CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
14TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
FOR THE PERIOD: 1ST JANUARY 2016 - 31ST DECEMBER 2016

THEME: CALLED TO BUILD RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

WEDNESDAY 22ND NOVEMBER 2017
5:30 P.M. - 7:30 P.M.
ARCHBISHOP’S HOUSE
27 MARAVAL ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN

“IF YOU WANT PEACE, WORK FOR JUSTICE” (BLESSED POPE PAUL VI)
CCSJ's 14th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

WEDNESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2017 (covering period 1 Jan - 31 Dec 2016)

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1. CCSJ's Prayer for Justice and Peace

O God, open our hearts to the gifts of your holy Spirit as we seek to promote Your reign here in Trinidad and Tobago. Help us to become a nation where peace is built with justice and justice is guided by love, love of God and love of neighbour. Help us to rediscover and live our faith so that our concern for social justice will be transformed into constructive action as we spread the Good News in this land. We ask you, O God, to guide and bless all our efforts. inspire us as you did the Prophets of old with courage, imagination, and creativity. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

AGENDA:

5:30 p.m. Opening prayer, welcome and apologies for absence: Leela Ramdeen, Chair, CCSJ

5:40 p.m. Minutes of CCSJ's AGM for period Jan to Dec 2015 held on Wed 22 March 2017 & Matters arising from Minutes

5:50 p.m. Presentation of Annual Report on CCSJ's work in 2016: CCSJ's Chair

6:10 p.m. Adoption of Annual Report and Questions/comments

6:25 p.m. Reasons for the deferral of CCSJ’s Audited Accounts for 2016

6:30 p.m. Appointment of Auditors

6:35 p.m. Election of Officers/Management Committee - See By Laws: 7.1 (Chair, Deputy Chair, Treasurer, Secretary)

6:40 p.m. Closing Prayer and refreshments.
2. CCSJ'S 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.

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.
3. INTRODUCTION BY CCSJ'S CHAIR

3.1 “A world of justice and peace cannot be created by words alone and it cannot be imposed by outside forces: it must be desired and must come about through the contribution of all. It is essential for every human being to have a sense of participating, of being a part of the decisions and endeavours that shape the destiny of the world” Pope St. John Paul II.

CCSJ is pleased to present its annual report for 2016. The Theme for CCSJ's AGM, which covers activities undertaken during 2016, is:

*Called to build right relationships.*

MEMBERSHIP OF CCSJ DURING 2016:

- Leela Ramdeen, Episcopal Delegate/Chair of CCSJ
- Annette des Iles, Vice Chair
- Nadine Bushell, Secretary
- Annette McKenzie, Treasurer
- Sr Roberta O’Flaherty, member
- Eldon Warner, member
- Jo-Ann Taylor-Smith, member
- Dianne Wells, member

CCSJ members record our thanks to Lorna Chee-Wah and Cheryl Wallace, CCSJ's Administrative Assistants, who, through a job-share, provide tremendous support to the Commission. I would also like to thank all members of CCSJ most sincerely for their commitment to the social imperatives of the Gospel. We thank also all those persons and organisations that have contributed to the Commission's work, and to His Grace, Archbishop Joseph Harris, for his leadership.
4. REFLECTION ON CCSJ'S AGM THEME:

Called to build right relationships.

4.1 The Faithful in our Archdiocese continue to strive to build a civilization of love - reconciling with God, neighbour, creation, and self. There is much work to do to build right relationships in TT/the world. Here in TT while there are many examples of positive relationships, on the other hand, there are many obstacles to creating positive relationships e.g. crime and violence, dysfunctional families, domestic violence, violence in schools, failing institutions, individualism, selfishness, greed, corruption, “throw-away culture”, inadequate care for the elderly/differently abled/mentally ill, low productivity, environmental degradation, and so on.

The following is offered as a case study for reflection. In some ways it highlights the state of play in TT regarding the kind of relationships we have with those on the margins of society.

Imagine a homeless man, Mr. Hugh Bernard, took the state to Court because he felt he had a right to sleep/live in Tamarind Square, POS. His claim states that “he has been homeless since being deported from the United States in 1993 and has been living on the streets as the Centre for the Socially Displaced at Riverside car park (located near to Tamarind Square) is unfit for human habitation.”

He claimed that his constitutional rights were infringed when the corporation constructed a perimeter fence and gates at the public square almost two years ago. In October 2017 he lost his lawsuit and was ordered to pay the Corporation’s legal bill. He had been “living” there for the past 4 years. The State has a duty to ensure that the resources of the nation are used to promote integral human development, to provide basic necessities for citizens, and to seek to empower them so that they can use their God-given talents to participate in society and build the common good.

All the media reports on this lawsuit highlight the way in which our society perceives/treats the homeless. The Newsday (31 Oct 2017) stated: “Bernard’s lead counsel, Christopher Hamel-Smith, SC, said while the decision to represent the homeless man pro bono (for free) was one for the
attorneys, the court ought not to send a message to the, ‘voiceless and downtrodden’, that the courts could only be accessed by those with deep pockets.

“‘They are homeless. It would be unfortunate to say to the less-well off you do so (bring a lawsuit) at your own peril,’ Hamel-Smith argued unsuccessfully, as Justice Donaldson-Honeywell ordered Bernard to pay costs fit for senior and junior counsel, to be assessed… Donaldson-Honeywell also found the corporation had no duty to provide accommodation or facilities to displaced people, nor did the homeless have a right to sleep in the square.”

This may be the case, but as a nation, where are the safety nets that are in place to assist socially displaced persons?

The Guardian reported: “While Donaldson-Honeywell praised Bernard for raising awareness of the plight of homeless people in T&T, she said the case could not proceed as Bernard’s lawyers should have pursued a constitutional motion instead. She said his claims focused more on how the decision affected his constitutional rights to life and liberty as opposed to the legality of the decision.

“‘Street dwelling is a concern not only for those unfortunate persons who, whether by choice or having suffered dire life experiences, seek to stake a claim to entitlement to reside in public places but also presents a threat to other members of the public whose freedom of movement, safety and enjoyment of public places may be adversely affected by such occupation,’ Donaldson-Honeywell said.

“Port-of-Spain Mayor Keron Valentine says there were over 300 homeless people in Port-of-Spain but dealing with that issue was not part of the corporation’s core function.‘We kept on calling for them to be placed in rehabilitation centres and that is not our core function. We kept on calling other state agencies and social services to take care of it…Robbie Robert, small business owner, said that the Government should do more for the homeless. The system should take care of them in general. The island has some wealth, it is a small population. Some of them are sick and we need to show more compassion,’ he said.”
Justice Donaldson-Honeywell said that there was no evidence of Bernard’s inability to pay. She asked: “They can’t work?”

Therein lies part of the problem. Are we really reading the signs of the times? Do we know, for example, why our socially displaced people are on the streets? A few years ago a study was conducted to determine the various kinds of homeless people who live in TT. We have the data but we have not developed the will-power to build right relationships with our homeless brothers and sisters who are either mentally ill, indigent, have ended up on the street due to family disputes and so on.

The Guardian reported that Justice Donaldson-Honeywell “also ruled she could not consider Bernard’s claims of unsanitary and inhumane conditions at the Centre for the Socially Displaced at Riverside car-park (located opposite Tamarind Square), as the corporation is not responsible for homeless shelters. “As a result, the claim for tents and portable toilets to placed by the corporation in the square also fails. This is so because neither the right for Bernard to sleep in the square, nor the duty of the corporation to provide accommodation has been proven”.

As part of her judgment, Donaldson-Honeywell “called upon the Government and citizens to partner with each other to address the issue of homelessness. “‘The reasons for the plight of the persons reduced to living in such circumstances are many and varied. However, what is certain is that in a society as small as ours these persons are connected perhaps by less than six degrees of separation from each of us. Accordingly, this issue of street dwelling is a matter that requires urgent attention and it is a concern from which no member of society can feel absolved of responsibility,’ she said.

“Contacted afterwards, Port-of-Spain Mayor Joel Martinez (appointed on 13 Dec 2016) said he had not had an opportunity to analyse the judgement and would have to discuss it with his executive council and administrative staff before deciding on the next move.

“However, he said: ‘From what I understand the corporation won the case. Therefore there is the likelihood that we would move forward with removing persons from the square. Our intention would be to unlock the square and bring it back to the pristine order that it was prior to the homeless occupying it.’”
The word “pristine” jarred on me as I read it. Used in this context, it reminded me of Pope Francis’ concern about our “throw-away culture”. Where is the justice of creating “pristine order” in a square that sits a stone’s throw from the Riverside Centre where the socially displaced live in “unsanitary and inhumane conditions?”


Inter alia, he said: “It is too easy to pass the blame about this social ill because as a society we do not want to look in the mirror and confront the larger structural, economic, social and cultural issues that fuel homelessness. This problem is not going away and unless we realise that we need to rethink our entire approach we will not be able to rectify this terrible injustice.

“Homeless people are not nameless or faceless. They are not sub-human or inhuman. They are human beings and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago just like the rest of us. Homeless people are someone's children, maybe even husbands or wives. These are people, and represent some of the most vulnerable in our society.

“As a nation we are failing to deal and understand the plight of the homeless and the displaced. Homelessness is not a punishment or a disease. It is not vengeance being meted out for evil or laziness. Not all homeless people are drug addicts or prostitutes. These stereotypes are limiting and are just convenient as we can neatly place blame on the homeless themselves. Homelessness can arise from a number of factors, many of which are out of the control of the victims. Mental illness which is a taboo in our culture is one of the leading causes of homelessness.

“A new paradigm is needed, one where the fate and plight of the homeless is seen as a national issue, and everyone's responsibility.”

On 16 March 2017, the Vatican reported that “the parable of the poor man, Lazarus, lying at the rich man’s door, was at the heart of Pope Francis’ homily at the Santa Marta Mass on Thursday morning. Pope Francis warned of the risks we run if we have the same uncaring attitude towards the poor and homeless people we see around us today…”
“When people live in a closed environment, surrounded by wealth and vanity and trusting in their own devices, the Pope said, those people lose their sense of direction and have no idea of their limitations. Exactly as happens to the rich man in the Gospel, who spends his time at dinner parties and takes no notice of the poor man lying at his door.

“What do we feel in our hearts when we see the homeless or the children begging in the streets, Pope Francis asked? Do we say, ‘No, those are the ones who steal?’ “What do we feel for the poor or the homeless, even if they are well dressed but they don’t have a job and can’t pay the rent? Do we say this is normal? Do we see the homeless as part of the landscape of our cities, like statues or bus stops or post offices?

“We must be careful, the Pope warned, because if we eat, drink and assuage our consciences by simply giving a coin and walking past, this is not the right way to go. Instead, he said, we must realise when we are on that slippery slope from sin to corruption. We must ask ourselves, what do I feel when I see on the news that a bomb has fallen on a hospital and lots of poor children have been killed? Do I just say a prayer and go on my way like before? Is my heart touched, or am I like the rich man whose heart was not touched by Lazarus but only the dogs had pity on him? If that is the case, the Pope said, we are on the road from sin to corruption.

“For this reason, he concluded we must ask the Lord to look into our hearts to see if we are on that slippery slope to corruption, from which there is no return. Sinners can repent and turn back, he said, but it is very hard for those with closed and corrupt hearts, so let us pray that the Lord will show us which road we are following.”

CNS reported on 11 Nov 2016: “Looking directly at thousands of homeless and marginalized persons, Pope Francis asked for their forgiveness for failures to recognize their dignity and alleviate their suffering ‘I ask your forgiveness for all the times that we Christians stand before a poor person or a situation of poverty and look the other way.’

“The forgiveness of those who have felt unloved and unwanted by men and women of the church ‘purifies us and helps us to believe once again that at the heart of the Gospel is the great message of poverty and that we -- Catholics, Christians, all of us -- must form a church that is poor for the poor. All men and women from any religion must see in the poor the message of God who comes close to us and made
himself poor to accompany us in life,’ he said. Over 6,000 homeless and socially excluded persons from 22 different European countries attended the jubilee celebration in Rome. The audience kicked off the final jubilee celebration before the conclusion of the Holy Year of Mercy Nov. 20.”

Let us get out of our comfort zone, open our hearts and act as advocates for the homeless and the poor.

Does this remind you of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man? See Luke 16:20. Here in TT, in the heart of our capital, close to displays of untold wealth, there are many who, like Lazarus, sit and wait for crumbs. The economy of the country should work for the people. This is a key social justice principle.

Our *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 201 reminds us that social justice “concerns the social, political, and economic aspects and, above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions.” With all the challenges that we will continue to face during these economically difficult times of structural adjustment/transformation, let us all be advocates for the poor and the vulnerable, so that as the “pie” shrinks, those on the margins/fringes will be embraced in the fold of humanity and will be able to have a fair share in whatever little exists.

