

## THE CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (CCSJ)

CCSJ's Plan of Action for 2019 by Leela Ramdeen, Chair, CCSJ - as at 13 Nov 2018

It must be stated at the outset that the Social Doctrine of the Church is not an optional extra; it is not an addendum but is an integral part of the Mission of the Church. It should, therefore, be an integral part of the formation of the Faithful. Much work needs to be done to win hearts and minds to journey with us as we seek to respond e.g. to the wise words of St Pope John Paul II who said:

“The teaching and spreading of her social doctrine are part of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Since it is a doctrine aimed at guiding people’s behaviour, it consequently gives rise to a ‘commitment to justice,’ according to each individual’s role, vocation, and circumstances.” (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, The Social Concern of the Church, n.41, St Pope John Paul II, 1987).

And he stated in *Centesimus Annus*, the 100th Year, 1991 - on the hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, an encyclical issued by Pope Leo XIII in 1891: “To teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church’s evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian message...The ‘new evangelization’... must include among its elements *a proclamation of the Church’s social doctrine.*”

**OUR VISION:** We envision a transformed national/world community where Justice, Peace and Love prevails, as divinely ordained by God, and which

- ensures human rights, duties and human dignity
- celebrates diversity and promotes equality
- promotes the common good, respect for human life and ecology justice

### OUR MISSION

The CCSJ is grounded in the Biblical concept of Social Justice and Catholic Social Teaching and is challenged by the Mission of Jesus to bring about a New World Order based on truth, love, justice, peace and freedom.

Our mission is to be a fearless and unified voice to eradicate social injustice in T&T and in the world, a voice infused with Gospel values that will awaken the social conscience of all citizens and create an empowered population so that all can be active participants in bringing about the Kingdom of God here on earth. We strive to do this through

- Social Justice Education and Advocacy
- promoting people-centred development, and
- working for the transformation of inequitable structures and systems.

## CORE VALUES

- We recognise our duties and obligations to the wider community
- “To bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, new sight to the blind, and to free the downtrodden”. (Luke 14)
- Always respecting the dignity of the human person
- We value the process of Reflection, Research and Action.

CCSJ recognises that our Vision, Mission, Core values and our 2019 Plan of Action will need to be in sync with the Aspirations, Objectives and Actions of the **Archdiocese’s Pastoral Plan (2019-2023)** which is currently in draft format and which has 8 stages. It is expected to be finalised by the end of 2018. The draft Plan focuses on 6 general focus areas: *Parish, Family Life, Catholic Education, Leadership in Church and Society, Youth, Clergy and Vocations*. From Jan to June 2019, Parishes will be expected to complete their 5-year Parish Pastoral Plan and stage 8 will involve implementation of Parish Pastoral Plans, which will be informed by the Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan.

Our Archdiocese's Pastoral Plan will be rooted in our relationship with our Trinitarian God who is a God of Justice and Peace. Therefore, the 6 areas listed above must be underpinned by the social doctrine of the Church. We are God's instruments on earth who will use our many gifts to promote His reign of justice, peace, truth, love, freedom and forgiveness.

There are major social justice issues inherent in each of the 6 areas listed above.

Social justice should be seen as a fundamental aspect of our Pastoral Plan.

## KEY CCSJ ACTIVITIES FOR 2019

**1.** CCSJ will continue to function as the **Secretariat of the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour** and CCSJ’s Chair will continue in the role of Secretary, with Jo Anne Lodge as Recording Secretary. Local Government Elections and General Elections will soon be upon us, so the work of the Council will have implications for CCSJ's workload.

**2.** Archbishop Gordon has placed responsibility for the **Archdiocesan Ministry for Migrants and Refugees (AMMR)** within the remit of CCSJ. The AMMR Team comprises: CCSJ's Chair, Leela Ramdeen, as Chair of AMMR; Rhonda Maingot, Living Water Community; Rochelle Nakhid, Living Water Community; Fr Simon Ango. Work in train includes the development of a Toolkit for distribution to parishes etc. and support for the establishment of Parish Ministries for Migrants and Refugees as per His Grace's request to parishes.

3. Pope Francis has declared Care of Creation an 8<sup>th</sup> Work of Mercy. A key priority for CCSJ during 2019 will be to promote **integral ecology**. In Genesis 2:15, we read: “*God took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it.*”

Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si* (On Care For Our Common Home) is a call for conversion of hearts, minds and lifestyles if we are to save our planet. He says **dialogue and education** can “help us to escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us”. He urges us to “hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” ... He calls us to promote authentic human ecology which connects ecological issues and life issues. He reminds us that “Our planet is a mother for all of us. We must hand it on to our children, cared for and improved, because it’s a loan they make to us.”

