

Catechists: Forming God's Caribbean People a Reflection on Revitalizing Catholic Culture and Identity.

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Good morning brothers and sisters in Christ. It is with great pleasure that I share with you today my thoughts on this important theme. Let's place this pastoral priority within the Mission of our Archdiocese. If we are forming God's Caribbean People, we must have a plan; a mission and vision of the kind of person that we wish to nurture; the kind of society that we wish to build.

As you know, the mission statement that was adopted after the last sitting of Synod in Jan/Feb 2009 (see previous sittings in 2003 and 2005), reads as follows:

We are the people of God in Trinidad and Tobago, building the civilization of love - reconciliation with God, neighbour, creation and self, through -

The New Evangelization,

Revitalizing Catholic Culture and Identity, and

Regenerating the Moral and Spiritual Values of our Society.

Having spent 1 ½ years focusing on the first pastoral priority (PP) – The New Evangelisation: Catholic Family Become What You Are the Archdiocese launched the 2nd PP on Corpus Christi (June 23, 2011) - Revitalising Catholic Culture and Identity.

The first PP was meant to run from December 8, 2009 (Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception) to December 7, 2010. It was extended to May 31, 2011 to allow more time for parishes, schools and Church departments to pursue the initiative. The 2nd PP is expected to run until Dec 2012.

As we were reminded in Catholic News on 29 May, 2011, "it is important to note that the new stage should not mean the end of reflection on the first initiative.

"Each priority is meant to operate in concert with the others and remain active even though the spotlight shifts from one to the other. In like manner, it is important to recall that reflection on: Called to Be Catholic", the theme of the first post-Synod phase, from January to December 2009, is meant to be ongoing during the present phase that embraces the three pastoral initiatives.

“The influence of “Called To Be Catholic” ought to be readily seen and experienced in the “New Evangelisation: Catholic Family Become What You Are” as in “Revitalising Catholic Culture and Identity” and in the third initiative, “Regenerating the Moral and Spiritual Values of our Society”.

“In the end, the entire process of Synod implementation falls easily under the banner of New Evangelisation – the first initiative. It is the lens through which all Synod activity can best be seen.

“In his 1990 encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II says the New Evangelisation is what is needed “in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptised have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel” (RM 33).

“The call to New Evangelisation does not diminish the need for taking the Gospel to those who have never heard it or for continuing “pastoral care of the faithful”, but it recognises the importance of confronting the phenomenon, in today’s secularised cultures, of the abandonment of the truth of Christ’s Gospel.”

We were asked to say the following prayer as we seek to implement the 2nd PP:

PRAYER

Almighty God, You have called us to be Your Church here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Be with us in the power of Your Spirit as we move forward together, striving to build the Civilisation of Love.

Send forth Your light and Your truth – let these be our guide.

Protect us from all that may lead us astray.

Keep us united in constant prayer with Mary, our mother, so that together we may make Your Church alive and present in our land.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

We are also asked to engage in a conversation about this 2nd PP “in families, regular Church groups such as choir, Legion of Mary, catechetical teams, in offices or wherever groups of Catholics meet.”

Having placed today’s theme within this wider Archdiocesan context, let’s examine aspects of the theme. We are reflecting on “Forming God’s Caribbean people”.

What is formation?

You will remember that *Jesus sent his disciples to proclaim the Good News to the whole world: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:19,20). In Jn 20:21 we read: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” See also: Mark 16:15 and Luke 24:47.*

Through our baptism, we have all joined the family of God; we are one body in Christ, called to love him, and to love our neighbour; called to play our part in promoting the mission of our Church – to proclaim the Gospel; to transform the world so that it reflects Gospel values, thus building God’s Kingdom of justice, peace, truth, love, freedom and forgiveness. We are Catholics striving to know, love and serve our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Most of us will have been baptized as babies or in our early childhood. Our Baptism should lead us to be true witnesses to Christ – but we have to work at it. Pope John XXIII said in his encyclical, *Peace on Earth*, God imprinted in our hearts and minds, even before we were born, a social order, a way in which we should live as children of God, the Catholic community needs to nurture this. None of us is a saint. We are all striving to be saints – it’s a lifelong journey – that is why we need ongoing formation.

In a Statement on Religious Education in Catholic Schools entitled: *Growing in Faith* - issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (5 May 2000), we read:

“The Gospel of Jesus Christ invites all who follow its teaching to the fullness of life. Discipleship in the Gospel is life-long, a journey of faith coming to complete fulfilment only in the presence of God in heaven. The entire life of the disciple is marked by learning and growth. Life-long growth in faith is to be a characteristic of Catholic life. An understanding of the **educative task** of the Church must start from this perspective and increasingly opportunities for life-long learning need to be developed for every member of the Church.