On 24 Sept 2015, Pope Francis told an audience of about 200 clients of Catholic Charities gathered at St Patrick Church in Washington, USA: “‘There is no justification for homelessness…The Son of God came into this world as a homeless person. The Son of God knew what it was to be a homeless person, what it was to start life without a roof over his head…We can imagine what Joseph must
have been thinking. How is it that the Son of God has no home? Why are we homeless, why don’t we have housing?

“‘These are questions which many of you may ask daily… Like St Joseph, you may ask: Why are we homeless, without a place to live?...These are questions which all of us might well ask. Why do these, our brothers and sisters, have no place to live? Why are these brothers and sisters of ours homeless?’

“The Pope told the Catholic Charities clients that Jesus is with them to give them comfort. ‘We know that Jesus wanted to show solidarity with every person. He wanted everyone to experience his companionship, his help and his love. He identified with all those who suffer, who weep, who suffer any kind of injustice…He tells us this clearly: ‘I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me.’

“He encouraged the Catholic Charities clients to pray. ‘In prayer… we learn to see one another as brothers and sisters…In prayer, there are no rich and poor people, there are sons and daughters, sisters and brothers. In prayer, there is no first or second class, there is brotherhood. It is in prayer that our hearts find the strength not to be cold and insensitive in the face of injustice. Jesus keeps knocking on our doors, the doors of our lives. He doesn’t do this by magic, with special effects, with flashing lights and fireworks. Jesus keeps knocking on our door in the faces of our brothers and sisters, in the faces of our neighbours, in the faces of those at our side,’ Pope Francis told them.”

Our Church is constantly teaching us about what we need to do to build right relationships. In April 2016, Pope Francis released an apostolic exhortation entitled: "Amoris Laetitia," or "The Joy of Love" (256 pages). It is the result of 2 Synods on marriage and the family in 2014 and 2015 and is written in the context of the Year of Mercy. The themes on which he focuses are wide-ranging, including: love, marriage, sex, family planning, communication, and commitment. He gives some good tips on relationships.

As Fr James Martin, SJ, says: "Using insights from the Synod of Bishops on the Family and from bishops’ conferences from around the world, Pope Francis affirms church teaching on family life and marriage, but strongly emphasizes the role of personal conscience and pastoral discernment. He urges the church to appreciate the context of people’s lives when helping them make good decisions. The goal is to help families—in fact, everyone—experience God’s love and know that they are welcome members of the church. All this may require what the pope calls 'new pastoral methods'” (199).

The 4th Commandment, does not only refer to relationships within the family.

"2212 The fourth commandment illuminates other relationships in society. In our brothers and sisters we see the children of our parents; in our cousins, the descendants of our ancestors; in our fellow citizens, the children of our country; in the baptized, the children of our mother the Church; in every human person, a son or daughter of the One who wants to be called "our Father." In this way our relationships with our neighbors are recognized as personal in character. The neighbour is not a "unit" in the human collective; he is "someone" who by his known origins deserves particular attention and respect.

2213 Human communities are made up of persons. Governing them well is not limited to guaranteeing rights and fulfilling duties such as honoring contracts.
Right relations between employers and employees, between those who govern and citizens, presuppose a natural good will in keeping with the dignity of human persons concerned for justice and fraternity."

John A. Humbach's paper: \textit{Towards a natural justice of right relationships}, is also informative. Inter alia, he says:

“Broadly, right relationships are relations in which each (or all) seek, without abandoning themselves, to be attentive and responsive to the needs and emotions of one another…That is, a relationship is not ‘right’ if participants seek to overbear in power (oppress), to overreach in resources (exploit), or to mislead for selfish advantage (manipulate). ...The justice of rights is a justice of entitlements. It is a conception of justice in which personal entitlements are the fundamental moral objects in view and their enforcement is crucial. By contrast, the justice of right relationships treats human relationships, not rights, as the fundamental moral objects, with no crucial role for entitlements at all. While the justice of rights is grounded in rules about entitlements, the justice of right relationships arises out of the human attachments and connections that people form in the course of daily life. At its core, the justice of right relationships is the intrinsic good that inures to persons who live in interaction with others whose fundamental moral concern is to maintain the quality and mutual worth of their relationships, instead of insisting on their rights."

Father James Chelich says he understands justice as "right relationship – with God, with others, and with the earth. These are some of the Christian and Hebrew Scriptures which help us envision what right relationship looks like:

‘For right relationship with God: 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness' (Matt 6:33); 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your being, all your strength and with all your mind…' (Luke 10:27)

‘With others: '..and love your neighbour as yourself.' (Luke 10:27); and the Works of Mercy, as described in Matthew 25:31-46: feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting those in prison.

‘With the earth: 'In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth…God saw that it was good'. (Genesis 1:1-31). 'But now ask the beasts to teach you, the birds of the air to tell you. Or speak to the earth to instruct you, and the fish of the sea to inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of God has done this?' (Job 10:8-9)
“We also look to Catholic Social Teaching to understand justice as it is expressed in our understanding of the dignity of the human person, our rights and responsibilities toward one another, the preferential option for the poor, and the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, economic justice, care for creation, and peacemaking.

“Just as the establishment and promotion of right relationships between all members of the human family, as well as the transformation of society’s unjust structures and institutions.’ CRS’ Justice Lens, Catholic Relief Services...

“JUSTICE means 'Right-relationship' or 'Life-giving Relationship’…Life-giving Relationship with others is impossible in any situation in which we are so intent on having things our way that we refuse to listen. Right-relationship is defeated when anyone is excluded from a meaningful place in the conversation.”

Sadly, in TT and globally, millions are excluded from a meaningful place in the conversation. Too many are socially excluded; live on the margins - part of what Pope Francis calls our "throw-away culture". Our task is to do as Gandhi said and be the change we wish to see in the world. Each one of us can and must make a difference in effecting change; in building right relationships. We cannot afford to be indifferent to the needs of our neighbour.

But in order to achieve our goals, it is important that each of us has a right relationship with God first. Only then can the Holy Spirit work in and through us to work effectively in God’s Vineyard. What does it mean to have a personal relationship with the Lord? Shaun McAfee, a convert to Catholicism says: "It means that we let God be in charge of our lives, that we form a relationship with His Mystical Body, and that we get to know His Mother. It also demands that we seek a constant and perpetual conversion, serve others in love, and create disciples...

“Having a personal relationship with Christ means that we are called to ongoing conversion. It is a journey in which we continually grow in the Lord. We grow in many ways: we deepen our faith; we get to know the saints and the family of believers; we become more compassionate toward the poor and the hungry; we become better fathers and mothers.

“Perpetual conversion calls for endurance. To face the flaming arrows of the enemy and the inevitable hardships in our lives, we must ask the Lord to pour out His Holy Spirit on us. And with the help of the Spirit, we must develop virtues and strive to overcome our vices. This will not happen overnight, though. We must
gradually empty ourselves by practicing good habits...We need a constant flow of God’s grace into our lives in order to replace our vices with virtues: prayer, brotherly love, obedience, joy, peace, service to others, and humility...prayer is personal, it is the most direct way of developing and maintaining a personal relationship with the Lord...when we grow in our relationship with God through prayer, we come to understand Him better and to understand His will for us. A good prayer life requires practice, discipline, commitment, openness, honesty, and love...

“When we trust God and give Him complete control of our lives — which we never really had much control over in the first place — God performs manoeuvres and makeovers that we never thought possible. Moreover, He removes all boundaries that hold us down and frees our spirits to soar.

“This is especially true in the case of sin. We cannot become free of sin and distress until we let God transform us. We let God transform us by participating in the sacraments, serving others, praying, and reading Scripture regularly.”

Andrew Casad's article: The Eucharist and right relationship to the land reminds us that: "We cannot be this image of Christ for the world unless we are in right relationship with one another and with all creation. For, as Jesus taught us, 'if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-24).

“It is only when we have cooperated with Christ to heal our broken relationships that we can then come forward and receive his broken body that reconciles us with the Father...We are called to stand in solidarity with all people, to put ourselves in the other’s shoes. In a particular way our building relationship with the land manifests itself in care for immigrants, supporting Fair Trade, and listening to the needs and wisdom of local farmers... Our relationship to God is opened up to us, is made incarnate, in our relationship to one another and to the land which we share and inhabit.”

4.2 Right relationships and the environment

As Patrick Carolan, Executive Director of the Franciscan Action Network says, caring for our environment is a moral, spiritual and ethical issue: “The basis of Catholic concern over climate change is exemplified in psalm 24:1: ‘The earth is the Lord’s and all that it holds.’ In response to the wonderful gift that God has given us of clean air, life-sustaining water, fruits from the land’s harvests and even
nourishment from the sea, we are called to not only honour God for these many blessings but to also do so by honoring his creation.

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.’

In a statement issued by the USCCB (US Bishops) called ‘Renewing the earth,’ our call is to be stewards of the earth. In it, the bishops pointed out that as stewards, ‘we seek to explore the links between concern for the person and for the earth and for natural ecology and social ecology. The web of life is One’... We need to recover the spiritual values that respect God’s creation.’

In his 1990 World peace day message Pope St John Paul II stated, ‘There is a growing awareness that world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflict, and injustices among people and nations, but also by a lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources which leads to a progressive decline in the quality of life. The sense of precariousness and insecurity that such a situation engenders is a seedbed for collective selfishness, disregard for others and dishonesty.’ Every tree every pond, every member of every species is unique and special to God.

So, building right relationships involves our concern for God's environment/creation also. Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, Laudato Si’ (On care of our common home), makes this clear. This ground-breaking encyclical is a story of right relationships, says Sr Patricia Siemen, Director of the Center for Earth Jurisprudence, Orlando, USA. She says: “Like Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis calls us into right relationship with all beings who share our common home and to defend those among us who suffer the most...Francis weaves a story of integral ecology (137).

“. . . [W]e have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate the questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (49).

“He emphasizes the interrelationship between environmental destruction, anthropocentric domination of nature, disregard for people who are poor and vulnerable among us, extinction of species and the plunder of an unrestrained global economic system. Pollution and climate change, depletion of fresh water, biodiversity loss and disregard for human communities are the consequence "of short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production” (32).
“Francis connects the value of human life with the value of the Earth community which sustains all life. ‘It is not enough . . . to think of different species merely as potential ‘resources’ to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves’ (33)…

“Francis calls for a new story of human relatedness with creation, and specific rejection of human domination over. ‘. . . Nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures’ (67). Francis’ explicit rejection of a theology of dominion over the Earth is a needed correction…

“Francis asks each of us, ‘What kind of world do you want to leave to those who come after us?’ (160). He boldly has set before us a vision of what it means to be human in the 21st century. He offers interconnected criteria for building an integral ecology and a moral compass for defending our common home.” And he rightly insists that “there can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself” (118).

5. DEFERRAL OF AUDITED ACCOUNTS FOR 2016

5.1 CCSJ’s Audited Accounts for 2016 are not included in this AGM Report and will not be laid at the Meeting for 2 reasons:

a. CCSJ’s Treasurer, Annette McKenzie, has been very ill over the past few months; and

b. The Archdiocese has only recently submitted – during the 1st week in November 2017, a statement of expenditure by CCSJ for the year 2016.

In light of the above, CCSJ’s Audited Accounts will be laid before Members at an Extraordinary CCSJ Meeting that will be arranged specifically to receive and adopt them.

Once Annette recovers from her illness, she will liaise with L. Dave Lopez & Co., the Firm of Accountants that has been preparing CCSJ’s Annual Audited Accounts free of charge since 2014. CCSJ is a Limited Liability Company under the Company’s Act. Mr. Lopez is a Catholic.
We wish to record our deep appreciation to Mr Lopez and his Team for their commitment over the past years to use their knowledge, skills and experience to further the aims of CCSJ, and by extension, the Archdiocese.

At a time when society is calling for more accountability, CCSJ continues to ensure that our accounts are audited, not only because the Commission is also a Company, but because accountability is a key virtue which we seek to promote.

NB: It is to be noted that once CCSJ’s land in San Raphael has been transferred to SVP, CCSJ will wind up as a Company and remain solely a Department of the Archdiocese.

6.0 SOME IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE CHURCH DURING 2016

6.1 The Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy: CCSJ observed this year which continued into 2016. On 13 March 2015, – the second anniversary of Pope Francis’ pontificate, he had announced that this period of prayer and action would run from 8 Dec 2015, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, to 20 Nov 2016, the Feast of Christ the King.

![Official logo for the Year of Mercy](image)

This extraordinary jubilee of Mercy is, as a Vatican document stated, “a year of forgiveness of sins... it is a year of reconciliation between adversaries, of conversion and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and consequently of
solidarity, hope, justice, commitment to serve God with joy and in peace with our brothers and sisters. A Jubilee year is above all the year of Christ, who brings life and grace to humanity.”

The Extraordinary Jubilee was declared by Pope Francis in a papal bull of indiction: Misericordiae Vultus (The Face of Mercy). Pope Francis urged us on New Year’s Day 2015, to recognise that: “This is the time of mercy. It is important that the lay faithful live it and bring it into different social environments. Go forth!” He said the Year was “dedicated to living out in our daily lives the mercy which the Father constantly extends to all of us” (Bull of Indiction Misericordiae Vultus, 25).

