Catholic Church Peacebuilding Activities and Their Contribution to Peaceful Coexistence Among Parishioners in Kenge Catholic Diocese, Democratic Republic of the Congo

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ABSTRACT

Peaceful coexistence is essential for sustainable development, social stability, and human well-being. Religious institutions, including the Catholic Church, contribute to peacebuilding through moral formation, reconciliation, mediation, dialogue, humanitarian assistance, and community mobilization. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), much attention has focused on the Church's national peacebuilding role, while empirical attention to diocesan and parish-level initiatives has been limited. This study examined the contribution of Catholic Church peacebuilding activities to peaceful coexistence among parishioners in Kenge Catholic Diocese, DRC. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design using a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach. The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected from 380 parishioners who completed and returned structured questionnaires, representing a 95% response rate from the 400 questionnaires distributed. Qualitative data were collected from 20 purposively selected participants, including clergy, Justice and Peace Commission members, lay leaders, youth and women's leaders, and community representatives, through interviews and focus group discussions. We analyzed quantitative data using descriptive statistics, while we analyzed qualitative data thematically. Findings showed that the Church engaged in peace education, preaching on forgiveness and reconciliation, conflict mediation, dialogue, pastoral counselling, humanitarian assistance, and Justice and Peace Commission activities (M = 3.94). These activities contributed positively to peaceful coexistence (M = 4.02). Major challenges included poverty and unemployment (M = 4.15), ethnic differences (M = 4.07), and limited resources (M = 4.05). Strengthening strategies recorded an overall mean of 4.18. The study concludes that Church-based peacebuilding contributes to peaceful coexistence, but requires stronger reconciliation programmes, resources, peace education, and community dialogue.

Keywords: Catholic Church; peacebuilding; peaceful coexistence; social cohesion; conflict mediation; Kenge Catholic Diocese.

INTRODUCTION

General Background

Peaceful coexistence is an important condition for sustainable development, social stability, and human well-being. Sustainable peace involves more than the absence of physical violence; it also requires justice, social inclusion, respect for human dignity, social cohesion, and institutions capable of addressing disagreements peacefully. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 consequently emphasizes peaceful, just, and inclusive societies and effective institutions (United Nations, 2015).

At the global level, religious institutions have historically contributed to peacebuilding through moral formation, mediation, reconciliation, humanitarian assistance, social services, and community mobilization. The Catholic Church, in particular, has developed a broad tradition of engagement in peace, social justice, and reconciliation. This engagement is rooted in Catholic Social Teaching, which emphasizes human dignity, solidarity, justice, the common good, and peaceful relations (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004; John XXIII, 1963). These

principles are further reflected in Catholic teaching on integral human development, solidarity, and the promotion of peace (Benedict XVI, 2009; Francis, 2020).

Beyond theological and moral teaching, religious institutions have also participated in practical peacebuilding processes. Appleby (2000) demonstrates how religious actors can contribute to conflict transformation, reconciliation, and peacemaking, while Philpott (2012) examines the role of religious actors and institutions in political reconciliation and the construction of just peace. Appleby (2018) further highlights the relationship between religion, conflict, and peacebuilding across different contexts.

Regional and National Relevance

In the African context, religious institutions operate within societies where religion is closely connected to social and community life. Religious actors, including the Catholic Church, have participated in peace education, reconciliation, mediation, humanitarian assistance, civic engagement, and community development. In Rwanda, the Catholic Church has been involved in grassroots reconciliation through parish ministry, prison ministry, Justice and Peace Commissions, dialogue, forgiveness, and reconciliation initiatives (Carney, 2015). In Kenya, the Catholic Church's Amani Mashinani approach has promoted dialogue, forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, and community-based conflict resolution (Kilonzo & Onkware, 2022). In South Sudan, Christian churches, including the Catholic Church, have participated in peacebuilding, dialogue, humanitarian assistance, reconciliation, and civic engagement through church-led peace initiatives and Justice and Peace structures (AMECEA, 2026). In the DRC, religious actors have been documented as participating in peace advocacy, humanitarian assistance, mediation, reconciliation, and post-conflict reconstruction at both leadership and grassroots levels (Alfani, n.d.; Oladosu, 2017).

DRC Context and Literature Gap

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) provides an important context for examining religious peacebuilding. Decades of armed conflict and political instability have contributed to poverty, displacement, weak governance, and the erosion of social and communal cohesion. World Bank assessments have documented how prolonged conflict, displacement, poverty, weak institutions, and local conflict systems have undermined social cohesion and development in the country (World Bank, 2021, 2023).

Against this background, the Catholic Church has played an important role in national peace and political dialogue through the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO). A notable example is CENCO's mediation of negotiations among political parties and civil-society actors that resulted in the Global and Inclusive Political Agreement of 31 December 2016, commonly known as the Saint-Sylvestre Agreement (Carter Center, 2019). Beyond national-level engagement, research has documented the broader peacebuilding role of the Church in the DRC, including mediation, reconciliation, advocacy, and community-oriented peace efforts (Oladosu, 2017).