“The first educators in the faith are parents. It is they, above all others, who establish in their children the first sensitivity and responsiveness to the presence of God, to the practice of prayer and to the patterns of life in the community of faith, the parish. By their example in the home and in their participation in the Mass and other sacraments, the foundations of life-long faith and discipleship in their children are laid down.”

Sadly, many of our children – including some in Catholic homes, are in dysfunctional families and have no proper guidance or support. We need to be aware of this reality and devise strategies to address their needs.

Archbishop Gilbert said in his homily (read by Coadjutor Archbishop Joe Harris) at the ordination of Bishop Jason Gordon: “We are a wounded community moving through history.” This powerful statement reminds us of our human frailty. Yes, we will fall as we journey through life. But if we engage in ongoing formation, we will seek the sacrament of reconciliation and restore our relationship with God and with our neighbour.

Catholic Faith formation involves forming the faithful to be true followers of Christ, to be faithful disciples. Through baptism Jesus called us to “Come, follow me!” However, if we are not formed in our faith, we will not acquire the knowledge, skills and ability we need to follow him. I repeat - **formation is a lifelong process**. Too often, after First Communion and Confirmation, many Catholics believe that that “they reach” and don’t need any further formation. Indeed, after Baptism, many children are not nurtured in their faith either in their homes or by Catholics in the wider community. 60% of our Catholic children attend schools that are not Catholic. Our Archdiocesan programme must be inclusive - from womb to tomb. If we are to leave no one behind, we need ongoing faith formation at all ages.

Lack of formation will leave the faithful open to the vagaries of our times. Unless the faithful is aware of the Church’s teaching on e.g. euthanasia, abortion, stem cell research, assisted suicide, pornography etc, our consciences may not be properly formed and our decision-making may be adversely affected.

Conscience formation, formation in Catholic morals and values, a true understanding of what it means to be Catholic in today’s world, are all critical if we are to “Follow” Jesus as his disciples. We need ongoing formation so that we don’t forget why we are Catholics; what makes us Catholics; and how our faith differs from that of other Christians.

Part of formation involves opening our hearts and minds to what the Holy Spirit is telling us about our own **vocation**. You may have read in my article in the Catholic News (Sept 16), reference to the informative essay by Prof William E May entitled: “The Vocation of a Catholic

Teacher/Scholar (www.christendom-awake.org/pages/may/teachers.htm). He offers his reflections on the various kinds of vocations to which we are called. I will seek to summarise the 19 pages. Firstly, he focusses on the universal call to holiness, which is the vocation that is common to all Christians: our baptismal commitment to holiness as members of Christ's body.

To fulfil this vocation, we must strive to make every choice we make every day of our lives conform to our baptismal commitment to follow Christ. He says: "Our vocation to be holy...means fundamentally that we are to become what we already are: God's faithful children, members of the divine family, alive with God's own life, willing to do only what is pleasing to the Father.

"In carrying out our common vocation to holiness, Christians are called to more specific vocations. These include the states of life to which individual Christians are summoned" e.g. priesthood, religious life, marriage, single life. St Josemaría Escrivá (founder of Opus Dei), said: "we fulfil our vocation to be holy by sanctifying our work, sanctifying ourselves in our work, and sanctifying others through our work."

"Thus a more specific vocation of a Christian incorporates not only the state of life to which he or she is called...but also the work one freely undertakes to be of service to God and neighbour...In addition, God speaks personally to each and every Christian...calling him or her to a unique personal vocation, inviting him or her to play a unique and indispensable role in carrying out His redemptive work."

We must each find our way of serving our communities. Prof May says: "One of our important tasks in answering God's call to holiness is to discern our personal vocation and fulfil it."

I urge you to open your hearts to your individual call to discipleship.

Why is formation fundamental to the spiritual life?

Focus on the importance of systematic formation

Formation involves more than simply imparting information. It includes forming the whole person: spiritual, moral, physical, intellectual, cultural, social etc. – integral human development (Pope Benedict XVI *Charity in Truth*) – the development of all dimensions of a person and of each person – no one should be left behind. And remember, as Pope Benedict XVI said in *Charity in Truth*: "*Man does not develop through his own powers...*" It is by God's grace that we develop. So we must pray for God's grace constantly. Remember the words in John 15:5 – "Without me you can do nothing." We need God's grace every moment of our lives.

Spiritual formation is just one aspect of integral human development. It is interesting to reflect on how others see us. See: *Thoughts on spiritual formation* - The Oak Tree: A 7th Day Adventist website: "an important lesson we can learn from Catholicism about spiritual formation is that we cannot take it for granted. We cannot just turn it over to the individual to pursue as they might, picking and choosing what they like. Spiritual formation is a responsibility of the Christian community—and especially the pastors and teachers—to form believers, to guide them on the path of discipleship, to immerse them in the common tradition, to build a community of prayer and service. And if we do not do this—if we do not give them water from our communal well—people will search on their own for anything that offers to quench their thirst."