CCSJ was represented at the opening of the Door of Mercy at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in POS. The Commission also shared information about the year in its column in Catholic News. CCSJ’s activities to observe the Year included presentations by the Chair during Lenten Retreats, Seminars, and discussions of the theme on Ask Why TV programme.

In his Prayer for the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis reminds us that we “are the face of the invisible Father, of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy: let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified…Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing, so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord, and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind”.

If we are the hands and feet of the living God, we must demonstrate that the corporal and spiritual works of mercy are integral parts of our very being. Pope Francis has said: “It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty.” (And see the encyclical, God is love (no.31).

We are living in a time when powerful forces are seeking to push religion off the public stage. In this time of crisis, with so many social ills to be addressed, we must not be armchair Christians.

As Bishop Robert Barron has said: “…the ultimate purpose of church people is not to hunker down behind walls, but rather to flood the world with the ideas and
practices that they have cultivated… Christians must vigorously resist the modern prejudice in favour of a privatized religion…The Church must come out from behind its walls – non-violently to be sure – but with confidence and panache, in order to share its life everywhere and with everyone.”

During 2016, CCSJ sought also to promote some of His Grace’s suggestions: “being a blessing for each other”; Dreaming Big; promoting a Missionary mindset among the Faithful so that they will be inspired e.g. to embrace a Missionary Project as part of their Novus Mentis Habitus.

6.2 On 21 November 2015, Archbishop Joseph Harris had issued a Pastoral Letter for the Year of Mercy. It is entitled: Merciful like the Father. Inter alia, he said: “In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus commands his followers “Be merciful just as your Father is merciful”. (Lk 6:36). This call must resonate in all hearts during this Holy Year. This is the attitude to which our hearts must be converted as we enter into the practices and observances of this Year of Grace. …I invite all people of good will to a deep encounter and intimacy with God, so that we may become ‘merciful like the Father’, willing to forgive ourselves and others “seventy times seven” so that our nation may truly live up to its name and purpose, a model of harmony and caring after the example of the Trinity.” In this excellent guide for the Year of Mercy, His Grace encourages us to:

- Meditate on the Word of God.
- Rediscover the practice of Silence.
- Judge not!
- Forgive!
- Give!

See the following link for the Pastoral Letter: http://www.iubilaeummisericordiae.va/content/dam/gdm/images/mercydoors/cathedral-of-the-immaculate-conception-archdiocese-of-port-of-sp/letter.pdf
6.3 Mercy Village: In a letter to the Faithful, Archbishop Harris stated:

Above is a photo of CCSJ’s booth at Mercy Village, organised on behalf of CCSJ by CCSJ Member, Jo Ann Smith, her husband, Richard, and their children.

“On Saturday 24th September 2016, REPUBLIC DAY, the Year of Mercy Committee, established by His Grace, organized in the name of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain a celebration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy under the title ‘MERCY VILLAGE’. This is an opportunity for the entire local Church to be one not only in creed but in presence. The committee aims to gather thousands of Catholics to experience and celebrate the merciful love of God for all of us.

An outline of this major event has been attached to the communication.

I therefore wish through this medium, to make the following requests:

1. That all priests in the Archdiocese join the people of God at the Mercy Village for some part of the day. Facilities will be organized for the hearing of confessions.
2. That all parishes organize pilgrimages to the Mercy Village. A Holy Door will be open at the Village.
3. That attendance at the Mercy Village be made mandatory for all Confirmation and RCIA candidates.
4. That every Catholic School send a contingent of students to the Mercy Village to experience the Church on a larger scale.

May this Mercy Village be an encounter of Faith, Hope and Love for all who attend an experience of our identity as Christians who know and share the Mercy of our God.

Sincerely yours in Christ

-Most Reverend Joseph E. Harris

Archbishop of Port of Spain”

6.4 CCSJ welcomed Pope Francis’ second Apostolic Exhortation: Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love), published on April 8, 2016. As the Vatican radio stated it: “draws together the work of the last two Synods of Bishops, affirming the Church’s teaching that stable families are the building blocks of a healthy society and a place where children learn to love, respect and interact with others. But at the same time, the text warns against idealising the many challenges facing family life, urging Catholics to care for, rather than condemning, those whose lives do not reflect the teaching of the Church.”

The Association of Catholic Priests in Ireland rightly says that the document “emphatically affirms the very rich and complex reality of family life, in a kindly, open-hearted way, profoundly positive, nourished by pastoral attention to reality.”
Key social justice principles are embedded throughout this important 325 paragraph document. The Church is aware that although “The life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises…these are also part of its dramatic beauty” (232). The Church continues to “promote marriage and the family and to defend them against those who attack them.”

This is an Evangelising document that challenges us to conversion. There are many topics addressed in the Exhortation, including biblical and spiritual reflections on the family; practical discussions on love, sexuality, marriage, parenting, the education of children, unemployment, inadequate housing, migration and violence, separated/divorced/ remarried Catholics, same-sex union, social media; the many social issues that beset families such as abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty; and the importance of families as transformers of their communities and the world.

Pope Francis said: “I do not recommend a rushed reading of the text. The greatest benefit, for families themselves and for those engaged in the family apostolate, will come if each part is read patiently and carefully, or if attention is paid to the parts dealing with their specific needs” (7).

There is much in the nine chapters on which we should reflect, including some sound advice and pastoral recommendations by the Holy Father:

Chapter 1 – In The Light The Word
Chapter 2 – The Experiences And Challenges Of Families
Chapter 3 – Looking To Jesus: The Vocation Of The Family
Chapter 4 – Love In Marriage
Chapter 5 – Love Made Fruitful
Chapter 6 – Some Pastoral Perspectives
Chapter 7 – Towards A Better Education Of Children
Chapter 8 – Accompanying, Discerning And Integrating Weakness
Chapter 9 – The Spirituality Of Marriage And The Family.

CCSJ recommended in one of the Commission’s articles in Catholic News that parishes should organise study groups to consider the issues raised in this Exhortation e.g. in this Exhortation, the Holy Father says:
“Narcissism makes people incapable of looking beyond themselves, beyond their own desires and needs.”

Pope Francis asks us to develop “new pastoral methods” (199) as we reach out to everyone in a compassionate, empathetic, non-judgmental manner. We are to love and encourage each other to live good Christian lives.

Fr James Martin SJ notes: “Francis affirms church teaching on family life and marriage, but strongly emphasises the role of personal conscience and pastoral discernment. He urges the church to appreciate the context of people’s lives when helping them make good decisions.”

It is important to note, though, that, as Mark Brumley, President of Ignatius Press states, Pope Francis emphasis on ‘conscience’ “doesn’t mean this is a free pass to do whatever you want,” for example:

- the Church makes it clear that marriage is between one man and one woman and is indissoluble. However, it reaffirms its position that: “every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while ‘every sign of unjust discrimination’ is to be carefully avoided particularly any form of aggression and violence. Such families should be given respectful pastoral guidance, so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God’s will in their lives (250);

- Abortion is seen as “horrendous…Here I feel it urgent to state that, if the family is the sanctuary of life, the place where life is conceived and cared for, it is a horrendous contradiction when it becomes a place where life is rejected and destroyed… The family protects human life in all its stages, including its last” (83).

- Pope Francis opposes euthanasia and “firmly rejects the death penalty” (83).

On Tuesday, April 26, 2016 CCSJ’s TV programme, Ask Why, on TCN focused on the Exhortation from 8-9 p.m. Fr Robert Christo, Deacon Derek Walcott and Dianne Wells joined Nadine Bushell and CCSJ’s Chair to discuss the Exhortation.
6.5 On Nov 21, 2016, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Letter, “Misericordia et Misera” (Mercy and Misery), when he officially concluded the Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy which ran from December 8, 2015 to November 20, 2016.

The title of his Apostolic Letter refers to the encounter between Jesus and the woman caught in adultery, from the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John. Although the Jubilee Year ended on Nov 20, Pope Francis rightly said that we are still living in a “time of mercy… Mercy cannot become a mere parenthesis in the life of the church…the door of mercy of our heart continues to remain wide open.”

One of his most profound statements is that “there is no sin that God's mercy cannot reach and wipe away when it finds a repentant heart seeking to be reconciled with the Father… Nothing of what a repentant sinner places before God's mercy can be excluded from the embrace of his forgiveness.”

Here are some of the key issues outlined in the Apostolic Letter. Pope Francis:

- extended the mandate to the Missionaries of mercy, that is, more than 1,100 priests who were given the faculty for the Holy Year to absolve the five sins reserved to the Apostolic See. He asked them to continue leading retreats, missions, prayer services and offering confession in dioceses around the world. They will be supervised by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization;

- extended the provision he made during the Year of Mercy of recognizing as valid the sacramental absolution received by "those faithful who, for various reasons, attend churches officiated by the priests of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X," the society founded by the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre – better known as lefevbrists;

- decreed that all priests now have permanent permission to grant absolution to those who confess to the sin of having procured an abortion (such absolution was normally reserved to the local bishop);

- declared that the Church's focus on God's mercy must continue with individual acts of kindness, assistance to the poor and with encouraging Catholics to participate in the sacrament of reconciliation and making it easier for them to do so;

- said that a special place in the church must be given to families, especially at a time when the very meaning of family is in crisis; - asked dioceses that have not yet done so to consider joining the ‘24 Hours for the Lord’ initiative. Near the
fourth Sunday of Lent, dioceses should choose a church or churches to stay open for 24 hours to offer the sacrament of reconciliation and Eucharistic adoration;

- urged the entire church to celebrate, on the 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, the World Day of the Poor. This would fall a week before the feast of Christ the King and would be "the worthiest way to prepare" to acknowledge the kingship of Christ, "who identified with the little ones and the poor and who will judge us on our works of mercy";

- asked every Catholic parish in the world to set aside at least one Sunday a year to promote reading, studying and praying with the Scriptures; teaching people "lectio divina". He reminds us that the Bible is the great story of the marvels of God’s mercy. Let us heed the Holy Father’s words as we celebrate God's mercy and as we strive to act as His instruments in our world today: “Now is the time to unleash the creativity of mercy, to bring about new undertakings, the fruit of grace.”

6.6 The 31st international celebration of World Youth Day (WYD) took place in Kraków, Poland from July 25-31, 2016. It is estimated that 3 million pilgrims from around the world celebrated the event which was launched by Pope St John Paul II in 1985 and which takes place every two or three years.

The theme in 2016 was dedicated to the theme of the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7). In his WYD Message, Pope Francis reminded us that this event was taking place in the heart of the Holy Year of Mercy. He invited young people of the world to become instruments of mercy to those around them: “When we open our hearts with humility and transparency, we can contemplate God’s mercy in a very concrete way” (Pope Francis).

In his Lenten message in 2016, Pope Francis reminded us that in the Christian life “the corporal and spiritual works of mercy must never be separated. . .In the corporal works of mercy we touch the flesh of Christ in our brothers and sisters who need to be fed, clothed, sheltered, visited. In the spiritual works of mercy – counsel, instruction, forgiveness, admonishment and prayer – we touch more directly our own sinfulness.”

At the end of his WYD message, the Holy Father said: “Mercy is the only way to overcome evil. Justice is necessary, very much so, but by itself it is not enough. Justice and mercy must go together. . .Jesus is waiting for you. He has
confidence in you and is counting on you! He has so many things to say to each of you. . . Do not be afraid to look into his eyes, full of infinite love for you. Open yourselves to his merciful gaze, so ready to forgive all your sins. A look from him can change your lives and heal the wounds of your souls. His eyes can quench the thirst that dwells deep in your young hearts, a thirst for love, for peace, for joy and for true happiness.

“Come to Him and do not be afraid! Come to him and say from the depths of your hearts: ‘Jesus, I trust in You!’ Let yourselves be touched by his boundless mercy, so that in turn you may become apostles of mercy by your actions, words and prayers in our world, wounded by selfishness, hatred and so much despair. Carry with you the flame of Christ’s merciful love – as Saint John Paul II said – in every sphere of your daily life and to the very ends of the earth.”

A T&T pilgrim at WYD Poland shows the national flag in a procession through the streets of Rybnik on Sunday 31 July. Photo: Jason Regis

The 2016 theme applies to us adults also. If we seek God’s mercy, then we have to be merciful. What are we doing to empower our youth; to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, and physical development of our youth in our educational institutions and in society? Are we meeting the needs of our youth with special educational needs?

Between 2014 and 2015 there were 56,744 cases of domestic violence brought before our magistrates’ courts. We cannot ignore the plight of the children in families that experience such violence. And what about the countless cases of child abuse and murders of our children? How much longer are we to stand idly by and watch our disaffected and disenfranchised youth kill each other and adults with impunity?
Gaudium et Spes reminds us that: “Everyone must consider every neighbour without exception as another self, taking into account first of all their life and the means necessary to living it with dignity…” Do we have a national youth policy? If so, how effective is its implementation? And while many of our youth languish in remand yard or at YTC, we seem to turn a blind eye to the deficiencies of the criminal justice system, our education system, etc.