The environmental crisis is a moral challenge for us in T&T. Just look around at the environmental degradation that surrounds us. We are the stewards/trustees of our environment. As Pope St John Paul II said: “We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the wellbeing of future generations.”

If we Catholics say we love God and all His creation, we must acknowledge our interconnectedness/interdependence and build right relationships with our environment.

CCSJ will run workshops in Vicariates/parishes/schools and organise competitions e.g. art, poetry, music, to educate the Faithful and the wider community; to encourage people to commit to be proactive stewards and advocates for the earth; to address ecological degradation that continues to impact all areas of our lives. A key aim would be to raise awareness of the fact that authentic integral human development is inextricably linked to ecological justice; and to educate the Faithful about how they can Reuse, Recycle, Reduce, Restore. We all need to practice these 4 R’s for sustainable living, as well as promoting energy efficiency, water conservation, waste avoidance, composting. We will also encourage the Faithful to enjoy God’s gifts to us in nature e.g. turtle watching, reforestation/replanting of trees, beach cleanup etc.

4. CCSJ will seek to devise more effective strategies to spread the Good News as far as SJ is concerned. The Commission will continue to build **social justice networks within and across parishes and Vicariates** – encouraging local action. Mission is where people are - in their parishes/communities, so action has to develop here. This does not mean that we ignore national and global issues. We will strive to get a balance in ensuring that we have an holistic approach to our SJ work.

It should be noted that, with His Grace's approval, CCSJ's Chair continues to hold the position of Lay Assessor on the Equal Opportunity Tribunal, which has the status of a High Court and which is based in Chaguanas. With no Parish Link Coordinators/ ‘foot soldiers’ on CCSJ, and with only 2 persons employed on a job-share at the Office - as Admin Assistant, it is essential that the Commission partners with other Commissions/Departments/NGOs etc to ensure that SJ is embedded in the work of others in the Archdiocese. This will be particularly important as the

Archdiocese's Pastoral Plan is developed and "rolled out." To optimise the Archdiocese's limited resources, and to promote effectiveness and efficiency, it is essential that Departments/Commissions do not work in "silos".

CCSJ will continue to promote a spirituality of justice and seek to integrate SJ into the work of the various Departments/Commissions in the Archdiocese – indeed, in the general life of the Catholic Church in our Archdiocese. As stated before, we will achieve our mission if all Catholic organisations partner with each other to:

- protect and promote the sanctity of life and the dignity of each human person. Crime and violence is at an all-time high and many seem to have lost their moral compass. The promotion of values and virtues will remain a key element of our work as we seek to build God's Kingdom of justice, peace, truth, love, freedom, and forgiveness;
- promote integral human development (the development of all dimensions of a person and of each person);
- act as advocates for the poor and vulnerable, including our children, the differently-abled, and senior citizens;
- strengthen family life, build community and the common good;
- promote human rights and meet our responsibilities;
- promote economic justice e.g. by ensuring that the economy works for the people;
- promote participation in the economic, political, social and cultural life of society;
- be good stewards of God's creation by promoting environmental/ecological justice - recognising that the gifts of the earth that God has given to us is for all to share – including future generations;
- build a nation/world in which truth, justice, love, freedom and forgiveness – the pillars of peace, become a reality.

**5.** CCSJ will plan and execute activities during the year focusing on key issues/events and applying the Church's Social Teaching to these. For example,

**a.** the Commission will partner with other Departments to run Workshops focusing on the implications for us today of **Biblical parables** such as: The Good Samaritan, The Prodigal Son, Lazarus & Dives, The Lost Coin, Lost Sheep etc. There are many social justice issues arising from these and other parables in the Bible.

**b.** Pope Francis' Message for the 52nd World Day of Peace, 1 Jan 2019. CCSJ's Newsletter will be produced and circulated to share the Holy Father's Peace Message.

**c.** Pope Francis' Lenten Message. Lent will run from Wed March 6 to Thurs April 18, 2019. CCSJ's Newsletter will be produced and circulated to share Pope Francis' Lenten Message.

**d.** Justice, Peace and Community Week – to be held in October 2019. Collaboration with other Archdiocesan Departments is essential to the success of the week’s activities, for example, the Spoken Word event which is organised in collaboration with the Youth Commission.