However, much of the documented discussion has focused on national political and peace processes, while comparatively less empirical attention has been given to the contribution of diocesan and parish-level initiatives to peaceful coexistence among local communities. This study therefore focuses specifically on the Catholic Church's contribution to peaceful coexistence among parishioners in Kenge Catholic Diocese.

Specific Problem and Study Focus

Peaceful coexistence remains a challenge in societies affected by social, economic, political, and communal tensions. Although religious institutions have long promoted peace, reconciliation, justice, dialogue, and social solidarity, conflicts and social divisions continue to affect many communities.

The DRC continues to face poverty, unemployment, land disputes, political tensions, social inequalities, displacement, and community divisions. These conditions can weaken trust, solidarity, and peaceful relationships among community members. The Catholic Church has responded through diocesan and parish

structures, Justice and Peace Commissions, Small Christian Communities, pastoral ministries, humanitarian programmes, and community-based activities.

In Kenge Catholic Diocese, these structures provide opportunities for dialogue, reconciliation, conflict resolution, social support, and peace education. Nevertheless, the existence of peacebuilding programmes does not automatically demonstrate their contribution to peaceful coexistence. This study addressed the limited empirical evidence on the extent to which Catholic Church peacebuilding activities contribute to peaceful coexistence among parishioners in Kenge Catholic Diocese.

Aim of the Study

The study aimed to examine the contribution of the Catholic Church to peaceful coexistence among parishioners in Kenge Catholic Diocese, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Significance of the Study

The study provides context-specific evidence on Church-based peacebuilding at the parish and diocesan level. The findings may be useful to Catholic Church leadership, Justice and Peace Commissions, parish leaders, government institutions, civil society organizations, development partners, and researchers interested in peacebuilding, social cohesion, and religious contributions to peaceful coexistence.

BACKGROUND

Catholic Church Peacebuilding Activities

Existing literature identifies several peacebuilding activities undertaken by religious institutions, including peace education, dialogue, mediation, reconciliation, humanitarian assistance, pastoral counselling, and community mobilization. Lederach (1997) conceptualizes peacebuilding as a long-term process aimed at transforming relationships, addressing root causes of conflict, and creating conditions for sustainable peace. Appleby (2000) emphasizes the moral authority of religious institutions in conflict prevention and reconciliation, while Philpott (2012) highlights forgiveness, restorative justice, and dialogue as important elements of religious peacebuilding.

At the African level, Church institutions have undertaken reconciliation programmes, community dialogue, trauma healing, civic education, and humanitarian interventions. In the DRC, Catholic dioceses and Justice and Peace Commissions have supported peace education, mediation, reconciliation, civic engagement, and human rights advocacy.

Contribution to Peaceful Coexistence

The literature suggests that religious peacebuilding can contribute to peaceful coexistence by improving relationships, promoting forgiveness, strengthening trust, encouraging dialogue, and building social cohesion. Lederach (1997) argues that sustainable peace requires the transformation of damaged relationships. Putnam (2000) similarly emphasizes that trust, networks, shared norms, and cooperation strengthen social capital and collective action. Studies reviewed in the thesis indicate that Church-led dialogue, pastoral counselling, youth programmes, humanitarian activities, and reconciliation initiatives can strengthen relationships and community resilience. However, evidence specific to parishioners in Kenge Catholic Diocese remains limited.

Challenges Facing Religious Peacebuilding

Religious peacebuilding operates within wider social and institutional environments. Common challenges include inadequate financial resources, insecurity, political instability, poverty, unemployment, ethnic divisions, limited trained personnel, and weak institutional capacity. The literature indicates that these factors can restrict the implementation and sustainability of peacebuilding programmes. In the DRC, poverty, displacement, insecurity, and political instability can further constrain the capacity of religious institutions to reach vulnerable communities.

Strategies for Strengthening Peacebuilding

Previous studies recommend strengthening peace education, leadership training, reconciliation programmes, community dialogue, youth and women's participation, institutional partnerships, and financial support for peacebuilding structures. Lederach (1997) emphasizes the importance of developing local peacebuilding capacities. The literature also highlights the importance of partnerships between religious institutions, government agencies, civil society organizations, traditional authorities, and development actors.