Sadly, what many believe is quenching their thirst today, is leading them astray. If we read the signs of the times we note that moral relativism, individualism, secularism, materialism, and the negative aspects of globalisation are leading people down the wrong path.

As Catechists you will know that there are objective moral truths that are valid at all times and everywhere and that the lie of moral relativism will not help people to make the right choices. God is the source of all moral truth. Basically moral relativism gives people the feeling that if something feels good, one can just do it. For many, morality has become subjective. The challenge for you and me is to find ways of combatting such thinking. Our greatest tools are the teachings of our Church.

Yesterday, 24 September, we observed TT's Republic Day. We are a Democracy and we find ourselves in the midst of a State of Emergency. I believe that, to some extent, we have arrived at this sad place because many of our people have lost their way; they are quenching their thirst with moral relativism etc. Check out the website: www.moral-relativism.com

"Moral Relativism - What's It All About?"

Moral relativism is the view that ethical standards, morality, and positions of right or wrong are culturally based and therefore subject to a person's individual choice. We can all decide what is right for ourselves. You decide what's right for you, and I'll decide what's right for me. Moral relativism says, "It's true for me, if I believe it."

"Moral relativism has steadily been accepted as the primary moral philosophy of modern society, a culture that was previously governed by a "Judeo-Christian" view of morality. While these "Judeo-Christian" standards continue to be the foundation for civil law, most people hold to the concept that right or wrong are not absolutes, but can be determined by each individual. Morals and ethics can be altered from one situation, person, or circumstance to the next. Essentially, moral relativism says that anything goes, because life is ultimately without meaning. Words like

"ought" and "should" are rendered meaningless. In this way, moral relativism makes the claim that it is morally neutral....

“Studies indicate 75% of American college professors currently teach that there is no such thing as right and wrong. Rather, they treat the questions of good and evil as relative to "individual values and cultural diversity." The problem with this, according to O'Reilly, is that "they see the world not as it is, but as they want it to be. And annoying questions about moral absolutes and unacceptable behavior are usually left unanswered."

“William McGuffey, author of the *McGuffey's Readers*, which were the mainstay of America's public school system from 1836 till the 1920's, wrote: "Erase all thought and fear of God from a community, and selfishness and sensuality would absorb the whole man." Where do you think the world is heading today?”

Sadly, around the world, many are erasing God from their communities. This is the time to hold on to our moral and spiritual values which are based on the Gospel. I note that Pope Benedict XVI encouraged the German Parliamentarians on 22 Sept. 2011 to launch an urgent debate on *right and wrong*.

It is worth reflecting on the words of Pope John Paul II who said in 1995: “Democracy stands or falls with the truths and values which it embodies and promotes. But these values themselves must have an objective content. Otherwise they correspond only to the power of the majority, or the wishes of the most vocal.”

(Give example of conscience formation – boy just out of YTC, living in a squat with his uncle because his mother has gone to the USA and sends him barrels of ‘goodies’. Each morning he and his uncle mug people to get money to buy breakfast. Who is forming his conscience?)

We cannot build the civilization of love if we are not guiding our young people to make informed decisions; if we are not nurturing their spiritual life.

And what about adults? You may recall what happened in July when a supermarket in Arima was destroyed by fire and the premises were looted. I watched in amazement as TV reporters interviewed some of the looters. On July 15, *Newsday*, in a report entitled: "Looting as a right?" stated:

“Looting, the taking of someone’s goods from their premises, whether or not the premises are destroyed, damaged, or in good condition, is an act of lawlessness, and is simply theft...As

purported ‘regular customers’ of the business, they claimed entitlement to take what they could, while admitting that looting neighbouring premises was ‘crossing the line’.”

During the riots in the UK, some of the looters claimed that they looted for “fun”. The most horrendous material is being posted on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter for “fun”.

Where is the moral compass of our people?

There is a desperate need to form the consciences of our people. Pope John Paul II noted when writing about priestly formation (*Pastores Dabo Vobis* 45), the Catholic tradition understands that “spiritual formation ... is applicable to all the faithful.”

“Human formation, when it is carried out in the context of an anthropology which is open to the full truth regarding the human person, leads to and finds its completion in spiritual formation.”

He identifies specific components of spiritual formation: “communion with the Triune God; the search for Jesus Christ in the Word of God, participation in the sacraments and prayer of the church, a life of service to those in need.”

RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF SYSTEMATIC ONGOING FORMATION:

We are constantly being converted to be followers of Christ. Each experience we have provides an opportunity for conversion/for formation. To plan for ongoing formation, it is necessary that the Archdiocese constantly monitors and evaluates its strategies to ensure that we are reading the signs of the times and responding accordingly with well-planned programmes. A systematic programme of ongoing formation is critical if we are to nurture our people and assist them in exercising their free will responsibly.

Catechists in the Caribbean context - Complex culture, importance of discernment within culture. A people with a unique identity, based on our history. Living as disciples in this specific context. As Christians we must be so formed to respond as Christ would have us do - for the benefit of our present day generations and future as well. Consider State of Emergency and the situation leading up to this. Catholic response.

Although our Church is universal and we are mandated to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in need around the world, it is helpful for Catechists to reflect on your work within a Caribbean context – taking into account our diversity and our historic antecedents. Our motto as we move forward in implementing Synod Resolutions in our Archdiocese is: “One Faith, One Journey, Diverse People.” Our task is to promote unity in diversity and to manage diversity. We’re not doing too well in this regard. We often talk about “we culture”. But in reality, there is

not a homogeneous culture either in TT or in the Caribbean. We have much to be proud of in terms of art, literature, music, dance, drama, language, dress and other aspects of our culture. However, not all aspects of our culture is worthy of emulation. I don't need to go into this as we are all aware of the difficulties we face in transforming our culture. You may have read Coadjutor Archbishop Joe Harris' interview with a journalist in The Guardian, Sunday 25 Sept. He rightly said that we can't truly call ourselves a "rainbow people" if we do not live in unity and harmony.

There is too much disunity in TT e.g. based on ethnicity. Ethnic tension is the elephant in the room and no one seems prepared to sit around a table and discuss this issue honestly and dispassionately. The blame game that is currently being played will not help us. *Immaculee Ilibagiza* warned us during her recent visit that we must work to promote unity among ethnic groups. You will recall her experience in Rwanda where almost 1 million men, women and children were killed within 100 days during the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

The Caribbean is populated by people from various parts of the world. Our history is linked to the slave trade, indentureship and migration generally. If we are to understand what God is asking us to do in our current culture, we must be aware of our history and the impact it has had on the minds of our people. Bob Marley is right; we must emancipate *ourselves* from mental slavery; "None but ourselves can *free* our *minds*."

I have been listening to some radio talk show hosts who are convinced that many of our black youths are behaving as they are because of the lingering negative effects of slavery. My belief is that if there are lingering effects, we need to address these. By not doing so, we fail to create conditions that will enable our people to realise their potential. The world is a fast-moving place today and we are being left behind because our leaders – at all levels – are not placing God at the centre of their policies, programmes and practices.

For me, the litmus test is always: "What would Jesus do in this situation?" We will never go wrong if we keep God at the centre of our thoughts and actions. Let the Holy Spirit inspire us to respond to the social ills that we face: crime and violence, human trafficking, poverty and social exclusion, breakdown of family life, illiteracy and poor education systems, poor health care, lack of basic amenities etc. etc. See CCSJ's 10 page paper to our AG about human rights issues – given to him to inform his preparation of TT's response to Universal Periodic Review on the state of play in relation to human rights in TT. You must be aware of the Caribbean context in which you are seeking to build God's Kingdom.

What is the role of the catechist in formation - with specific reference to helping people to understand the mission of the church to which they belong - the living identity and the cultural matrix of the Church. The images of Church.

Firstly, I would like to say that the Archdiocese owes each of you a debt of gratitude for your dedication; for volunteering your time, talent and treasure to deepen the knowledge of Catholics of their faith and to strengthen their faith so that they can be witnesses to the living Christ who walks among us. The Holy Spirit has called you and you have said: “Yes!” (Is 6:8).

We thank you for your evangelizing spirit to bring back to the fold those who do not practice their faith, to proclaim the Gospel to everyone, and to deepen the faith of the faithful. There are about **340,000** Catholics in TT and only 17% go to Church on Saturday evenings/Sundays. We are still the largest faith community in TT – just over 26% of the population. But, as Bishop Jason Gordon says: “There are those who identify themselves as being Catholic but do not practise their faith; those who practise but do not transfer it to their children as a living tradition; and those who transfer it to their children but do not transmit it to others.” We have work to do.

“At the origin of the catechist's vocation...apart from the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, there is a specific call from the Holy Spirit, a *"special charism recognized by the Church"* and made explicit by the Bishop's mandate.”

We thank you for saying: “Yes. Here I am Lord, send me” (Is 6:8).