The principle of Catholic solidarity demands that we move out of our comfort zones and act to save our youth. As St Pope John Paul II said in his 1987 encyclical, Sollicitudo rei socialis (On Social Concern), solidarity “is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” Are we listening to the cry of our youth?

7. REPORT ON CCSJ’S WORK DURING 2016

7.1 CCSJ is one of 19 Departments in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain. In keeping with the annual practice, CCSJ submitted its Pastoral Plan for 2016, along with all Departments, parishes, and schools. This plan is available on CCSJ’s Website.

At CCSJ’s meeting on Wed 29 June 2016, CCSJ’s Chair reported that the budgets for all Departments have been reduced due to the economic downturn. CCSJ’s allocation from the Archdiocese for 2016 was TT $50,000.00 – excluding the salaries of the Chair and the 2 part-time Administrative Assistants (job-share).

With no Parish Link Coordinators, and with a reduced budget for 2016, it was agreed that certain aspects of CCSJ’s 2016 Plan would be revised. Collaboration with other Departments and organisations allowed CCSJ to optimize the use of its limited resources.

Also, CCSJ is grateful for the generosity of a few individuals who continue to lend tremendous support to the Commission - in kind. For example, the cost of all the Newsletters, posters etc. that are provided free of charge to CCSJ would leave the Commission in the “red” if CCSJ had to pay for them. Also, the Company that
provides graphic designs and the Auditors who provide their services to CCSJ free of charge are also to be thanked for their unstinting support of the Commission.

CCSJ encourages the Faithful to let the Church’s social doctrine guide our path. With no Parish Link Coordinators/ “foot soldiers” on CCSJ, the Commission continues its efforts to raise awareness of the Faithful/Citizens of the social doctrine of the Church, and to encourage them and the wider community:

- to demonstrate our love for God, for our neighbour and for all creation by reaching out in solidarity e.g. to those who are poor/socially excluded and to build the common good;

- to be true witnesses to our faith by integrating our faith with our daily lives.

An integral part of our Ministry is a commitment to promote justice:

“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.” (The Social Concern of the Church, n.41, Blessed John Paul II).

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 (this means being vigilant and speaking out against attempts to liberalize laws that will allow abortions, homosexuality, and striving to abolish the death penalty);

- 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.

7.2 Tribute to the late Clive Belgrave: Clive died on December 18, 2015. And although our tribute to him is included in CCSJ’s 2015 AGM report, it is fitting to note that at its first meeting in 2016 – held on 17 Feb 2016, the Minutes of that meeting recorded Members’ tribute to Clive for his tireless work on behalf of CCSJ and for his commitment to promote social justice generally – with SVP and with all the other organisations with which he was involved. On behalf of the Commission, CCSJ’s Chair paid tribute to him in an article published in CCSJ’s column in Catholic News.

The following information was contained in CCSJ’s 2015 AGM report, but is appropriate to be included in this report:

“CCSJ’s Deputy Chair, Clive Belgrave, died on December 18, 2015, after being hospitalised in Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at the Port-of-Spain General Hospital. His funeral took place at St Finbar’s RC Church, Diego Martin. Clive had been a member of CCSJ since its inception in 2003 and had served tirelessly and faithfully, not only as a member of CCSJ, but in a number of organizations, for example, he was:

- Chair of Trinidad and Tobago Reintegration Foundation/Anthony Pantin Reintegration Foundation which runs a rehabilitation facility in San Raphael for former prison inmates – on land that is owned by CCSJ;

- Honorary Secretary of the Society of St Vincent De Paul (SVDP) in Trinidad and Project Coordinator for the North and South America and the Caribbean regions. As reported in the Newsday on 26 December, “Belgrave, has been a long time member with more than 50 years of service in support of the many homes and activities the Society operates and performs in service of those in
need in Trinidad and Tobago.” Speaking at the ceremony, his eldest son, Valder, said: “Dad gave of his time very generously and supported various SVP, United Way, Archdiocese of PoS, alma mater Fatima College reps from swimming and horse racing and the advertising community as well...

Archbishop Joseph Harris delivered the sermon. Inter alia, he said that “Clive’s life was a life spent helping people, feeding the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, and imprisoned. ‘So as much as sadness has hit me, as it has hit all of us, there is profound peace because I know the man who walked was a person who was prepared because his whole life was a preparation for this moment,’ he said.

His Grace said the St Vincent de Paul Society of which Clive was honorary secretary for so many years has surely lost a champion, but hoped and prayed from above Clive will intercede with the Father, for everyone. ‘Clive will talk to the Father for us, so that God can raise up other people whose lives can be characterised by the good which they have done for those who live on the margins.’”

May our dear colleague and friend, Clive, rest in peace. You have served well in the Lord’s Vineyard.”

Annette des Iles was appointed as CCSJ’s Acting Deputy-Chair at CCSJ’s meeting held on 17 Feb 2016. This appointment will be confirmed at CCSJ’s next AGM.

7.3 **Council for Responsible Political Behaviour:** This Council was established to monitor and evaluate adherence to the Code of Ethical Political Conduct by the Political Parties and their Candidates. The Council seeks to encourage moral, lawful and responsible conduct during elections.

The Code was conceptualised by Archbishop Joseph Harris and was drafted with input from other religious leaders including Anglican Bishop Claude Berkley and civil society organisations, including Transparency International and the Network of Non-Governmental (NGOs), along with FITUN and the Chamber of Commerce.

The Code was launched at the Hilton Trinidad Conference Centre on 25 March 2015. Signatories to the Code included the Inter Religious Organisation (IRO), Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, the Anjuman Sunnat ul Jamaat Association (ASJA), T&T Chamber of Industry and Commerce, T&T Transparency Institute, Women’s Network of
NGOs, the T&T Publishers and Broadcasters Association and the Communication Workers’ Union.

At the launch, Archbishop Harris said: “We as a people have developed certain habits which are not the best and the code seeks to help us to change those habits and build better habits where politics and canvassing and campaigning are concerned.….We don’t expect to have 100 per cent compliance immediately, even though I suppose all of that would be welcomed, but we do hope that the code would help us so that ten years from now we could look back and say, ‘Yes our political culture has changed.’ And not a people who focus on the character assassination but on the projects, the ideas, the philosophy and the development which we all seek for our country.”

The code is intended to achieve the following objectives:

• Fostering of democracy through peaceful, free and fair elections, conducted at regular intervals in which voters are permitted to cast their ballots freely, without interference, fear, intimidation or bribery.

• Promotion of respect for human rights, the pursuit of civil and political liberties, the tolerance of divergent opinions, full and active participation of all in the political process.

• Encouraging participation in the electoral process by the People and to uphold their right to make political choices.

• Promoting an election process free from violence.

The Council is a separate entity which was born out of the code. See the following link for a Media Release from the Council, outlining Methods for managing complaints and reporting thereof:


It should be noted that, in line with the thinking of the Members of the Council, the chairman of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) Dr Herbert Masson that the Code of Ethical Political Conduct should be codified in law. (See Express Sept 8, 2015).

During 2016 the council comprised: Chair - Dr Bishnu Ragoonath, Vice-chair - Bishop Clive Abdulah, Secretary is Catholic Commission for Social Justice’s representative, Leela Ramdeen (CCSJ acts as the Secretariat of the Council),
former IRO head, Bro. Noble Khan and Maha Sabha representative, Ranjit Maharaj. Also on the Council are representatives from the five political parties including Ferdie Fereira (PNM) and Nicholas Morris (UNC), Lisa Henvell (Congress of the People) alderman Sunil Ramjitsingh (ILP) and Vincent Cabrera (MSJ). By March 2015 all five political parties had signed the code.

During 2016 there was a change in the UNC representative. In Feb 2016, Khadijah Ameen replaced Nicholas Morris as the UNC representative. In September 2016, Denisia Forbes replaced Khadijah Ameen as the UNC representative. Since the resignation of Reginald Dumas in 2015, there remains a vacancy for a person who is not aligned to any political party.

During 2016, 6 Council meetings were held: Jan 18, Feb 22, Mar 14, Apr 18, Sep 19, and Nov 10. For the other months there was either no quorum or other meetings with the Founding Organizations were held.

A meeting of the Founding Organizations was held on Jun 13 2016.

There was also one joint meeting of the Founding Organizations and the Code Council - held on May 16

The Council also issued a Media release on Nov 16.

The Express’ report in March 2015 is instructive: “Asked if the council has the power to impose sanctions, Harris said: ‘We have no power to penalise anyone. The council will monitor and evaluate what politicians and parties are doing. People can complain to the council and they will be well within the law. We are evaluating the person or party based on the principles kept. We have no powers to do anything. It has to work through the moral and spiritual suasion of the electorate. The electorate has to ensure the politicians are keeping their word.’

‘Harris said they will be embarking upon an education programme for the nation. He said: ‘The citizenry can determine if the parties are being true. It is not a religious instrument. It has a lot of civil society groups. The code was intended to stop the downward slide of politics and politicians on the hustings.’

“In a previous interview, Harris had said the code was intended to encourage politicians to behave responsibly and refrain from mauvais langue and non-charitable remarks on political platforms and even during Parliamentary sessions.
Harris also said they should discuss national issues and not focus on the individual.

Asked to share his sentiments on the Council, Dr Ragoonath said: “At this point in time, we have no power and we have no sanctions. All we could do is utilise moral suasion. We take it to the media and the party that has not been adhering to the Code will be exposed. The individual will also be exposed to the public.”

Dr Ragoonath said the code’s tenets focus on the need to uphold the Constitution, moral principles and ethical standards, promote and enforce tolerance, respect, harmony and peace, and to refrain from practices that promote divisiveness, especially racist remarks.”

During 2016 CCSJ continued to function as the Secretariat of the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour and CCSJ’s Chair continued in the role of Secretary, with Jo Anne Lodge as Recording Secretary. The Council’s work continued up to and beyond the Local Government Elections. The Council was incorporated as a not for profit Company on Dec 15, 2015.

Since its inception in 2015, the following have been achievements of the Council (up to 31 Dec 2016):

- Printed copies of the Code booklet, Council banner, podium pendant,
- Activated a webpage and email address
- Meetings of the Council were held fortnightly
- Deliberated on several complaints from the general public and political party representatives utilizing the judgment of Council members to formulate responses sent out via media statements and letters.
- Issued seven (7) media releases over the period April to October 2015.

Examples of the Council’s impact included:

- that a political party candidate publicly stated that they were cited by the Council of a breach of the Code
- the media houses allowed representatives of the Council to appear for interviews
- the entire Code document was published by the print media
• calls from the general public went to the media houses asking for adherence to the Code by politicians
• all the Council’s media releases were published or included in the newscasts, achieving the publicity that was expected. As a result, the Council will continue to use moral suasion to achieve the objectives with which it has been charged.

CCSJ’s Chair informed members of the Council that due to budgetary constraints in 2016, CCSJ would no longer be able to meet the cost of the stipend paid to Jo Anne Lodge, the Council’s Recording Secretary. CCSJ had paid the sum of $2,000 per month to her for her services from Jan 2015 to Nov 2015. The Council undertook to seek to raise funds to pay her and she committed to continue performing her duties pro bono until the funds were identified.

In 2016 the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Port of Spain offered to give a grant to the Council for the sum of $50,000 – to support expenses for the administration of the Council. This sum was deposited into the Council’s Bank Account on Oct 18, 2016. The Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS) also made a pledge of $25,000 to be used for the administration of the Council. The SDMS contribution was deposited into the Council’s Bank Account on Jan 4, 2017.

7.4 **CCSJ Seminar on the Death Penalty:** As part of its plan for the Year of Mercy, CCSJ organised a Seminar, in collaboration with the Greater Caribbean for Life, on the theme: Divine Mercy and the Death Penalty. It was held at Our Lady of Fatima RC Church, Curepe, on **Sat 27 Feb 2016** (3-5pm). Speakers included: Gregory Delzin, Attorney-at-Law, Rev Gwenolyn Ruth Greaves, CCSJ’s Chair and Andrew Paul Douglas, who has spent almost 25 years in prison and four years on death row for murder. His death sentence was commuted and he is an inmate at the Maximum Security Prison.

At the Seminar Andrew apologised to the family of the man whose life he had taken. As the Express newspaper reported: “He said he knew the pain they felt, having lost his own son at the hands of a murderer less than six months ago…Douglas has since achieved a long list of academic credentials, attained while behind bars serving a life sentence…Douglas lamented the circumstances that led to his incarceration.”

CCSJ Chair’s presentation can be accessed via CCSJ’s Website: [http://www.rcsocialjusticett.org/downloads/lentenretreatchagFIN_240216.pdf](http://www.rcsocialjusticett.org/downloads/lentenretreatchagFIN_240216.pdf)
7.5 Meeting with Parliamentarians for Global Action: On Thursday, June 23, Fr Robert Christo, a few invited guests, and CCSJ’s Chair met with three representatives from Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA): Dip. Minou Tavarez Mirabal from Dominican Republic and PGA President, Dr David Donat Cattin, PGA Secretary-General, and Monica Adame, PGA Program Director.

