

My brothers and sisters in Christ, as you know, His Grace, Archbishop Jason Gordon, has established an Archdiocesan Ministry – a *Ministry for Migrants and Refugees*. Living Water Community has been working in this area for more than 29 years and is the implementing partner of the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner (UNHCR).

We have formed a small Team in the Archdiocese. It includes: Rhonda Maingot, founder of LWC; Rochelle Nakhid, Coordinator of LWC's Migrants and Refugees Ministry – LWC; Fr Simon Peter, who has theological and practical knowledge in this area as a result of his work in Rome, and me.

The Archdiocesan Ministry falls within the remit of CCSJ. But the *Archdiocesan Ministry for Migrants and Refugees* cannot achieve our goals alone, we need all of you on board, if we are to sow the seeds of Peace.

We will also be working closely with the Society of St Vincent de Paul. SVP already exists in every parish, so we will build on their good work.

You know, we sing so many wonderful **hymns** that should remind us of the reason why we should reach out to our brothers and sisters in need – not only those who are citizens here, but also those who have come here as migrants and refugees.

Remember the hymn: **My God is awesome?** The words should touch our hearts. Here are some of them: *“My God is awesome, saviour of the whole world; his grace is why I am living. He is mighty, holy, deliverer, protector, he reigns.”*

Yes he died, rose again and he reigns not only for us, but for **everyone**.

Each migrant and refugee is made in **His image and likeness** with an **inherent, inviolable dignity** which Pope Francis and Archbishop Jason ask us to promote.

In TT there are Migrants and Refugees from **over 20 countries**, including *Cuba, Venezuela, Syria, Bangladesh, Jamaica, Colombia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Congo, Mali, Sudan and Uganda*. There are many **children** among the men and women seeking refuge here from these and other countries.

In **Pope Francis' Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees** in January 2018 – entitled: *Migrants and Refugees: men and women in search of peace*, he asks us to develop a **strategy** combining **4 actions** to support Migrants and Refugees: *welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating*.

He reminds us of the words of St Paul who said in **Ephesians 2:19**: “*You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people.*”

The **earth**, says Pope Francis, is **our common home** and we are a **universal family**. Together, we are called to build the **common good**, that is, to create conditions in which each person can realise his or her potential.

We cannot turn our eyes away from the **65.3 million** persons in our world who have been **displaced** from their homes and the **22.5m refugees** who, as Pope Francis says, seek peace. He reminds us that Migrants and Refugees are **not pawns on the chessboard of humanity**, and urges us to have respect for their lives and dignity.

In **Nov 2000**, TT acceded to the *1951 Convention relating to the status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol*. These are the **2 main international legal instruments** that lay down **principles** which the 148 States that have acceded to them, including TT, will follow. The Convention defines who is a refugee and outlines the basic rights which States should afford to refugees.

The Convention defines a refugee as **a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country or return there because there is a fear of persecution.**

The protection of refugees has many aspects. These include safety from being returned to the dangers they have fled – non-refoulement; access to asylum procedures that are fair and efficient; and measures to ensure that their basic human rights are respected to allow them to live in dignity and safety while helping them to find a longer-term solution.

Sadly, although TT has signed on to the Convention and Protocol, these have not been incorporated into domestic legislation, although draft legislation is being prepared. In **June 2014 Cabinet adopted a National Policy** to address Refugee and Asylum Matters in TT. The Policy makes some sound recommendations, but there is a need for legislation to support such a Policy. In the meantime, LWC is working closely with organisations such as UNHCR and UNICEF to support those in need.

The Policy outlines rights that refugees are entitled to: **a permit** authorising their stay in the country, the right to **work, identity papers, travel documents, public**

assistance (if unable to work and in need), **medical care, freedom of movement, family reunification, educational opportunities and recreational activities, counselling** for trauma or other psychological issues, and **the right not to be expelled from the country** (unless the refugee poses a threat to national security or to public order). It envisages a **three-phased approach** to enabling the government to assume responsibility for refugee protection and take over **refugee status determination (RSD)**.

Let us embrace Archbishop Jason's initiative. He has asked each parish to set up a Ministry for Migrants and Refugees and we on the Archdiocesan Team will be working with members of the Clergy to support the establishment of your parish Ministry in this important area. Among other things, we will produce **para-liturgy**, as **prayer and action** must go together; and **guidelines and other resources** that parishes can use as you seek to implement work in this Ministry.

You and I, my brothers and sisters, are the **hands and feet of the Lord**; we are **His instruments** who must build His Kingdom of *justice, peace, truth, love and freedom* here on earth. We are the ones who must be **advocates for justice**; to work to ensure that, as the prophet **Amos** said (5:24), **justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.**

St Ambrose gives us an example of what justice looks like when he said that if you have **2 shirts in your cupboard**, one belongs to the person who needs it.

It reminds me of a **story my brother told me.** He was going to a Conference in London and as he arrived at Victoria Station in London and was walking to the Conference Center, he was approached by someone who was begging near the station. He stopped to talk to him and discovered that he was a refugee from Sudan. He was shivering. It was winter and he had on open sandals.

My brother gave him the extra pair of shoes and socks he had in his suitcase. On his way back to the station at the end of the Conference, he saw the young man again, but noticed that he did not have on the shoes. When he asked him what had happened to the shoes, the young man said that he was so hungry that he sold the shoes to get money to buy food. He stood there in his socks. It was **Gandhi** who said: **“To a hungry man, a piece of bread is the face of God.”**

So, my brothers and sisters, remember, we are people of the **Beatitudes**; we are a **Eucharistic** people. This reality should propel us to act; let us share what we have – as everything we have is gift from God; let us become advocates for migrants

and refugees who bring with them skills, courage, resilience and other cultural treasures, as Pope Francis says.

Pope Francis asks us to avoid the globalization of indifference. We cannot walk on the other side like some of those in the parable of **the Good Samaritan**. The **greatest commandment** that God gave us is to love God, and to love our neighbour as He loves us. And our neighbour is anyone in need. We encounter Christ in our neighbour; and in the world's migrants and refugees, we see the face of the Refugee Jesus.

So let us **banish fear** from our hearts and **welcome** migrants and refugees with joy and generosity; let us hear their **cry**; **stand in solidarity with them** and **respond** to their many needs, demonstrating that we are **true disciples** of the living God. **Amen.**