Sherri Rachuba, Director of Youth Evangelization & Catechesis, Cathedral of Mary our Queen, Baltimore, USA, said: “The root meaning of catechist is “one who echoes.” The catechist’s role is to echo and re-echo the story of Jesus Christ; to teach; and to model the teachings of our Church.”

In Redemptoris Missio, (the mission of the Redeemer) Pope John Paul II, says: “Among the laity who become evangelizers, **catechists have a place of honour...** Even with the extension of the services rendered by lay people both within and outside the Church, there is always need for the ministry of catechists, a ministry with its own characteristics”

“Pope John Paul II said to the catechists of Angola during his visit to that country: “*So many times it has fallen to you to strengthen and build up the young Christian communities, and even to found new ones through the first proclamation of the gospel. If missionaries could not be there for this first proclamation or had to leave before it could be followed up, it was you, the catechists, who instructed the catechumens, prepared people for the sacraments, taught the faith and were leaders of the Christian community (...). Give thanks to the Lord for the gift of your*

vocation, through which Christ has called you from among other men and women to be instruments of his salvation. Respond with generosity to your vocation and your names will be written in heaven (cf. Lk 10:20)".

There are a few documents that guide you in your work e.g.

- 1993 Guide for Catechists: Document of vocational, formative and promotional orientation of Catechists in the territories dependent on the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.
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- The General Directory for Catechesis: Congregation for the Clergy (1997 – revised) which states, inter alia: “The maturation of the Christian life requires that it be cultivated in all its dimensions: knowledge of the faith, liturgical life, moral formation, prayer, belonging to community, missionary spirit. When catechesis omits one of these elements, the Christian faith does not attain full development” (p. 168).

“Formation seeks to enable catechists to transmit the Gospel to those who desire to entrust themselves to Jesus Christ. The purpose of formation, therefore, is to make the catechist capable of communicating...the Gospel message" (p. 235).

- Statements in our Catechism: “Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people, and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life”(the Catechism of the Catholic Church, p8).

The Guide for Catechetics (1993) states: “Catechists have always had a very important role in the secular journey of evangelisation. Even today, they are considered to be irreplaceable evangelisers, as the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* so rightly states. In his message to our Plenary Assembly, the Holy Father confirmed the uniqueness of their role: "During my apostolic journeys I have been able observe personally what the catechists offer, especially in mission territories, an 'outstanding and absolutely necessary contribution to the spread of the faith and the Church' (AG 17).

“Catechists: announce "the Good News" to their brothers and sisters of other religions, preparing them for entry into the ecclesial community through baptism. Through religious instruction, preparation for the sacraments, animation of prayer and other works of charity, they help the baptised to grow in the fervour of the Christian life... Catechists are truly the pride of the missionary Church!"

You continue to make "an outstanding and indispensable contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church". You are "a witness of Christ in the community"

"Catechists with the specific task of catechizing, which includes educating young people and adults in the faith, preparing candidates and their families for the sacraments of Christian initiation, and helping with retreats and other meetings connected with catechesis. Catechists with these functions are more numerous in Churches that have stressed the development of lay services" (Guide for Catechists).

The challenge you face is to develop creative ways of forming the faithful. As Archbishop Gilbert said in his homily at the ordination of Bishop Jason (read by Bishop Emeritus Galt): "A new world culture is being build and no part of the world will be untouched." He said we have to find "a new way to talk to this new world culture, and to build new forms of solidarity through which we can communicate the gospel." That is why the Holy Father is using Twitter, the internet etc. Same old, same old won't do in today's world.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CATECHIST:

It is important that you do not neglect your own spirituality as you seek to spread the Good News. You cannot be teaching about Christ, if you're not spending time with Him. The Guide for Catechists state:

"Catechists must have a deep spirituality, i.e. they must live in the Spirit, who will help them to renew themselves continually in their specific identity...The need for a spirituality proper to catechists springs from their vocation and mission. It includes, therefore, a new and special motivation, a call to sanctity. Pope John Paul II's saying: "*The true missionary is the saint*", can be applied without hesitation to the catechist. Like every member of the faithful, catechists are "*called to holiness and to mission*", i.e. to live out their own vocation "*with the fervour of the saints*".

"Their spirituality is closely bound up with their status as lay Christians, made participants, in their own degree, in Christ's prophetic, priestly and kingly offices. As members of the laity, they are involved in the secular world and have, "*according to the condition of each, the special obligation to permeate and perfect the temporal order of things with the spirit of the gospel. In this way, particularly in conducting secular business and exercising secular functions, they are to give witness to Christ.*"

Catechists and Catholic culture and Identity

You play a key role as the Archdiocese implements the 2nd Pastoral Priority – Revitalising Catholic Culture and Identity. What makes us Catholic? I remember going in to the home of a woman whose second son had died through gang warfare in TT. I had gone to pray with her. She was Catholic. We entered her small bedroom where she had an altar with a rosary hanging on the wall, the bible, prayer books and statues were placed tidily on the altar and religious pictures adorned the walls of her small home. Her story was devastating. To cut a long story short, she and her family had allowed the culture to transform them and this had led to disaster.