Empirical Gap

Four empirical gaps were identified. First, there is limited empirical research specifically examining Catholic Church peacebuilding activities in Kenge Catholic Diocese. Second, there is insufficient evidence regarding the contribution of these activities to peaceful coexistence among parishioners in this particular context. Third, limited attention has been given to context-specific challenges affecting Church peacebuilding in Kenge. Finally, little evidence exists regarding strategies that are particularly appropriate for strengthening the Church's peacebuilding role in the Diocese. The present study addresses these contextual and empirical gaps.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by **General Systems Theory** and **Social Capital Theory**. General Systems Theory, developed by **Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968)**, views society as a system composed of interconnected and interdependent components. A particularly relevant concept for this study is the **open system**, which emphasizes that social systems interact continuously with their external environments through the exchange of resources, information, values, and relationships. In this study, the Catholic Church is therefore understood as an open social system that interacts with families, schools, government institutions, traditional authorities, civil society organizations, and local communities within Kenge Diocese.

The open-systems perspective provides the analytical bridge for explaining how Catholic Church peacebuilding activities can contribute to peaceful coexistence among parishioners. Church activities such as peace education, preaching, conflict mediation, pastoral counselling, community development, Justice and Peace Commission activities, and reconciliation programmes do not operate in isolation. They interact with the social environment in which parishioners live and can influence relationships, attitudes, norms, communication, and patterns of cooperation. At the same time, the Church receives influences from the wider community, including social conflicts, poverty, ethnic differences, political tensions, and insecurity. Thus, peaceful coexistence is understood as an outcome emerging from the interaction between the Church and the wider social system.

Social Capital Theory, associated particularly with **Robert D. Putnam (2000)**, complements General Systems Theory by explaining the relational mechanisms through which Church activities may strengthen peaceful coexistence. Social capital emphasizes trust, social networks, reciprocity, shared norms, cooperation, and civic participation as resources that facilitate collective action. In Kenge Catholic Diocese, parish structures, Small Christian Communities, youth and women's groups, and other Church programmes provide opportunities for parishioners to develop trust, cooperation, shared values, social networks, and community engagement.

Accordingly, the conceptual framework proposes that Catholic Church peacebuilding activities constitute the main explanatory factor, while social capital provides an important relational mechanism through which these activities may contribute to peaceful coexistence. The peacebuilding activities include peace education, conflict mediation, community development, Small Christian Communities, pastoral counselling, Justice and Peace Commission activities, charity and welfare, and youth and women's ministries. Social capital is reflected in trust, social networks, shared norms and values, civic participation, cooperation, and community engagement. These processes are expected to contribute to peaceful coexistence, reflected in social harmony, reduced conflicts, tolerance, unity, respect for diversity, and community stability.

Therefore, General Systems Theory explains the broader interaction between the Catholic Church and its social environment, particularly through the concept of the open system, while Social Capital Theory explains the relational processes through which Church activities can strengthen relationships and collective action. Together,

the two theories provide an analytical basis for examining how Catholic Church peacebuilding activities relate to peaceful coexistence among parishioners in Kenge Catholic Diocese.

Theoretical Implications of the Findings

The findings contribute to peacebuilding theory by demonstrating that religious peacebuilding is not limited to direct conflict intervention but operates through continuous relational, institutional, and community-based processes. The results support Lederach's understanding of peacebuilding as a long-term process of transforming relationships, while also extending this perspective by showing how ordinary pastoral activities, including preaching, counselling, reconciliation, and community interaction, can function as everyday peacebuilding mechanisms. The findings further strengthen the relevance of Social Capital Theory by demonstrating that trust, cooperation, dialogue, shared values, and social networks constitute important relational pathways through which Church activities may support peaceful coexistence. At the same time, the findings qualify a purely relational understanding of peacebuilding because poverty, unemployment, insecurity, ethnic differences, and limited institutional resources constrained the effectiveness and sustainability of peacebuilding interventions. General Systems Theory therefore provides an important complementary explanation: Church-based peacebuilding is shaped by continuous interaction between the Church and its wider socioeconomic, political, and community environment. Taken together, the findings suggest that sustainable religious peacebuilding is best understood as an interconnected process in which relational transformation, institutional capacity, and socioeconomic conditions interact rather than operate independently.

METHODS

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design using a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach. The convergent parallel design allowed quantitative and qualitative data to be collected during the same general phase, analyzed separately, and integrated during interpretation. The descriptive design was appropriate because the study sought to describe existing peacebuilding practices and perceptions without manipulating variables, while the cross-sectional design provided a snapshot of the situation within the study area.

Study Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in Kenge Catholic Diocese, Kwango Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Diocese is located in the southwestern part of the DRC and includes both urban and predominantly rural communities. The area is characterized by agricultural livelihoods, poverty, limited infrastructure, geographical dispersion, and diverse social and cultural communities.