PGA is “a network of more than 1,300 parliamentarians from 143 Parliaments across the world” that, inter alia, “utilizes peer-to-peer advocacy methodology…to allow for a multi-partisan involvement of the concerned stakeholders to strengthen their understanding of misconceptions about the death penalty and its ineffectiveness in crime prevention and justice.”

One of their reasons for visiting T&T was to form a local chapter of PGA. Another was to meet with me, as Chair of CCSJ and GCL, and with others to discuss issues relating to the abolition of the death penalty. As PGA rightly states: “Justice is not revenge.”

CCSJ continues to urge TT’s Government to strengthen the capacity of public institutions, including the criminal justice systems, to address crime and violence and the risk factors that contribute to crime. It is time to boost preventive measures also and create within our parishes, outreach programmes to stand in solidarity with the victims of crime as part of a restorative justice approach to crime.
Fr Robert Christo, Leela Ramdeen, Chair, CCSJ & GCL, Anika Farmer, Attorney-at-Law, Timothy Hamel-Smith, Attorney-at-Law, and O’Leo Lokai (RED Initiatives) with three representatives from Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA): Dip. Minou Tavarez Mirabal from Dominican Republic and PGA President, Dr David Donat Cattin, PGA Secretary-General, and Monica Adame, PGA Program Director.

7.6 World Day against the Death Penalty: On 6 October, in advance of World Day against the Death Penalty, CCSJ partnered with Amnesty International (AI) and RED Initiatives, a human rights organisation in TT, to organise an informal discussion and quiz evening on the theme: Let’s talk about the Death Penalty. It was held at the Big Black Box, 33 Murray St., Woodbrook. Short video clips relating to the death penalty were shown and, according to Chiara Sangiorgio (AI), and O’Leo Lokai (RED Initiatives), the event went well. CCSJ’s Chair was unable to attend as she was in London for an operation.

7.7 AEC Bishops document on Capital Punishment: Human Life is Gift from God: During 2016 CCSJ’s Chair was invited by the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC) to prepare a draft document, drawing on 2 of their previous Pastoral Letters on the issue of the Death Penalty/Capital Punishment: Jubilee Year 2000, Antilles Episcopal Conference Pastoral Letter on Capital Punishment, and We are called to proclaim, celebrate and serve The Gift of Life, Pastoral Letter of the Antilles Episcopal Conference, Rome, 29 March 2008.

Following her presentation of a draft document at the 60th Annual Plenary Meeting of the Bishops of the AEC held in Trinidad in April 2016, the Bishops asked her to draft 2 statements on this issue – a short version and a longer version. She complied with their request and following amendments to the documents by the Bishops, the Statements were released in two formats. The short Statement (Part A) was issued on 4 July, 2016 and the long Statement (Part B) was issued on
21 September 2016. Part B contains more technical language for policy makers and all those who can influence change in the laws in our Region. One of the main aims was to sensitize the faithful and policy makers in the Region of the importance of ending the Death Penalty in our Region.

During the Jubilee Year of Mercy, CCSJ’s Chair arranged with the Commission’s generous printer to print the 2 statements in a booklet entitled: *Human Life is Gift from God*. It was published as a Statement on Capital Punishment by the Bishops and copies were sent to all AEC Bishops. Copies were also distributed to all parishes/Departments/Catholic organisations in TT.

The booklet provides a Catholic perspective on the on-going debate on this important issue in the Region and globally. Readers can access the booklet via the following link: http://www.rcsocialjusticett.org/downloads/capitalpunishmentbooklet.pdf

It is important to contextualize this document. The AEC website states:

“The AEC is the episcopal conference of the English, French and Dutch territories of the Caribbean, with the exception of Haiti. This is the geographical area entrusted to the pastoral care of the Bishops of the AEC. The Catholic Church within these territories comprises five Provinces, consisting of five archdioceses, fourteen dioceses and two Independent Missions, i.e., twenty-one ecclesiastical units in all. Politically, within the five Provinces there are thirteen independent nations (Belize, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Lucia, Grenada, Dominica, Guyana, Suriname, The Bahamas, St. Kitts-Nevis, three Departments of France (Guadeloupe, French Guyana, Martinique), two parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands having complete internal autonomy (Curacao + and Aruba ), and six British colonies (Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Montserrat and Turks and Caicos Islands). In addition, one United States Dependency, St.Thomas, enjoys observer status.”
7.8 Lenten Retreats: CCSJ’s Chair addressed the Faithful at the Lenten Retreat at St Phillip and St James RC Church, Chaguanas on 26 and 27 Feb 2016 on the themes: Mercy and the Environment; and Be merciful to ourselves. Parishioners turned out in their numbers and responded well during the Q&A sessions. Her presentations are available on CCSJ’s Website – see Speeches and Presentations: Mercy and the Environment
Be merciful to ourselves

7.9 CCSJ Training Seminars: In June CCSJ’s Chair wrote to all members of the Clergy and Administrators asking them if they will be prepared to send one or two persons to at least one Training Session that CCSJ was organising in various Vicariates. The aim was to raise the Faithful’s awareness of the Church’s key social justice principles and of the importance of the social doctrine of the Church to the Mission of the Church. Even though the response was poor, CCSJ decided to offer the Training Seminars and to step up publicity etc.
Advertisements were placed in Catholic News that the Seminars would be held at the following Venues Dates and Times:

Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Carapichaima Sat 23 July 2016 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Assumption, Maraval Sat 30 July 2016 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Our Lady of Fatima, Curepe Sat 10 September 2016 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Santa Rosa, Arima Sat 17 September 2016 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

St Joseph’s, Scarborough, Tobago Sat 1 October 2016 (TBC) 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Our Lady of Perpetual Help, San Fernando Sat 8 October 2016 10.00 a.m. – 12.00 noon

The Faithful were invited to join CCSJ members to discuss issues such as: The Sanctity of life & the Dignity of the Human Person; the Common Good; The Option for the Poor and Vulnerable; Family & Community; Participation in the economic, political, social and cultural life of society; Rights and Responsibilities; Economic Justice; Environmental Stewardship; The Role of Government; Subsidiarity; Solidarity; The dignity of work and the Rights of Workers; Promotion of Peace and Disarmament.

In spite of the Ads in the Catholic News, and notices by some Parish priests during Masses, the turnout at the first 2 Seminars were disappointing. Mr Alloy Youk See, Retired Prison Officer, Social worker and Mediator, had agreed to support this initiative and delivered 2 excellent presentations on Restorative Justice at the first 2 Seminars. Due to the very low turnout, the other Seminars were cancelled.

7.10 CCSJ’s Report for Ad Limina visit on the activities and projects of the Commission: Jan 2011 – Dec 2015: Msgr Christian Pereira, Vicar General, requested that all Departments should submit a report on their activities and projects covering the period Jan 2011 to Dec 2015. The request was that reports should identify Projects undertaken over the past 5 years and should state the outcome of these Projects. The template provided was as follows: Date, Project, Outcomes, and Remarks.
CCSJ’s Chair prepared the Commission’s Report. It was circulated to Members for comment and after a few amendments, it was submitted to Msgr Pereira for use by His Grace during the AEC Bishops’ Ad Limina visit with Pope Francis in Rome.

7.11 Ask Why – CCSJ’s monthly TV programme on social justice issues: The programme is aired live on Trinity Communications Network on the 4th Tuesday of each month. It is repeated on the following Sunday and a DVD of each programme is filed at CCSJ’s Office. These are available to support social justice Ministry in parishes. During 2016, the following programmes were aired:

26 Jan. Theme: “OVERCOME INDIFFERENCE AND WIN PEACE”
Moderator: L. Ramdeen
Panellists: Rhonda Maingot, Dianne Wells, Fr. Robert Christo

23 Feb. Theme: “THE WORKS OF MERCY ON THE ROAD TO JUBILEE”
Moderator: L. Ramdeen
Panellists: Gail Oxley, Deacon Derek Walcott, Bernadette Patrick

26 Apr. Theme: “WELCOMING THE JOY OF LOVE”
Moderator: L. Ramdeen Co-Moderator: Dianne Wells
Panellists: Derek Walcott, Fr. Robert Christo

24 May Theme: “MARY, MOTHER OF JUSTICE AND MERCY”
Moderator: Nadine Bushell, CCSJ
Panellists: Fr. Pax Jey-Sharwan-Dir. Legion of Mary;
Randy St Rose-LOM; Tonia Gooding-Teams of Our Lady

28 Jun. Theme: “UNEMPLOYMENT”
Moderator: L. Ramdeen
Panellists: Terrence Farrell, Catholic Voices; Rheema Farrell;
26 Jul. Theme: “REFUGEES”
Moderator: L. Ramdeen
Panellists: R. Maingot & Rochelle Nakhid-LWC, Ruben Barbados, UNHCR

25 Oct. Theme: “LIVING AS CREDIBLE WITNESSES TO GOD’S MERCY”
Moderator: L. Ramdeen
Panellists: Fr. Robert Christo, Najette Abraham, Mikkel Trestrail

22 Nov. Theme: “ADVENT: JOURNEY TOWARDS HORIZON OF HOPE ”
Moderator: Dianne Wells
Panellists: Fr. Robert Christo-Vicar for Evangelization; Mikkel Trestrail – Companions of The Transfigured Christ; Joseph Marquis-Catholic Voices

7.12 Justice, Peace and Community Week (JPCW) - Saturday 22 October 2016 – Saturday 29 October 2016. The Theme for the Week was: “Living as credible witnesses to God’s mercy.” As usual, all Archdiocesan Departments, Catholic Schools and Catholic organizations were encouraged to plan activities to observe the Week, and to use the Prayer Supplement that was produced by Sr Juliet Rajah, Directress of Catechetics, and published in Catholic News for JPCW. CCSJ had circulated to all parishes/Departments and Catholic organisations, a poster on the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy for display.
All Parish Priests/Parish Administrators were asked to encourage the Faithful to pray the Rosary during the Week. They were also asked to encourage Youths to lead holy hour in parishes – before Mass. All Catholic Schools were asked to focus on the theme: “Youth as credible witnesses to God’s Mercy.”

Another resource produced to support initiatives during JPCW was a Newsletter (No. 19) entitled: “MOMENTS OF MERCY CCSJ’s Reflections for Justice, Peace and Community Week during the Year of Mercy October 22 – October 29, 2016 Theme: Living as credible witnesses to God’s Mercy.”

The Prayer for JPCW was:

“Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father, and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him. Show us your face and we will be saved. Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money; the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things; made Peter weep after his betrayal, and assured Paradise to the repentant thief. Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman: ‘If you knew the gift of God!’

You are the visible face of the invisible Father, of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy: let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified. You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness in order that they may feel compassion for those in
ignorance and error: let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing, so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord, and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind. We ask this through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy, you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.”

CCSJ’s Chair made a decision to return to TT from London to ensure that she was present for the Week’s activities. She then returned to London on Thursday 27 October for an operation. She would like to record her thanks to Annette des Iles who acted as Chair for the period that she was away in London. Activities for the week included:

**Saturday 22 October, 3.00 – 5.00 p.m:** The launch of JPCW was held at Living Water Community on Frederick Street, POS. The session was taped and aired on TCN. Speakers on the theme at the launch were: His Excellency, Archbishop Nicola Girasoli; Msgr Christian Pereira Vicar General; and CCSJ’s Chair. Michael Logie, Winner of CCSJ’s 2015 Spoken Word competition, delivered a dynamic Spoken Word poem. Dianne Wells, CCSJ Member, was the Moderator of the session.

**Monday 24 October, 7.00 – 9.00 p.m.:** Prayer Session and Testimonials to God’s mercy St. Charles RC Church, Tunapuna. Organised by Eternal Light Community

**Tuesday 25 October, 8:00 – 9:00 p.m.:** CCSJ’s Ask Why TV Programme. Theme: “Living as credible witnesses to God’s mercy.” Moderator: Dianne Wells Panellists: Fr. Robert Christo, Najette Abraham, and Mikkel Trestrail.

**Thursday 27 October, 8.00 – 9.00 p.m.:** VIGIL Theme: “Living as credible witnesses to God’s mercy by promoting life from conception to natural death” Organised by Emmanuel Community.

On Thurs 27 October, CCSJ’s Chair also delivered the **Feature Address at the annual Awards Ceremony at St. Joseph’s Convent, St. Joseph**, on the theme: *Our Celebration of Excellence must take us on the Pathways that lead to Mercy*. Her presentation can be accessed via CCSJ’s Website: [http://www.rcsocialjusticett.org/downloads/sjcpresentation_271016.pdf](http://www.rcsocialjusticett.org/downloads/sjcpresentation_271016.pdf)
CCSJ’s Chair thanks Acting Principal, Ms. Margot Guerrero, for her kind invitation and for the tokens that were given to her on behalf of the School.