I tell you this to highlight the fact that we are not defined as Catholics only by sacramentals e.g. rosaries, scapulars, statues, crosses, religious pictures; saying novenas; or indeed, by attending Mass on Sunday and receiving Holy Communion (the Eucharist is the source and summit of the life and mission of the Church) and other sacraments.

We are defined by our beliefs; our core virtues and values and how we live our faith; how we behave. As Archbishop Edward Gilbert said: “Virtues inform values and values influence behaviour.”

Or, as the Bishops of England and Wales said in Choosing the Common Good: “The virtues form us as moral agents, so that we do what is right and honourable for no other reason than that it is right and honourable, irrespective of reward and regardless of what we are legally obliged to do. Virtuous action springs from a sense of one's dignity and that of others, and from self-respect as a citizen. **It is doing good even when no-one is looking.**” As human beings, we will flourish if we live virtuous lives; if we build right relationships.

The early Christian Diognetus wrote:

“Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. Their teaching is not based upon reveries inspired by the curiosity of men. Unlike some other people, they champion no purely human doctrine. With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign

“And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland,

wherever it may be, is a foreign country. Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not expose them. They share their meals, but not their wives.”

Although this may not be true for all Catholics, the message is clear. Catholics live in the world but since their lives should be infused by Gospel values, as followers of Christ, their identity will clearly stand out if the prevailing culture is not in keeping with our faith. As the US Bishops said, we are not supposed to abandon the world, but to help transform it; to evangelize the culture.

On the day of Coadjutor Archbishop Harris’ ordination, CNMG TV invited me to join Jessie May and Paul to speak about what an ordination entails. When I responded to a question about Coadjutor Archbishop Harris’ involvement in the 2010 Catholic Band, I reminded viewers that as Catholics, God does not expect us to abandon the world when we discover that our values are different from those in our society. We are called to evangelize the culture so that it reflects Gospel values; we are called to build a just and compassionate social order; we have a duty to speak out fearlessly against injustices.

A Christian viewer texted: “You Catholics are involved in too much politics.” I replied that we are supposed to be involved in politics with a small ‘p’. Read the bible and you will see that Jesus was involved in politics in his day. If we are His faithful followers, we have a duty to follow in His footsteps. As the Bishops of England and Wales said in the document: The Common Good and the Catholic Church: “The Church has the right and the duty to advocate a social order in which the human dignity of all is fostered, and to protest when it is in any way threatened.”

This is what differentiates us from some Christian communities that preach a Gospel of prosperity. For us Catholics living our faith is not all about our individual salvation and our personal aggrandizement. We realise our dignity in community; we journey with others who are our brothers and sisters and we must be concerned about their welfare. His Grace is always reminding us that Catholics should be concerned not only about a vertical relationship with God, but also a horizontal relationship with our neighbour and with all of creation. We must get involved in politics with a small ‘p’ if we are to respond to the new commandment (John 13:34); or if we are to follow the words in Micah 6 or to follow our mandate in Luke (4:18):

“The spirit of the lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour.”

We should take heed of Fr Rick Heilman's wise words (3 June, 2011): "While I do believe that Catholics are to be immersed in society in many ways, we also need to have a strong Catholic identity so that we don't drown in the prevalent culture. There has always been a thin line balancing our need to be part of the culture yet separate from it."

We do not journey through life alone. TT is populated by people of other faiths. If we are to dialogue with others and with the culture that prevails, we must be strong in our faith. See the article in Zenit (www.zenit.org) : *Dialogue with culture requires reaffirmation of Catholic identity* (Sao Paulo, Brazil, Oct 13, 2004): "In an interview with CNA during his visit to Brazil, Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, said dialogue with the culture requires first a **reaffirmation of one's own Catholic identity**.

"The French Cardinal... told CNA that 'to dialogue with another means one has to be oneself.' Dialogue is an exchange between two persons; each one has his convictions, and dialogue allows each to understand the convictions of the other, and this is true in all areas of culture...The fundamental reference for our Catholic identity is Jesus Christ who, as Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* states, is the archetype of man."

"This is the basis upon which we dialogue: that Jesus Christ is the one in whom the fullness of man's vocation is realized. And, we are members of the Catholic Church, and wherever we are we are always linked to a bishop, who is linked to the Pope, the Successor of Peter."