The broader population of the study consisted of Catholics within the Kenge Catholic Diocese. According to the *Annuario Pontificio* (2021), the Diocese had approximately **697,600 baptized Catholics**. However, this figure represented the broader diocesan Catholic population and was not used directly in determining the study sample size. Instead, the Yamane sample-size calculation was based on the accessible parishioner population within the selected study sites. The target population comprised parishioners, clergy, members of the Justice and Peace Commission, lay leaders, youth and women's leaders, and selected community representatives who possessed relevant knowledge and experience of the Catholic Church's peacebuilding activities and their contribution to peaceful coexistence.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The quantitative component targeted **400 parishioners**, with the sample size determined using **Yamane's (1967) formula at a 5% level of precision**. Simple random sampling was employed to select the quantitative respondents, giving each eligible parishioner an equal opportunity to participate in the study. Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, **380 were completed and returned**, representing a **95% response rate**.

The qualitative component involved **20 purposively selected participants**, comprising clergy, members of the Justice and Peace Commission, lay leaders, youth and women's leaders, and community representatives. Purposive sampling was used to ensure the inclusion of participants with relevant knowledge and experience of the Catholic Church's peacebuilding activities and their contribution to peaceful coexistence.

Thus, the **overall planned sample consisted of 420 participants**, comprising 400 targeted quantitative respondents and 20 qualitative participants. The final quantitative dataset consisted of **380 completed questionnaires**, while all 20 purposively selected qualitative participants were included in the qualitative component.

Instruments and Measures

Structured questionnaires were administered to quantitative respondents. The questionnaire contained demographic questions and statements measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The instrument examined Church peacebuilding activities, their contribution to peaceful coexistence, challenges, and strategies.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected key informants, including clergy, Justice and Peace Commission members, lay leaders, and community representatives. Focus group discussions were used to obtain perspectives from selected parishioners, youth leaders, and women leaders. These methods provided complementary quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Validity and Reliability

A pilot test involving 40 respondents, equivalent to 10% of the quantitative sample, was conducted in parishes not included in the main study. Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable for internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

The study collected quantitative and qualitative data using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative respondents completed the structured questionnaire, while selected qualitative participants participated in interviews and focus group discussions. The convergent parallel approach enabled the two forms of data to be collected during the same general phase.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, entered, cleaned, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the data. Qualitative data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically. The quantitative and qualitative findings were subsequently compared and integrated to identify convergence, complementarity, and differences between the two forms of evidence.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical conduct was observed throughout the study in accordance with established principles governing social science research. Ethical considerations were particularly important because the study involved community relationships, peacebuilding, conflict management, and participants' personal experiences.

Before data collection began, the researcher obtained formal authorization from the Centre for Social Justice and Ethics (CSJE) at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). The authorization letter, dated 30 July 2026, confirmed that the researcher was a Master of Arts student in Justice, Peace and Cohesion and authorized assistance for the collection of data for the study. Permission was also obtained from the relevant authorities of Kenge Catholic Diocese and the responsible parish authorities before conducting data collection in the selected parishes.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, the expected use of the information, and their rights as research participants. Informed consent was obtained before questionnaires were administered or interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. They were also not required to disclose information that they did not wish to share.

The privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of participants were carefully protected. Unnecessary personally identifying information was not collected, and participants' names were not used in the presentation of the findings. Quantitative findings were reported in aggregate form, while information obtained through interviews and focus group discussions was presented using codes or general descriptions rather than personal names. Particular care was taken to avoid including information that could reasonably reveal the identity of individual participants.

Confidentiality was also maintained in the handling and storage of research data. Completed questionnaires, interview notes, transcripts, and electronic research files were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher. Electronic files were protected through password-protected storage, while physical research materials were kept in a secure location. The information collected was used strictly for academic purposes and was not disclosed to unauthorized persons.

The researcher exercised particular care when addressing sensitive issues relating to conflict, community tensions, and personal experiences. Participants were not pressured to disclose information that could expose them to social, psychological, or other forms of harm. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted respectfully, with due consideration for local cultural and religious norms. Participants were also assured that their responses would not negatively affect their relationship with the Catholic Church, parish leadership, or any other institution.

The principle of beneficence was observed throughout the research process. The study was intended to generate knowledge that could contribute to strengthening Church-led peacebuilding initiatives and promoting peaceful coexistence among parishioners in Kenge Catholic Diocese. The researcher also maintained academic integrity by avoiding fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, misrepresentation, and manipulation of research findings.

Data protection was maintained throughout the research process. Access to collected data was restricted to the researcher, and information that could identify individual participants was excluded from the final report. Research data were retained and disposed of in accordance with applicable institutional requirements and ethical guidelines.

Overall, the study respected the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, non-maleficence, beneficence, academic integrity, and data protection. These measures ensured that the research was conducted responsibly while protecting the dignity, rights, privacy, and well-being of all participants.

RESULTS

Questionnaire Response Rate and Participant Characteristics

Of the 400 questionnaires administered, 380 were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 95%. Female respondents constituted 53% of the respondents, while males constituted 47%. The largest age category was 35–44 years (29.5%), followed by 25–34 years (26.0%). Respondents with secondary education constituted the largest educational category (44.0%), followed by college/university education (26.5%).