The Photo above appears in SJC’s 2016-2017 Year Book (Convent Pulse). It was taken during CCSJ Chair’s address to students on the theme of their Annual Awards Ceremony. She was sharing the story of the Brownlee brothers. On 19 Sept 2016, BBC Sports reported on a story that had gone viral. CCSJ shares the story as a good example of compassion and empathy in action:

“Jonny Brownlee: Alistair helps brother over finish line in dramatic World Series finale

Exhausted Briton Jonny Brownlee needed to be helped over the finish line by brother Alistair in a dramatic end to the Triathlon World Series in Mexico. Leading with 700m left, Jonny, 26, began to weave over the road in hot and humid conditions in Cozumel.

Third-placed Alistair, 28, caught his brother, propping him up for the final couple of hundred metres before pushing him over the line in second place. They were overtaken by South African Henri Schoeman, the eventual winner.

Victory in Mexico would have given Jonny the world title, but second place left him just four points behind Mario Mola. The Spaniard was fifth on Sunday to top the overall standings.
Jonny, Olympic silver medallist at Rio 2016 and a bronze medallist at London 2012, collapsed to the ground the moment he crossed the finish line. He required treatment but later tweeted he was OK, with a photo of himself lying in a hospital bed on a drip.

Alistair said it was ‘a natural human reaction’ to come to the aid of his brother, adding: ‘I'd have done the same thing for anyone in that position…’ The ITU dismissed the Spanish Triathlon Federation's appeal to disqualify Jonny, because ‘athletes can receive help from another athlete’.

The New York Times covered the story (19 Sept 2016) and gave examples of other compassionate individuals in similar situations: “At the 1992 Olympics, Derek Redmond tore his hamstring during a 400-meter heat, but decided to try to hobble to the finish. His father raced out of the stands and helped him to the finish… In the women’s 5,000 meters at this year’s Olympics, the American Abbey D’Agostino and Nikki Hamblin of New Zealand collided and fell, then helped each other across the line.”

**Friday, 28 October, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.: Youth Event – 2nd Annual Spoken Word Competition on** the theme: “Living as credible witnesses to God’s mercy.” Schools and parishes: Ages 12 – 21 years. Organized by CCSJ and Catholic Youth Commission.

**7.13 Spoken Word Competition on 28 Oct.:**

Pope Francis said in Laudato Si: “Young people demand change.” They themselves can be change agents. CCSJ and the Youth Commission will continue
to create opportunities for youth to release their creativity and innovation. The Spoken Word poetry is a genre that allows young people to express their views on issues that concern them. We thank the 12 youths who entered this year’s competition. They were:

Adia Alyssa Alonzo, Kyle de Gannes, Keon Kayodé Cunningham, Mark Howell-Paul, Fidelis Iwueke, Isaiah John, Michael Logie, Maria Peters, Leeum Quan Kep, Carissa Rudulfo, Keno Samuel, Emmanuel Villafana.

Their ages range from 13 years to 21 years old. The event was aired live on TCN on Fri 28 October, as part of Justice, Peace and Community Week. The winners of the Spoken Word Competition were:

Emmanuel Villafana (1st prize) - St Phillips and St James Parish, Chaguanas.
Michael Logie’s (2nd place) - St. Charles, Tunapuna.
Carissa Rudulfo’s (3rd place) - Lady of Lourdes, Tacarigua.

Their poems were published in 3 issues of Catholic News. Here is the winning contribution from 20 year old **Emmanuel Villafana** from St Phillips and St James Parish, Chaguanas:

"None Greater" by Emmanuel Villafana
In a world where more bullets hit the ground than rain drops
and a mother's tears are not enough to stop her innocent boy from being shot
they tell me
by now our sons should be allowed to wear guns around their waists instead of belts
simply to protect themselves
and maybe it’s the fact that school bags are getting lighter
because books being replaced with lighters for students to light ah piece ah grass
and be merry
but something about all these lighters making my heart more heavy
because in a world where success is not defined by passing an exam
but by puff puff passing grams of grind grass to graduate at the high - est degree
they still tell me that we need not God's mercy
when the chains of technology gripping tighter than those from African slavery
imagine
the average teen punches in over 2,000 keys a day while locked into Wi-Fi bars but not once takes charge and hits Esc
it’s because the weight of peer pressure forces their fingers into submission
and they no longer have permission to escape such mind control
and we all know mind control starts at the top
I guess that's why we use the CAPS LOCK so much...
and it’s so much so that youths don't even know the difference between Cain and Abel
and they still unable to tell me how the Tower of Babel could never get into the heavens
but they could tell me about Jordans.
But they don't know that the day they choose Jordans over Jesus is the day they place him under their feet
and every step they take is one step closer to the heat weeping and gnashing of teeth
when golden streets await those who simply believe
so tell me
why must we take burns if He was already bruised for our inequity
and why must we be chastised into pieces when the chastisement of our piece is already upon Him
Maybe you just need to read up on Him
and you'll see that although your sins may be as tall bush on land
God's mercy is the wacker for the wacker-man the way He makes a way where there seems to be no way
and He said to say…
we red and we ready
because we overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimonies
so we red and we ready
to take the test out of Thessalonians and make testimonies,
to take the mess in our lives and make something like "messtimonies"
when we understand that He took holes in His hands so that we could be made holy
then it’s only fair that we give Him all the praise, honour and glory
so it doesn't matter if you're locked up behind WI FI bars
God's mercy will allow you to take charge and BE MOBILE out of every DIGI CELL
so you could be for Jesus
and He serious
so if you representing Christ just do it
and if you representing Him get to it!!!!

CCSJ and the Youth Commission remain committed to acknowledging/promoting the talent of our young people.

7.14 CCSJ’S Newsletters: (See all Newsletters at: http://rcsocialjusticett.org/2.0/parishlink). It should be noted that hard copies of these Newsletters are printed free of charge by a generous Catholic who owns a printery. The Newsletters are distributed widely to all parishes, schools, and Archdiocesan Departments. Each one can be accessed on CCSJ’s Website. Five Newsletters were produced in 2016:

January 2016 : In this issue CCSJ shared Pope Francis’ Message to celebrate the 49th World Day of Peace – 1 January 2016. The title was: “Overcome indifference and win peace.” It is divided into 3 parts:
1. Mary, the image of a Church which evangelizes because she is evangelized.
2. God’s covenant with humanity: a history of mercy.
3. The works of mercy.

February 2016 : CCSJ shared Pope Francis’ message for Lent 2016. The Theme was : “I desire mercy and not sacrifice (Matthew 9:13). The works of mercy on the road of the Jubilee”.

October 2016: CCSJ put together reflections as a useful resource for individuals and groups. It was entitled: *MOMENTS OF MERCY: CCSJ’s Reflections for Justice, Peace and Community Week during the Year of Mercy October 22 – October 29, 2016.*

December 2016: CCSJ shared Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter, *Misericordia et Misera* (*Mercy and Misery*), which was issued on Nov 21 when the Holy Father officially concluded the Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy which ran from December 8, 2015 to November 20, 2016. The title of his Apostolic Letter refers to the encounter between Jesus and the woman caught in adultery, from the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John.

7.15 CCSJ’s Take-a-Bite series: A few years ago CCSJ arranged for 5 DVDs to be produced on the following 5 themes:

- Overview of Social Justice: Fr Jason Gordon (now Archbishop-elect – Archdiocese of POS)
- Human Life and Dignity: Sr Diane Jagdeo (now deceased)
- Stewards of God’s Creation: Dr. John Agard
- Rights and Responsibilities: Leela Ramdeen
- Global Solidarity: Fr Malcolm Rodrigues.

The DVDs were copied and circulated in packs of 5 to parishes as an educational tool. Further copies of the DVDs are available from CCSJ’s Office.

7.16 Nine Leaflets focusing on various social justice themes have been distributed over the years and are available at CCSJ’s Office. They seek to raise awareness of the social doctrine of the Church.

7.17 Facebook and Website - (http://rcsocialjusticett.org ): CCSJ records its thanks to Jo Ann Smith who manages CCSJ’s Facebook page and keeps it up-to-date. CCSJ also owes an enormous debt of gratitude to Raymond Syms, who does an excellent job as the Commission’s Webmaster. Sadly the Website was hacked during 2016 and Raymond experienced much difficulty in dealing with this issue.
Some of the **items that are available on CCSJ’s Website** are as follows:

### 7.18 CCSJ Articles and Quotations in Catholic News

- **Media Releases** over the years. In 2016, as part of the Year of Mercy, CCSJ issued a Media release on 25 July calling for urgent action to create a just and merciful criminal justice system. (See: [http://rcsocialjusticett.org/2.0/2016/07/25/ccsj-calls-for-urgent-action-to-create-a-just-and-merciful-criminal-justice-system/](http://rcsocialjusticett.org/2.0/2016/07/25/ccsj-calls-for-urgent-action-to-create-a-just-and-merciful-criminal-justice-system/)).

There are also a number of useful CCSJ documents under the heading: **Special Focus** ([http://rcsocialjusticett.org/2.0/special-focus/](http://rcsocialjusticett.org/2.0/special-focus/)). They cover:

- Trafficking in Persons
- Health: Diabetes
- Environment: 3 documents produced by CCSJ on this issue
- Capital Punishment
- Restorative Justice and Parole
- Laventille Devotions 2008
- Family Life
- Women’s issues.

### 7.19 Weekly articles in Catholic News during 2016:

CCSJ continues to produce weekly articles in Catholic News – focusing on social justice issues. These can be accessed on CCSJ’s website. Inter alia, the articles seek to educate the Faithful about justice issues and to point them in the direction of documents from the Magisterium that will strengthen their Faith.

### 7.20 Social Justice Quotations published in Catholic News weekly

– to raise awareness of the richness of the social doctrine of the Church; to motivate readers to educate themselves on this issue; and to assist them to see and analyse from our Faith perspective, and then to act to promote Gospel values. CCSJ wishes to thank Mr. Rene Wihby who remains dedicated to the joyful task of submitting a brief quotation - weekly - on the social doctrine of the Church for publication in Catholic News. Here are some of the quotations that he submitted and that were published in Catholic News during 2016.

The following quotations were taken from Pope Francis’ World Day of Peace Message on 1 Jan 2016, entitled: **Overcome indifference and win Peace.**
“Indifference to our neighbour shows itself in different ways. Some people are well-informed; they listen to the radio, read the newspapers or watch television, but they do so mechanically and without engagement. They are vaguely aware of the tragedies afflicting humanity, but they have no sense of involvement or compassion (3)

In other cases, indifference shows itself in lack of concern for what is happening around us, especially if it does not touch us directly. Some people prefer not to ask questions or seek answers; they lead lives of comfort, deaf to the cry of those who suffer. Almost imperceptibly, we grow incapable of feeling compassion for others and for their problems (3)

On both the individual and communitarian levels, indifference to one’s neighbour, born of indifference to God, finds expression in disinterest and a lack of engagement, which only help to prolong situations of injustice and grave social imbalance (4)

Indifference and lack of commitment constitute a grave dereliction of the duty whereby each of us must work in accordance with our abilities and our role in society for the promotion of the common good, and in particular for peace, which is one of mankind’s most precious goods (4)

On the institutional level, indifference to others and to their dignity, their fundamental rights and their freedom, when it is part of a culture shaped by the pursuit of profit and hedonism, can foster and even justify actions and policies which ultimately represent threats to peace. Indifference can even lead to justifying deplorable economic policies which breed injustice, division and violence for the sake of ensuring the wellbeing of individuals or nations (4)

And the following quotations were taken from Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation: Evangeli Gaudium –The Joy of the Gospel.

“To believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone means realizing that he seeks to penetrate every human situation and all social bonds:” § 178

It is no longer possible to claim that religion should be restricted to the private sphere and that it exists only to prepare souls for heaven. We know that God wants his children to be happy in this world too, even though they are called to fulfillment in eternity, for he has created all things ‘for our enjoyment,’(1 Tim 6:17), the enjoyment of everyone.” §182
We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses.” §183

...the planet belongs to all mankind and is meant for all mankind: the mere fact that some people are born in places with fewer resources or less development does not justify the fact that they are living with less dignity.” §190

[Solidarity] presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few...Solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them.” §188-189

The more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others.” §190 “We are not simply talking about ensuring nourishment…for all people…but also their…education, access to health care, and above all employment.” §192

We should not be concerned simply about falling into doctrinal error, but about remaining faithful to this light-filled path of life and wisdom. For defenders of orthodoxy are sometimes accused of passivity, indulgence,…regarding the intolerable situations of injustice…” §194

We may not always be able to reflect adequately the beauty of the Gospel, but there is one sign which should never lack: the options for those who are least, those whom society discards.” §195

…loving attentiveness is the beginning of a true concern for the person of the poor which inspires me effectively to seek their good. This entails appreciating the poor in their goodness, in their experiences of life, in their culture, and in their ways of living the faith.” §199

...the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care...Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care.” §200 “

No one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas.” §201

7.21 VIRTUS Programme: Protecting children from child sexual abuse: (www.virtus.org)
This programme falls within the remit of The Archdiocese’s Family Life Commission (FLC). CCSJ’s Chair is a Facilitator on the training programme but has not been able to attend sessions during 2016 due to her lengthy medical treatment in TT and in the UK during 2016. Tricia Syms and the FLC Team take responsibility for organizing the training events and registering persons who have attended the programme. A number of other Facilitators have joined the team to speed up the training process.