Cardinal Poupard recalled that "the Pope continuously invites us, each day, to evangelize the culture...The Gospel is good news, not only for persons but for the culture as well. But in order for this news to be well-received it must be received in the language of the culture to which it is directed. And this is the logic of the incarnation. From the beginning all of this has taken place in the life of the Church and of the Christian, who is always an imitator of Christ."

If we are to evangelise the culture around us – as our Holy Father tells us to do, we must LIVE the values that we espouse. Remember the words in the Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes*: "the split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age" (GS, 41). If we are to be true witnesses to Christ, we must LIVE our faith – at home, in our work-places, in our parishes etc.

Personal prayer is also an essential dimension of our Catholicity. Find time for God in your lives; deepen your own spirituality so that you can deepen that of others. Like all Christians, catechists are called to continual conversion and growth in their faith. Deepening our spirituality requires us to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion. At the end of Mass we are told to "Go now to

love and serve the Lord.” How are we to do this? We must go out into the world as a Eucharistic people and practise our faith. We must lead by example.

Key aspects of our Catholic identity are the principles derived from the Social Teaching of our Church e.g. as the scriptures say, people will know us by our works. Justice is at the centre of the mission of the Church. As Catechists, it is important for you to SEE-JUDGE-ACT from a Social Justice perspective. We cannot divorce justice from our Catholic culture and identity.

This year the Church will observe in November the 40th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops 1971 document: *Justice in the World*. From 12 – 19 Nov the Archdiocese will be observing Respect for Life Week and I urge each Catechist to play your part in observing the theme of the week: *Respect Life: Promote Justice*.

One of the famous quotations from that documents states: “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel.” (*Justice in the World*, 1971).

You can access the entire document and a critique of it on CCSJ’s website. Each Department in the Archdiocese was asked to submit an article on the 2nd PP. The following is CCSJ’s submission which was published in Catholic News:

“As we engage in a nationwide conversation about the Archdiocese’s second Pastoral Priority: *Revitalising Catholic Culture and Identity: My Church, My Parish, My Family*, remember that we believe in a God of truth, justice, peace, love, freedom and forgiveness. These values should underpin our lives and inform our actions.

“CCSJ has an important role to play in revitalizing Catholic Culture and Identity in Trinidad and Tobago and the world. We continue to raise the faithful’s awareness that being a Catholic involves more than going to church on Sundays, praying or displaying religious pictures in our homes. Embedded in our identity is a love of God and love of our neighbor.

“This “love” propels us to challenge injustice wherever it rears its head; to promote integral human development, which, as Pope Benedict XVI said, means the development of all dimensions of a person and of each person; to promote the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; to strengthen family life; to celebrate diversity and promote equity and equality, the common good and ecology justice.

“If we are to see, judge and act from a Catholic perspective, we must be aware, not only of our Scriptures, but also of the social teachings of our Church. Being Catholic means reading the

signs of the times and challenging moral relativism and individualism; standing in solidarity with the poor, the socially excluded and the vulnerable e.g. the 43.7 million persons who have been forcibly displaced from their homes worldwide; welcoming the “stranger”, striving to build an inclusive Trinidad and Tobago.

“Being Catholic means developing a spirituality of justice and being prepared to use our time, talent and treasure to build God’s Kingdom on earth; it means acting on words in our Scriptures:” ... *this is what God asks of you; only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God.*”

There are certain **non-negotiable elements** of our Catholic faith e.g. we believe in the sanctity of life from conception to natural death and in the inherent, inviolable, inalienable dignity of the human person – all made in God’s image and likeness. We promote human life and human dignity at all stages and in all circumstances – that is why we oppose the current culture of death and seek to build a culture of life – see the encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*. The measure of any society is whether what we do threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person. What are the issues relating to this culture of death that we must resist - Abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, capital punishment, the use of human embryos for scientific exploitation etc.

Just to let you know that from Oct 17-19, 2011, I shall be participating in a Conference in Madrid Conference – focusing on The Death Penalty in the Caribbean. One of the main organizers is The Community of Sant’Egidio – a Catholic organisation.

As Catechists you should be au fait with the teachings of the Church in relation to these issues. Sadly, some Catholics treat our faith as a smorgasbord – picking and choosing what they want to believe. Recently I was a guest on a radio programme speaking about the death penalty and a Catholic gentleman rang saying: “Leela Ramdeen, shut yuh mouth! I am Catholic and I say hang them high. Hang them in Woodford Square and sell tickets to see them hang!”

We are swimming against a culture in which violence is seen as the way to deal with violence. As Pope Benedict XVI said in his 2011 Peace Message: "Violence is not overcome by violence... peace is the result of a process of purification and of cultural, moral and spiritual elevation involving each individual and people, a process in which human dignity is fully respected."