Farmers represented 29.5% of respondents, business persons/traders 24.0%, civil servants 15.5%, students 13.5%, religious workers 4.5%, and other occupations 13.0%. Respondents were distributed relatively evenly among the five selected parishes, and 42% had been members of the Catholic Church for more than 20 years.

Catholic Church Peacebuilding Activities

Respondents generally agreed that the Catholic Church undertook a range of peacebuilding activities in Kenge Catholic Diocese. The overall mean was **3.94** on the five-point Likert scale.

Table 4.1: Respondents' Perceptions of Catholic Church Peacebuilding Activities

No.	Peacebuilding activity	Mean (M)	Interpretation
1	Church teachings promote forgiveness, tolerance, and reconciliation	4.14	High
2	Humanitarian activities	4.00	High
3	Priests and Church leaders in mediation/reconciliation	3.98	High
4	Counselling and pastoral support	3.96	High
5	Justice and Peace Commission activities	3.91	High
6	Peace education programmes	3.89	High
7	Dialogue meetings	3.82	High
8	Youth and women's programmes	3.80	High
	Overall Mean	**3.94**	**High**

Source: Field data, 2026.

The highest-rated activity was Church teaching on forgiveness, tolerance, and reconciliation (M = 4.14), followed by humanitarian activities (M = 4.00) and mediation/reconciliation by priests and Church leaders (M = 3.98). Dialogue meetings (M = 3.82) and youth and women's programmes (M = 3.80) received comparatively lower ratings, although both remained above the neutral midpoint of the scale.

These findings indicate broad recognition of the Church's peacebuilding role, with moral formation and reconciliation-oriented activities particularly prominent.

The qualitative findings complemented the survey results. Participants identified preaching, catechesis, reconciliation

programmes, dialogue, mediation, pastoral counselling, and humanitarian assistance as important mechanisms through which the Church addresses conflict and strengthens relationships. The convergence between the quantitative ratings and qualitative accounts suggests that the Church's peacebuilding role is experienced not only through formal programmes but also through routine pastoral and community interactions.

Contribution to Peaceful Coexistence

Respondents generally perceived Catholic Church peacebuilding activities as contributing positively to peaceful coexistence, with an overall mean of **4.02**.

Table 4.2: Perceived Contribution of Church Peacebuilding Activities to Peaceful Coexistence

Indicator of peaceful coexistence	Mean (M)
Encourages peaceful conflict resolution instead of violence	4.13
Encourages forgiveness and reconciliation after conflicts	4.10
Contributes to social cohesion	4.08
Improves relationships among parishioners	4.04
Strengthens trust and cooperation	4.02
Overall Mean	**4.02**

Source: Field data, 2026.

The highest-rated indicator was the Church's encouragement of peaceful conflict resolution instead of violence (M = 4.13), followed by forgiveness and reconciliation after conflicts (M = 4.10). Social cohesion had a mean of 4.08, improved relationships among parishioners 4.04, and strengthened trust and cooperation 4.02.

The findings indicate that respondents associated Church peacebuilding most strongly with non-violent conflict resolution and reconciliation. Qualitative participants provided practical explanations for these perceptions, describing situations in which Church leaders brought conflicting individuals or families together, listened to both sides, encouraged forgiveness, and supported reconciliation.

Challenges Facing Church Peacebuilding

The overall mean for the identified challenges was **4.00**, indicating that respondents considered the listed factors significant constraints on Church peacebuilding.

Table 4.3: Challenges Facing Catholic Church Peacebuilding

Challenge	Mean (M)
Poverty and unemployment	4.15
Ethnic differences	4.07
Limited financial resources	4.05
Lack of trained peacebuilding personnel	3.97
Political tensions	3.96
Limited community participation	3.90
Insecurity	3.88
Overall Mean	**4.00**

Source: Field data, 2026.

Poverty and unemployment received the highest mean (M = 4.15), followed by ethnic differences (M = 4.07) and limited financial resources (M = 4.05). Lack of trained peacebuilding personnel had a mean of 3.97, political tensions 3.96, limited community participation 3.90, and insecurity 3.88.

Qualitative participants similarly emphasized inadequate resources, poverty, insecurity, and limited institutional capacity. This convergence indicates that Church peacebuilding is embedded in socioeconomic and institutional conditions that can either support or restrict its effectiveness.

Strategies for Strengthening Church Peacebuilding

Respondents expressed strong agreement with the proposed strategies, producing an overall mean of **4.18**.

Table 4.4: Proposed Strategies for Strengthening Catholic Church Peacebuilding

Proposed strategy	Mean (M)
Strengthen reconciliation programmes	4.24
Provide more resources to the Justice and Peace Commission	4.22
Strengthen parish peace education	4.20
Train clergy and lay leaders in conflict resolution	4.18
Expand community dialogue forums	4.17
Collaborate with government and civil society	4.15
Increase youth and women's involvement	4.12
Overall Mean	**4.18**

Source: Field data, 2026.