Protecting God’s Children is one of several VIRTUS Programmes conceived, developed, and financed by the US-based National Catholic Risk Retention Group Inc. According to the VIRTUS website, Protecting God’s Children 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 programme turns every parish into a child-safe haven”.

The programme includes two awareness videos (“A Time to Protect God’s Children” and “A Plan to Protect God’s Children”), as well as group work with the aid of a handbook and workbook. The first AEC training workshop was hosted by the Georgetown diocese, Guyana, on October 5, 2010. CCSJ’s Chair attended on behalf of this Archdiocese. VIRTUS Training Officer Pat Neil (USA) was a Facilitator at that event. The programme is being implemented in Archdioceses and Dioceses of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC), following a commitment by the AEC Bishops “to do all in their power to protect the children of the region from sexual abuse”. (CN, 20 Mar 2011).

All adults working with children at Catholic institutions are required to participate in this sexual abuse awareness/prevention programme. Continuous education and training is offered through VIRTUS Online, a web-based training platform. Tricia is in regular contact with VIRTUS’s Trainer, Pat Neal, in America via Skype about issues relating to the VIRTUS programme - seeking answers to some of the problems we face in TT and accessing new material to enhance the Archdiocese’s programme. From 2011 to the end of 2016 training sessions have been organized for: Priests, Deacons, Administrators, Heads of Department in Secondary Schools, Staff/Religious, Catholic Institutions, Volunteers, Ecclesial Communities and Prayer Groups, Catholic Primary and Secondary Principals and staff in some schools, Catechists, Administrators/Staff of convalescent children’s homes, the
wider Catholic community in some parishes, First Communion, Confirmation and RCIA candidates in a number of Vicariates.

7.22 Pro-Life work and Mary Care Centre: Human life is sacred. It is worth recalling the statement contained in the Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes), no. 2. “All offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person…all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where men are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons: all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilization…and militate against the honour of the creator.”

And our Catechism tells us that: “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.” (2270) CCSJ continues 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 are the death penalty, abortion, human sexuality, assisted suicide, euthanasia and those listed above. CCSJ is committed to build a culture of life. There is an urgent need to promote the fundamental value of life from conception to natural death.

Inter alia, CCSJ’s education programmes and pastoral work throughout the Archdiocese aim to raise awareness of the need for each of us “to respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life.” — The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae), n.5. Promoting integral human development is the work of everyone. CCSJ continues to maintain vigilance to ensure that our laws against abortion remain intact.

The Commission expresses the views of the Catholic Church on prolife issues fearlessly in the market place. Where Draft Government Policies contain clauses/provisions that, from a Catholic perspective, will not help to promote a culture of life or to build the common good, CCSJ works with other faith communities, where necessary, to urge that these clauses and provisions are excised from the Draft Policies. In relation to the Mary Care Centre (MCC):

“The Church, in its commitment to promote and defend life in all circumstances and at all stages, and to promote integral human development, continues to offer
opportunities for young women to have their babies and to live in 29 dignity e.g. through the work of MCC, a sanctuary in Woodbrook for unmarried, pregnant, young women.

“MCC was founded in 1980 by the late Archbishop of Port of Spain, Reverend Gordon Anthony Pantin, in his concern for and commitment to the preservation of life. On 22 June 29, 2011, MCC was rededicated by the then-Archbishop, Edward Gilbert. The spiritual, physical and psychological needs of young women at MCC are nurtured towards self-development and growth. MCC is a non-profit organisation funded by donations received from the private and public sector.

“The Centre opens wide its door to young, pregnant, unmarried women from throughout the region regardless of their background or religious beliefs and tries to impart to them that the value of life is sacred. The following is a report from MCC for 2016:

“All staff at Mary Care Centre (MCC) continue to maintain the objectives of MCC which 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.”

The young women are usually brought to MCC through recommendations, by the Community Police and Social Workers.

Deborah John Belle, MCC’s Administrator, reports that during 2016, ten young women who all had their babies were housed at Mary Care Centre in 2016.

Some of these young ladies attended the Choices programme. MCC partners with Choices which is under the umbrella of the Child Welfare League. The girls are schooled there and are taught social and life skills. They are prepared for the school Leaving Examinations, taught Computer skills as well as Cookery, and Beauty Culture, which includes nails and Hairdressing.

At the Centre, the girls are supervised by two (2) Caregivers who work twenty four hours a day, seven days a week on a shift basis. The day starts and ends with prayer. At the Centre the young women are “rostered” to undertake chore. The girls work under the supervision of the Caregiver.
Readers will recall that in 2014, Mary Care received ‘The Medal for the Development of Women’ (gold) from the President of the Republic, His Excellency, Anthony Thomas Aquinas for “Outstanding Contribution to the Development of Women’s Rights and Issues in Trinidad and Tobago in the Sphere of Community Service.”

MCC also received the Faith Wiltshire Award. Mary Care continues to depend on donations from their Angels.

Funds have been depleted drastically with the downturn in the economy. Nevertheless, as Deborah says: “Mary Care continues to extend its services to all who come seeking their assistance.” MCC falls within the remit of CCSJ but is run on a daily basis by Deborah de Rosia, Eternal Light Community (ELC).

The Archdiocese contributes towards the running cost of MCC and is responsible for any Capital expenditure on the property which belongs to the Archdiocese. ELC raises funds to run the Centre. A number of individuals contribute on a monthly basis. They responded to ELC’s Advert in Catholic News for “Mary Care Angels”. Donations received by MCC include money, furniture such as cribs, baby-walkers and clothes. Due to the economic downturn, the level of donations has dropped but the Centre continues its fundraising efforts.

ELC has appointed a Board, led by Deborah, to ensure the effective running of the Centre. There are 7 Board members. They meet on a monthly basis. MCC keeps in touch with the young women’s families and discuss with them pertinent issues as they arise. The Centre ensures that the young women keep all their hospital appointments.

CCSJ wishes to affirm Deborah and her team at MCC for their dedication and commitment to this important area of pro-life work. The MCC Team faces many challenges but do so joyfully to build God’s Kingdom here on Earth.

7.23 CCSJ’s Calendar for 2017 was printed and circulated before the New Year. It focused on the theme: Be Merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:36). The script read: “Be a witness of mercy. Let the Church always be a place of mercy and hope, where everyone is welcomed, loved and forgiven…It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live this Year in the light of the Lord’s words: ‘Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.’

We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity and peace. Our Salvation depends on it…The Church is called above all to
be a credible witness to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Pope Francis).

7.24 Some examples of collaboration with others, including Archdiocesan Departments, Parishes, Schools, Government Ministries, NGOs, CBOs, FBOs, regional and international organizations, the Media etc.:

As the saying goes, there is strength in unity. CCSJ participates in/responds to national consultations related to social issues in an effort to share Catholic Social Teaching and to ensure that these morals and principles are included in national policy – for example, on Restorative Justice, Local Government and so on. CCSJ takes the opportunity to work collaboratively with others, both within the Archdiocese, and in the wider community e.g.

a. On 1 Feb CCSJ’s Chair met with Andy Johnson to discuss certain social justice issues. He was gathering information to inform the series of articles that he was writing for publication in TT’s Express Newspaper. Issues discussed included: poverty and social exclusion, homelessness, crime and violence, the criminal justice system, and the death penalty.

b. On 15 Feb, CCSJ’s Chair attended the first of 3 one-day consultation on education – held at the Teaching and Learning Complex, St Augustine Campus, UWI. Information on the consultation read as follows:

“The National Consultation on Education will provide opportunities for individuals and stakeholder groups from every geographic area and echelon of society of Trinidad and Tobago to share their concerns and recommendations for the improvement of the education system. The theme of the NCE is “Working together to deliver quality education.” Several topics will be discussed at the consultation events including school indiscipline, the Education Act and the Concordat of 1960, the National Scholarship Programme, GATE and education service delivery. The NCE is intended to give members of the public the opportunity to contribute to T&T’s educational agenda and will comprise the following:

- 3 one-day consultation events, 2 in Trinidad and one in Tobago;
- Call-in radio sessions; and
- Mixed mode surveys for schools and members of the public.
- Mixed mode surveys will be administered to the general public and schools from Mon Jan 25th to Feb 5th using street surveys and online surveys.”
The Consultation was opened by Ag. PM, Hon Colm Imbert. Key participants were: Hon Min. Anthony Garcia, Min. of Education; Dr the Hon Lovell Francis, Min of State in the MoE; Ms Zena Ramatali, NPTA President; and Mr Devanand Sinanan, TTUTA President.

Archbishop Joseph Harris was asked to speak during the opening session. CCSJ’s Chair, His Grace, Sharon Mangroo and Mennen Walker-Briggs (CEBM) attended the Break-out session on the Concordat and the Education Act. In the afternoon, CCSJ’s Chair attended the session on Indiscipline in School – a major social justice issue.

c. On Wed 24 February, CCSJ’s Chair met with Prof. Daniela Schneider and her colleague from the Geography Dept., University of Augsburg, Germany, together with 25 of the students from this Department. They were on a field trip to TT. Apparently, in preparation for their trip, they had visited CCSJ’s website and wrote to CCSJ’s Chair asking for an appointment to meet with her to discuss social justice issues. At the meeting CCSJ’s Chair was asked to share information about social justice issues facing TT and about the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. Since the students had had an opportunity to visit a number of places in TT before their meeting with CCJS’s Chair, they were eager to engage in a conversation about things that they had observed and about ways in which TT was addressing certain social ills in society.

d. On Thurs 25 February, CCSJ’s Chair joined Deacon Derek Walcott on Breakfast with the Deacons to discuss issues relating to the Death Penalty and to promote CCSJ’s Seminar on this issue.

e. On Mon 29 February CCSJ’s Chair was a guest on CNMG TV, Channel 6, to discuss issues relating to the Seminar on the Death Penalty and to raise awareness of the Church’s position on the Death Penalty.

f. On Monday 25 April, CCSJ’s Chair attended a consultation meeting organised by the Delegation of the European Union to TT, entitled: Human Rights and democracy Country Strategy 2016 – 2020: Civil Society Consultation Meeting. This was just one of the consultation sessions planned as part of the process of revising the TT HRD Country Strategy which aims at providing a political and operational analysis of human rights and democracy concerns at a local level and defining the strategic priorities for EU action in TT. More than 20 Civil Society organisations in TT attended the meeting. CCSJ’s Chair was able to speak about human rights issues from a Catholic perspective. It was noted that some of the
organisations present embrace views and opinions that are contrary to the teaching of the Catholic Church.

g. On 27 April CCSJ’s Chair was interviewed on Radio 99.5 by Jessie-May Ventour and Edison Carr about Archbishop Harris’ Petition. In April 2016, His Grace led a petition seeking to “free” remand prisoners who have been behind bars longer than the maximum prison term they would have gotten if they had been found guilty of their crimes. The Guardian report on April 25 helps to contextualize this social justice issue:

“The petition which has been circulated to priests and parish administrators across the country recently aims to attract sufficient signatures to trigger mercy for hundreds of prisoners, particularly those charged with minor offences. A remand prisoner is one who has been charged with an offence but is awaiting trial. Many of them are on bail but are unable to meet the requirements to obtain bail.

This year has been declared the ‘Jubilee Year of Mercy’ by Pope Francis and it is in this context that Harris is seeking Presidential Pardon for some incarcerated on remand. In a letter sent to priests and parish administrators dated April 7, Harris informed his clergy that he had written to the government with the request and asked that the priests read a letter which he sent to the congregation to “sensitise their parishioners about this cause.” He has also asked that parishioners sign forms “endorsing this petition and return them to Archbishop’s House between Pentecost and Corpus Christi.” That is between May 15 and May 26.

The letter was read out in some Catholic churches last weekend and parishioners were asked to sign the petition as they were leaving. But the response was ‘mixed.’ Some parishioners said they needed time to ‘think about what was being asked of them.’ But many others were in support of the initiative, expressing the view that it was only right that we be ‘merciful’ to those in need of it.

…the letter from Harris came out of a meeting of the clergy at which he is said to have expressed concern that there are several young men and women who have been in prison for years, in some instances more than a decade awaiting their matters being heard, and when their matters are heard, he said, some of them may be sentenced to an additional five years in prison.
Harris argues that by ‘no fault of their own’ these young men and women would have already spent significantly more time than the sentence imposed, and in this year of mercy he believes that having already served their time once the sentence is passed they should be allowed to go free...the clergy found the initiative to get parishioners to sign the petition as ‘a favourable thing to do,’ since it was felt it ‘concretised the year of mercy’ in this jurisdiction.

It was felt that given the slow pace of criminal justice in the country it was ‘inhumane’ for people who had committed minor crimes to be in prison waiting more than ten years to get a trial.