**6.** CCSJ’s will continue to maintain its Website and Facebook Pages (see Raymond Syms and Jo Ann Smith) and will produce resources such as:

i. Monthly Ask Why TV programmes on TCN

ii. Quarterly Newsletters. Inter alia, the Newsletter is a useful tool for sharing the teaching of the Magisterium and for sharing good practice.

iii. Weekly articles in Catholic News

iv. Weekly SJ quotations in Catholic News

**7. a.** CCSJ will continue liaising with the team at Mary Care Centre (MCC) - a sanctuary for unmarried, pregnant, young women. It was founded in 1980 by the late Archbishop of Port of Spain, Most Reverend Anthony Pantin in his concern for and commitment to the preservation of life. Mikkel, PLC for the Northern Vicariate, has responsibility for liaising with MCC. The centre is a non-profit organization funded by donations received from the private and public sector. The objectives of *Mary Care Centre* are two-fold:

- To provide a safe and secure environment for the pregnant mother to give birth to her child.

- To enable the young mother to be employable at the end of her stay at the Centre.

CCSJ has overall responsibility for the work of the Centre which is being run on behalf of the Archdiocese by Deborah de Rosia and her Management Committee - Eternal Light Community.

**b.** Other pro-life work: CCSJ will continue to promote and defend life in all forms and at all stages: from conception until natural death. Other issues that are on the front burner to be addressed will be child abuse, pornography, incest, domestic violence, the death penalty, abortion, euthanasia/assisted suicide, human sexuality, human trafficking, justice for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, for prisoners and former offenders.

**8.** CCSJ will continue to research issues and monitor trends in policy and current affairs locally, regionally and internationally.

**9. a.** CCSJ will maintain contact/collaborate with other Catholic Departments in the Archdiocese (collaborative ministry) and with FBOs, NGOs, CBOs, Government Ministries, regional and international organizations, including Catholic Agencies, to bring a Catholic Social Justice perspective to discussions. Links with organizations such as the Inter Religious Organisation (IRO), in our multi-faith community, is critical if we are to share/promote a Catholic SJ perspective on issues and if we are to promote Christian unity.

**b.** As part of our communications strategy, we will issue media releases when appropriate – speaking out against injustices and abuses of various kinds. It is important to note that these can only be released after they have been approved by His Grace or his representative.

**c.** CCSJ will also take advantage of opportunities to appear/be a guest on various media programmes on issues relating to SJ/the common good.

**10. a.** Some CCSJ activities will be linked to UN Days (at parish and Archdiocesan level) – See list of UN Days and UN Years. <http://www.un.org/en/sections/observances/international-days/> - -for example: World Social Justice Day (20 Feb); International Women’s Day (8 March); International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (21 March); – World Health Day (7 April); UN Day of Families (15 May); International Literacy Day 8 Sept; International Day of Peace (21 Sept); Universal Children’s Day (20 Nov); World AIDS Day (1 Dec); International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 Dec); Human Rights Day (10 Dec).

**b.** Parishes will be urged to plan activities to mark TT’s Independence Day (31 Aug) and Republic Day (24 Sept) - from a Catholic perspective. Authentic integral human development and integral ecology are embedded in the social doctrine of the Church and inform nation-building.

**11.** CCSJ’s Chair and/or the Commission’s Administrative Assistants will maintain Personal contact with members of the public who come to Archbishop’s House for assistance or who telephone for help.

**12.** Whenever possible, CCSJ’s Chair will continue her role as a Facilitator on the VIRTUS training programme - working in collaboration with the Family Life Commission which has overall responsibility for the programme. The programme focuses “on the education and training of clergy, staff, volunteers, parents, and other adults about the nature of child abuse, child sexual abuse, and how adults can help prevent harm to children. The Protecting God’s Children program turns every parish into a child-safe haven.

Through expert trainers, the VIRTUS programs bring education and awareness to the entire faith community, and ongoing training is provided through VIRTUS Online.” The training programme comes with 2 videos: Part 1 = A time to protect God’s children. Here children who have been abused (and actors) share their story. Also, 2 abusers share the strategies they used to ‘lure’ children. Part II = A plan to protect God’s children. Training is ongoing.

**13.** CCSJ's Retreat (Members and Staff) – date and theme to be decided. We must seek to develop our own spirituality/deepen our relationship with God. Our annual retreat provides an opportunity for Members and Staff to come together in prayer and contemplation.

**NB:** It is acknowledged that this draft Plan of Action for 2019 will be reviewed in light of the development of the Archdiocese's Pastoral Plan.

**LEELA RAMDEEN, CHAIR, CCSJ**  
**FRIDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2018**