Strengthening reconciliation programmes received the highest rating (M = 4.24), followed by providing additional resources to the Justice and Peace Commission (M = 4.22) and strengthening parish peace education (M = 4.20). Increasing youth and women's involvement received the lowest, although still strongly positive, rating (M = 4.12).

The qualitative findings reinforced these priorities. Participants emphasized the need for sustained peace education, leadership training, greater youth and women's participation, stronger dialogue forums, additional support for the Justice and Peace Commission, and collaboration with government and civil society organizations.

Integrated Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The convergent mixed-methods design allowed the quantitative and qualitative findings to be considered together. Table 4.5 presents a joint display showing the relationship between the two strands of evidence.

Table 4.5: Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Study dimension	Quantitative finding	Qualitative evidence	Integrated interpretation
Church peacebuilding activities	Overall M = 3.94; forgiveness, tolerance and reconciliation highest (M = 4.14)	Participants identified preaching, catechesis, reconciliation, mediation, counselling and humanitarian assistance	Both strands indicate that moral formation and practical pastoral interventions are central components of Church peacebuilding.
Contribution to peaceful coexistence	Overall M = 4.02; peaceful conflict resolution highest (M = 4.13)	Participants described bringing conflicting parties together, listening and encouraging reconciliation	The survey pattern is explained by practical accounts of dialogue, mediation and reconciliation in community life.
Challenges	Overall M = 4.00; poverty and unemployment highest (M = 4.15)	Participants emphasized poverty, inadequate resources, insecurity, and limited institutional capacity	Peacebuilding capacity is constrained by socioeconomic and institutional conditions beyond the Church's immediate control.
Strengthening strategies	Overall M = 4.18; reconciliation programmes highest (M = 4.24)	Participants emphasized peace education, leadership training, dialogue, youth/women participation and stronger CJPC support	Both strands support a locally rooted strategy combining relational, institutional and capacity-building interventions.

Source: Integrated interpretation of quantitative and qualitative field findings.

Mixed-Methods Meta-Inference

The integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings generated a broader interpretation than either strand of evidence could provide independently. The quantitative findings established the general pattern and relative strength of respondents' perceptions regarding the Catholic Church's peacebuilding activities, their contribution to peaceful coexistence, the challenges encountered, and strategies for strengthening peacebuilding efforts. In contrast, the qualitative findings provided contextual explanations of how these activities and experiences operated within parish and community life.

The two strands demonstrated substantial convergence regarding the importance of reconciliation, mediation, peace education, pastoral engagement, and community dialogue. The qualitative findings complemented and expanded the quantitative results by illustrating how these activities operated through interpersonal relationships, parish structures, and community interactions. For example, the quantitative findings indicated generally positive perceptions of the Church's contribution to peaceful coexistence, while the qualitative evidence provided explanations of the processes through which preaching, counselling, mediation, reconciliation initiatives, and community dialogue fostered trust, forgiveness, cooperation, and improved relationships among parishioners.

At the same time, both strands of evidence identified important socioeconomic and institutional constraints, particularly poverty and unemployment, inadequate financial and human resources, insecurity, and limited institutional capacity. These convergent findings indicate that the effectiveness of Church-led peacebuilding cannot be understood solely in terms of pastoral or relational interventions. Rather, peacebuilding outcomes are also influenced by the broader social, economic, and institutional environment in which parish communities operate.

The resulting meta-inference is that Catholic Church peacebuilding in Kenge operates through the interaction of relational mechanisms and institutional structures within a wider socioeconomic context. Relational activities such as reconciliation, mediation, counselling, dialogue, and peace education contribute to trust-building and improved interpersonal relationships, while institutional structures such as the Justice and Peace Commission, parish leadership, and community networks provide mechanisms for sustaining these efforts. However, the sustainability and reach of such interventions are partly constrained by socioeconomic difficulties, insecurity, and limited resources. This integrated interpretation therefore strengthens the mixed-methods conclusion that peaceful coexistence in Kenge is shaped by the interaction of interpersonal, institutional, and contextual factors, rather than by any single peacebuilding activity operating in isolation.

DISCUSSION

Catholic Church Peacebuilding Activities

The findings demonstrate that the Catholic Church in Kenge Catholic Diocese plays a multidimensional role in peacebuilding. The overall mean of 3.94 indicates that respondents generally recognized the presence of Church-led peacebuilding activities. The highest-rated activity was Church teaching on forgiveness, tolerance, and reconciliation (M = 4.14), followed by humanitarian activities (M = 4.00) and mediation and reconciliation by priests and Church leaders (M = 3.98).