Harris said the Catholic Church is a ‘Corporate citizen in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago’ and desires a ‘national reconciliation among our people,’ and in this year of Mercy it desires from the Lord for our country ‘a national proclamation of mercy.’

Harris is asking the authorities that a ‘review be undertaken of those who are serving prison sentences and who are found to be worthy of pardon and mercy, be granted their liberty,’ and that ‘those charged for minor offences and have been held in remand for a long time, some of whom if and when sentenced would have already served that time in remand, that similar consideration of mercy may be afforded them.’

Former attorney general Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj said the country is on the ‘verge of having a broken criminal justice system.’

Maharaj said it was unacceptable that people are in prison charged for bailable offences but are unable to get bail because they come from ‘families who live below the poverty line and cannot afford it. That is unacceptable,’ he said. He said that is tantamount to ‘them pleading guilty and serving time and when their matter is tried and they are sentenced they have to serve time again, that is an injustice.’

**AG: Welcome initiative**

Contacted for comment Attorney General Faris Al-Rawi told the GML Enterprise Desk that the government ‘welcomes the support of his Grace in this very critical venture and we welcome his concern.’

The AG said he had raised similar concerns at the recent consultation on the prison system in T&T. At that consultation the AG had expressed concern that
it costs the state almost $50 m a month to maintain the 2,235 prisoners in
remand yard.

He questioned then ‘how is a poor man with no land able to get bail? Does he
stay in jail for a longer period of time for obscene language or maintenance,
or is it time we accept cash deposits?’

He said there are over 2,000 prisoners on remand yard and there is need to
disaggregate between crime and sentences, the issue of clearing the backlog of
cases and those languishing in the prison system ‘we intend to deal with the
issue head on.’ Several factors would, however, have to be taken into account
he said including a thorough analysis ‘and recommendation by the Director of
Public Prosecutions in appropriate cases where pardon may apply.’

Obviously he said it will not apply to those charged with serious crimes and
murder. For those whom it may apply, he said, process must be followed this
involves ‘the Mercy Committee, and recommendations from the DPP. But
ultimately he said ‘His Grace is in sync with the government on the issue.’

**Breakdown of prisoners**

There are currently 2,235 people on remand yard that is just over 60 per cent
of the prison population which currently stands at over 3,400.

A breakdown of remand yard prisoners indicate that 42 per cent of the
prisoners are on murder charges, that calculates to 939, 11 per cent or 246
persons are on drug possession charges, 7 per cent or 156 people have been
charged with sexual offences and 12 per cent or 268 people have been charged
for lesser offences including child maintenance and traffic offences, coming
to a total of 1,609 prisoners.

Some 28 per cent of remand yard prisoners or 625 were unaccounted for in the
statistics. Al Rawi said many of these inmates have been in prison for over 10
years in some cases 11 and 15 years waiting for their matters to be heard.

He said it costs $20,000 to $25,000 a month to maintain someone who may
not have been able to pay a $12,000 fine, “it’s like bouncing a rubber ball off
a concrete block” he said. In addition he said the state spends $80 million
dollars a year moving remand yard prisoners to and from courts across T&T.

The estimated cost includes having a prosecutor assigned to each case, a
police officer, health costs and others. If the 12 per cent on lesser offences
were to benefit from the request by the Catholic Church that would be roughly 270 prisoners, there would be a saving of $6.75 million per month.

Al Rawi had told the national consultation on prison reform that ‘every single dollar matters in our country, there must be value for money considerations.’

He said he was ‘pleased that someone other than the Government is looking at this way forward. This is not impossible to achieve, I am pleased his Grace is thinking the same way we are.’”

On April 29, the Guardian shared the direct link to the petition site and stated: “The Roman Catholic Church wants the wider national community to have its say on the call by Archbishop Joseph Harris for provisions to be made by the Government to pardon deserving prisoners, especially those incarcerated and awaiting trial for periods of time longer than what they would have served if found guilty.

The petition initially sent out to Roman Catholic churches across the country is now available online to the wider community, both Catholic and non-Catholic…the archbishop has agreed to an online option which would allow anyone wanting to sign the petition to do so.

There is an option on the link for people to say whether they want their names to appear publicly or not. Harris is hoping that ‘as many people as possible will sign this petition so that the powers that be may hear the desire of the people to make this land, our home, a more merciful place.’

Meantime, relatives of prisoners incarcerated for minor crimes say they fully support the archbishop’s call which can give ‘new hope to the poor justice system’…”

***Sadly, the year ended with no concrete action taken by the Authorities to embrace this Petition. Although change may take time, as Catholics, we simply have to continue raising our voices and working in the Lord’s Vineyard. The initiative sparked a national debate on the issue and it is hoped that in the near future action will be taken by those in Authority to address this gross injustice.

h. On Thurs 30 June (6pm to 8pm), CCSJ’s Chair attended a Panel Discussion at UWI on the theme: Remand Justice – God’s Law. The Panellists included Archbishop Joseph Harris; Roger Gaspard, DPP; Alloy Youk See, Retired Snr. Prison Officer, Social Worker and Mediator; Crystal Charles, President of the
Student Law Society at UWI; Prof Rose-Marie Belle Antoine – Dean or the faculty of Law and Moderator of the session. CCSJ’s Chair was able to contribute from the “floor” during the Q&A session.

i. On TT’s Republic Day (24 Sept. from 1pm to 10 pm), CCSJ had a booth to promote CCSJ’s Work/CST at Mercy Village 2016. This was an Archdiocesan event. It was held at Jean Pierre Complex, Woodbrook. See 6.1 above.

7.25 CCSJ maintains personal contact with individuals/groups. For example, many persons who come to Archbishop’s House for assistance are seen by CCSJ’s Chair or Administrative Assistant(s). As well as giving a small sum of money to those in need, relevant advice is also given and, where necessary, individuals are pointed in the right direction to seek further assistance.

7.26 CCSJ’s links with Trinidad and Tobago Reintegration Foundation/Anthony Pantin Reintegration Centre (TTRF/APRC)

As a result of Clive’s passing, CCSJ Members agreed to seek to “speed up” the process of executing the lease (for a peppercorn rent) of CCSJ’s land at San Raphael to SVP so that SVP could continue running the Rehabilitation of the Centre for former inmates. However, eventually Members agreed to transfer the land by Deed of Gift to SVP instead. SVP made a decision not to continue running the Centre but to use the land to plant food to supply its many Charitable facilities.

It is to be noted that although Stephen Belgrave had been running the Centre at San Raphael, he had no funds to do so and in the end there were only about 2 persons at the Centre. Since SVP decided not to continue supporting the Centre financially, and since the number of persons accessing it had dwindled over the years, it seemed inevitable that SVP would seek to use it for another purpose. CCSJ’s Chair met with Mr Belgrave to convey this information to him. TTRF/APRC is a Company but its Directors have not met for a few years. Since Clive Belgrave, its Chair, died, CCSJ is unaware of the status of the Company.

The Deed of Gift was executed and signed by CCSJ’s Chair, and CCSJ’s Acting Deputy-Chair in mid-2017. As at Nov 7th 2017, CCSJ awaits a copy of the Deed stamped by the Ministry of Legal Affairs. Since SVP has charitable status, there is no need for Stamp Duty to be paid. On receipt of this document, CCSJ will take
action to wind up as a Limited Liability Company and remain a Department of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain.

8.0 SOME CHALLENGES:
Given the fact that CCSJ no longer has Parish Link Coordinators in post, and only a few parishes have social justice teams in place, it is often difficult to mobilise support at parish level. CCSJ members seek to promote the Commission’s goals in their respective parishes and take advantage of invitations to work in other parishes, schools, and with other Departments and organisations. The Church’s Social Teaching should be an integral part of the work of everyone in the Archdiocese since it is integral to the Catholic Faith.

Given the lack of dedicated personnel on the ground, and given the Chair’s other commitment at the Equal Opportunity Tribunal and on the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour, it is proving difficult to engage in the kind of fund-raising events that the Commission organised in the past e.g. Annual Christmas Dinners.

As stated earlier, however, CCSJ receives funding “in kind” from a number of individuals and their contributions are substantial. CCSJ records its thanks to all those who give so generously their time, talent and treasure freely to enable the Commission/the Church to build God’s Kingdom here on earth.

The many social ills in TT/the world remain a concern to CCSJ. CCSJ members will continue to raise awareness of the social doctrine of the Church, in the hope that one day more ears will hear, more eyes will see, more voices will speak out and more people will take action to promote justice.

It is hoped that with limited resources, Departments within the Archdiocese will strive to optimize the use of our resources by finding more creative ways of working together.

9.0 CONCLUSION

CCSJ continues to play its part in sharing what some believe to be the Church's “best kept secret” - Catholic Social Teaching. As the US Bishops stated in their 1998 document - Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions: “…many Catholics do not adequately understand that the social
teaching of the Church is an essential part of Catholic faith. This poses a serious challenge for all Catholics, since it weakens our capacity to be a Church that is true to the demands of the Gospel. We need to do more to share the social mission and message of our Church...Because this commitment to social justice is at the heart of who we are and what we believe, it must be shared more effectively...

“The values of the Church's social teaching must not be treated as tangential or optional. They must be a core part of teaching and formation. Without our social teaching, schools, catechetical programs, and other formation programs would be offering an incomplete presentation of our Catholic tradition. This would fall short of our mission and would be a serious loss for those in our educational and catechetical programs...

“The Church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. It offers moral principles and coherent values that are badly needed in our time. In this time of widespread violence and diminished respect for human life and dignity in our country and around the world, the Gospel of life and the biblical call to justice need to be proclaimed and shared with new clarity, urgency, and energy.

“The Scriptures say, "Without a vision the people perish" (Prv 29:18). As Catholics, we have an inspiring vision in our social teaching. In a world that hungers for a sense of meaning and moral direction, this teaching offers ethical criteria for action. In a society of rapid change and often confused moral values, this teaching offers consistent moral guidance for the future... The test for our Church is not simply have we ‘kept the faith,’ but have we shared the faith.”

Being a Christian involves more than prayer. We are called to walk with the “two feet of Christian service.” Works of mercy/charity and works of social action. Remember the words of Pope Pius XI stated in Divini Redemptoris (1937):

“Charity will never be true charity unless it takes justice into account...Let no one attempt with small gifts of charity to exempt themselves from the great duties imposed by justice.”

Although there is a relationship between charity and justice they are not the same. Working for justice involves changing systems, structures, institutions and public policies that are at the root cause of injustices such as poverty and social exclusion. It is important to understand the interplay and differences between the two
approaches. Social ministry, in the Catholic tradition, is a "both/and" proposition. While we meet immediate needs today, we work for long-term changes that will create a more just tomorrow – for all.

The Commission’s challenge is to raise awareness of the meaning of true Discipleship/servant leadership in today's world. Christ’s mandate is clearly outlined in Luke 4:18: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.”

The enormity of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us should send us from the images of Christ crucified on Calvary to the images of Christ crucified on the highways and byways of our country and in our world. It is because of the cross that we must continue to work tirelessly for social justice.

We must all be committed to do what Pope St. John Paul II asked and be “communicators of hope.” CCSJ members agree with Thomas Massaro who said in his book: Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action,

“Catholic Social Teaching can serve as a unifying force, a banner under which believers may rally…”

It is our sincere hope that the Faithful will rally under this banner. And as we on CCSJ continue to promote the social mission of our Church, let us spread the Good News with credibility and integrity as we act on the words in Micah 6:8:
Universal destination of goods

“The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the coat hanging unused in your closet belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the one who has no shoes; the money which you hoard up belongs to the poor. You do wrong to everyone you could help, but fail to help.”

Saint Basil the Great

“The principle of the universal destination of goods is an invitation to develop an economic vision inspired by moral values that permit people not to lose sight of the origin or purpose of these goods, so as to bring about a world of fairness and solidarity, in which the creation of wealth can take on a positive function…

“The universal destination of goods requires a common effort to obtain for every person and for all peoples the conditions necessary for integral development, so that everyone can contribute to making a more humane world…

“The principle of the universal destination of goods requires that the poor, the marginalized and in all cases those whose living conditions interfere with their proper growth should be the focus of particular concern. To this end, the preferential option for the poor should be reaffirmed in all its force” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 174, 175. 182).
Catholic Social Teaching - Key Principles

Sanctity of life & the Dignity of the Human Person

Common Good

Fundamental Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

Family & Community

Participation in the economic, political, social and cultural life of society.

Rights and Responsibilities

Economic Justice

Environmental Stewardship – Care for God’s Creation

Role of Government & Subsidiarity

Global Solidarity & Development

Social Justice, Commutative Justice & Distributive Justice

Dignity of work and the Rights of Workers

Promotion of Peace and Disarmament

Universal Destination of Goods

To find out more about Catholic Social Teaching, an essential element of our faith, contact: The Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ)
Office: Leela Ramdeen 299 8945 or Lorna Chee Wah/ Cheryl Wallace 622 6680