These findings suggest that peacebuilding within the Diocese extends beyond formal conflict mediation. Preaching, catechesis, pastoral counselling, reconciliation, humanitarian assistance, dialogue, and Justice and Peace Commission activities constitute interconnected forms of peacebuilding. The qualitative findings reinforced this interpretation, as participants described preaching, mediation, counselling, dialogue, and reconciliation as important ways through which the Church addresses tensions and strengthens relationships.

The findings are consistent with Lederach's (1997) understanding of peacebuilding as a long-term process of transforming relationships and addressing conditions that sustain conflict. They also support Appleby's (2000) argument that religious institutions can mobilize moral resources for reconciliation.

From the perspective of General Systems Theory, the findings demonstrate the Church as an **open system** whose peacebuilding activities interact with families, parish communities, local leaders, civil society, and the wider socioeconomic environment. Similarly, Social Capital Theory helps explain how repeated interaction within parish structures can strengthen trust, cooperation, shared norms, and social networks.

Contribution to Peaceful Coexistence

The overall mean of 4.02 indicates that respondents perceived a positive contribution of Catholic Church peacebuilding activities to peaceful coexistence. Peaceful conflict resolution instead of violence received the highest rating (M = 4.13), followed by forgiveness and reconciliation (M = 4.10), social cohesion (M = 4.08), improved relationships (M = 4.04), and trust and cooperation (M = 4.02).

The qualitative findings help explain these perceptions. Participants described situations in which Church leaders brought conflicting individuals or families together, listened to their concerns, encouraged forgiveness, and supported reconciliation. These practices correspond with Lederach's emphasis on relationship transformation and Putnam's emphasis on trust and cooperation.

The findings therefore suggest a relational pathway through which Church peacebuilding may support peaceful coexistence:

Church engagement → dialogue and mediation → increased interaction and trust → reconciliation and cooperation → peaceful coexistence.

However, because the study used a cross-sectional design and relied substantially on participants' perceptions, this pathway should not be interpreted as proof of causal relationships. Rather, it provides an empirically grounded explanation of the perceived contribution of Church peacebuilding.

Challenges Facing Church Peacebuilding

The findings demonstrate that Church peacebuilding is influenced by the wider socioeconomic and institutional environment. Poverty and unemployment constituted the most significant challenge (M = 4.15), followed by ethnic differences (M = 4.07) and limited financial resources (M = 4.05). The qualitative findings similarly emphasized poverty, inadequate resources, insecurity, and limited institutional capacity.

These findings are particularly relevant to General Systems Theory because they demonstrate that the Church cannot address peacebuilding challenges independently of the wider environment. Economic hardship, insecurity, political tensions, ethnic differences, and institutional limitations can influence the capacity of Church structures to reach communities and sustain peacebuilding activities.

The findings also qualify a purely relational interpretation of Social Capital Theory. Although trust, cooperation, and social networks are important, social capital alone cannot overcome severe socioeconomic constraints. Sustainable peacebuilding therefore requires both relational resources and adequate material and institutional capacity.

Implications for Peacebuilding Practice

The findings have several practical implications for Kenge Catholic Diocese.

First, peacebuilding should be integrated into ordinary parish life rather than treated only as a response to conflict. Preaching, catechesis, Small Christian Communities, pastoral counselling, youth and women's programmes, and community dialogue can provide continuous opportunities for relationship-building and early conflict prevention.

Second, the Diocese should strengthen the capacity of clergy and lay leaders in mediation and conflict resolution. The high rating given to reconciliation programmes (M = 4.24) demonstrates strong support for strengthening this area.

Third, peacebuilding should be connected with socioeconomic interventions. Since poverty and unemployment were identified as the most significant challenges, livelihood support, vocational initiatives, and community development should complement reconciliation and dialogue efforts.

Practical Implications for Peacebuilding Practice

The findings have important implications for the practical organization of peacebuilding within Kenge Catholic Diocese. First, peacebuilding should be institutionalized as a continuous pastoral function rather than activated only when conflicts emerge. Parish structures, Small Christian Communities, youth and women's groups, and Justice and Peace Commission structures can serve as permanent platforms for early identification of tensions, dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation. Second, the relatively high rating of reconciliation programmes and peace education suggests that these interventions should be strengthened and implemented systematically across parishes. Third, the findings demonstrate the need to combine relational peacebuilding with socioeconomic support. Since poverty and unemployment constituted the most highly rated challenge, peacebuilding initiatives should, where feasible, be linked with livelihood development, vocational training, community development,

and social support. Finally, the involvement of youth and women should move beyond participation as beneficiaries toward meaningful involvement in planning, decision-making, mediation, and community peace initiatives.

Implications for Policy and Institutional Collaboration

The findings indicate that peacebuilding should not be considered the responsibility of the Church alone. Government institutions, civil society organizations, traditional authorities, and development partners can collaborate with diocesan and parish structures because these structures already have established relationships with local communities.

The strong support for collaboration with government and civil society (M = 4.15) reinforces the importance of a partnership approach. Such collaboration could include support for Justice and Peace Commission structures, conflict-sensitive programming, community dialogue platforms, peace education, and leadership training.

The findings also indicate the importance of meaningful youth and women's participation. Although their involvement received the lowest rating among the proposed strategies (M = 4.12), the score remained strongly positive. Youth and women should therefore be regarded as active peacebuilding actors rather than merely beneficiaries.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concludes that the Catholic Church makes a **meaningful perceived contribution to peaceful coexistence among parishioners in Kenge Catholic Diocese**. This contribution occurs through peace education, preaching and moral formation, forgiveness and reconciliation, conflict mediation, dialogue, pastoral counselling, humanitarian assistance, and Justice and Peace Commission activities.

The quantitative findings demonstrated generally positive perceptions of both Church peacebuilding activities and their contribution to peaceful coexistence. The qualitative findings provided contextual explanations of how these activities operate in parish and community life.

At the same time, the findings demonstrate that Church peacebuilding operates within a challenging environment. Poverty, unemployment, ethnic differences, limited financial resources, insecurity, political tensions, and inadequately trained personnel can constrain the reach and sustainability of peacebuilding initiatives.

The study therefore concludes that effective and sustainable peacebuilding requires both relational interventions such as dialogue, reconciliation, trust-building, and mediation and institutional and socioeconomic support.

The findings further support the relevance of General Systems Theory and Social Capital Theory. General Systems Theory explains the interaction between the Church and its wider social environment, while Social Capital Theory helps explain how trust, networks, shared norms, and cooperation can connect Church activities with peaceful coexistence.

Policy Implications

The findings have implications for peacebuilding policy at diocesan, local government, and community levels. First, policies and programmes addressing local conflict should recognize religious institutions as relevant community-based peacebuilding actors, particularly where they possess established relationships and trust within local communities. Second, government and development partners should consider structured collaboration with Church-based Justice and Peace Commissions in areas such as peace education, community dialogue, mediation, early conflict prevention, and social cohesion. Third, peacebuilding policies should address the socioeconomic conditions that undermine peaceful coexistence. The high rating assigned to poverty and unemployment suggests

that conflict-prevention policies should not focus exclusively on dialogue and reconciliation but should also incorporate livelihood opportunities, youth employment, vocational training, and community development. Finally, policy interventions should promote inclusive participation by ensuring that women and young people are represented in local peacebuilding structures and decision-making processes.

Limitations of the Study

The study may also have been affected by social desirability bias, as some parishioners may have felt inclined to provide favorable responses when evaluating an institution to which they belonged. Because the study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design, the findings demonstrate perceived associations and contributions rather than causal effects. The study therefore cannot determine whether Church peacebuilding activities directly caused improvements in peaceful coexistence.

First, the quantitative component involved 400 parishioners from five selected parishes, while the qualitative component involved 20 purposively selected participants. The findings therefore may not represent all parishioners or all communities within Kenge Catholic Diocese.

Second, the cross-sectional design captured perceptions at one point in time and therefore could not establish causal effects or changes in peaceful coexistence over time.

Third, the study relied partly on self-reported perceptions. Some respondents may have provided favorable assessments because of their commitment to the Catholic Church, while others may have emphasized negative experiences.

Fourth, the qualitative participants were purposively selected because of their knowledge or experience of peacebuilding. Their views provided important contextual evidence but cannot be assumed to represent every parishioner. Interviews and focus group discussions may also have been affected by recall bias or reluctance to discuss sensitive issues.

Finally, the available documentation confirms formal authorization for data collection from the Centre for Social Justice and Ethics (CSJE) at CUEA, dated 30 July 2026, as well as authorization from the relevant diocesan authorities. However, the available CUEA document is a data-collection authorization rather than an explicit institutional ethics-review approval. Therefore, the study should not claim a formal ethics approval number unless a separate ethics approval document exists.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that Kenge Catholic Diocese:

1. Strengthen parish-based reconciliation and dialogue programmes that bring conflicting individuals and groups together.

2. Provide greater institutional and financial support to Justice and Peace Commission structures to strengthen mediation, peace education, and community outreach.

3. Expand systematic peace education through preaching, catechesis, Small Christian Communities, youth programmes, and women's groups.

4. Provide regular conflict-resolution and mediation training for clergy, lay leaders, and other parish-based peace actors.

5. Increase meaningful participation of youth and women in peacebuilding planning, implementation, and leadership.

6. Develop stronger partnerships with government institutions, civil society organizations, traditional authorities, and development partners.

7. Integrate livelihood and community-development initiatives into peacebuilding, particularly in response to poverty and unemployment.

8. Ensure that future research maintains complete ethical documentation, including institutional approval where required, informed consent procedures, confidentiality safeguards, and data-protection measures.

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