As the U.S. Catholic bishops have said in their document “Living the Gospel of Life:

"Our witness to respect for life shines most brightly when we demand respect for each and every human life, including the lives of those who fail to show that respect for others. The antidote to violence is love, not more violence."

The process of revitalizing our Catholic Culture and ID will assist us in addressing these and other issues. We may be swimming counter-cultural, but that's OK. Hold on to the exhortation in Romans 12:2: *"Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do."*

The following social justice principles will help us as we seek to build a just society. They are taken from the Church's social teaching which, as the US Bishops remind us, is "a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. The depth and richness of this tradition can be understood best through a direct reading of these documents. In these brief reflections, we highlight several of the key themes that are at the heart of our Catholic social tradition." (US Bishops):

1. The Sanctity of Life and the Dignity of the Human Person
2. Common Good, family and Community
3. Option for the Poor and vulnerable
4. Rights and Responsibilities
5. Role of Government and Subsidiarity
6. Economic Justice : The economy must serve people, not the other way around.
7. Stewardship of God's Creation
8. Promotion of Peace and Disarmament
9. Participation: "All people have a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community." (US Bishops).
10. Global Solidarity and Development
11. The dignity of work and the rights of workers
12. The universal destination of goods.

It is worth noting Theo Ferguson's article in Friday's TT Guardian (23Sept). In writing about the State of Emergency, he says:

"The path to greater enlightenment of the people will never be found through just restraining negative human behaviours. It may prevent the society from falling apart and it may satisfy short-term goals but it will never advance the civility of the people. It will never produce the greater enlightenment that is at the heart of human and societal advancement. Beyond The State of Emergency ... if there is the absence of policies and plans to aggressively pursue a human development agenda, it becomes tempting to continue to forcefully restrain unacceptable

behaviours in the false belief that doing this will somehow advance human development. We are all challenged to think beyond the state of emergency. The choice is clear—T&T must embark on a path of greater human enlightenment towards the development of a truly great society.”

Ferguson is right. This is why the Church has a role to play in helping to inform the discussion about nation-building. On Tuesday evening, please watch CCSJ’s Ask Why TV programme from 8 – 9 pm on TCN (Ch. 10). Fr Clyde Harvey and CCSJ’s recently appointed Parish Link Coordinator, Sr Christine Walcott O.P. will be discussing with me the theme: *Building a nation for ALL*. Our role as Catholics in society is to promote inclusion.

You will understand more about our Catholic Culture and Identity if you read some of the encyclicals – or summaries of them e.g. Pope Benedict XVI’s latest encyclical: *Charity in Truth* in which he urges us to promote integral human development, which, he says, is the development of every dimension of the person and of each person. No one should be left behind.

CONCLUSION:

I urge you to go out as stout heralds of our Faith to proclaim the Gospel. Reflect on the words of St Teresa of Avila: “Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which is to look out Christ's compassion to the world; Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men and women now.”

As you strive to transmit the Catholic faith, may the Holy Spirit inspire you; may God fill you with wisdom; and may you hear Jesus’ gentle voice guiding and sustaining you as you journey on. Go forth today to share the Good news with joy and confidence.

And for all of us who are not “Catechists”, remember the words in the **Lineamenta** for the 2012 Synod on The New Evangelization for the transmission of the Christian Faith (Oct 7 -28, 2012):

“The transmission of the faith is a very complex, dynamic process which totally involves the faith of Christians and the life of the Church. What is not believed or lived cannot be transmitted. [12] . . . the goal of the transmission of the faith is the realisation of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, in the Spirit, thereby leading to an experiencing of his Father and our Father.[35]

“We cannot transmit a relationship we have not lived ...The transmission of the faith is never an individual, isolated undertaking, but a communal, ecclesial event.... may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but

from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world.” Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiando* (8 December 1975).

“The new evangelization does not mean a “new Gospel”, because “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (*Heb* 13:8), but rather, a new response to the needs of humanity and people today in a manner adapted to the signs of the times and to the new situations in cultures, which are the basis of our personal identity and the places where we seek the meaning of our existence. Consequently, a “new evangelization” means to promote a culture more deeply grounded in the Gospel and to discover the new man who is in us through the Spirit given us by Jesus Christ and the Father...

“Pope John Paul II...insisted that a “new evangelization” means “to rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the Church’s beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out: ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel’ (*1 Cor* 9:16). This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of ‘specialists’ but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived as the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups... a “new evangelization”, namely, a new proclamation of Jesus’ message, which brings joy and sets people free...

“Being Christian and being Church means being missionary: one is or is not. Loving ones faith implies bearing witness to it, bringing it to others to participate in it.” (*Lineamenta* for 2012 Synod of Bishops Meeting).

Coadjutor Archbishop Joe Harris gave us some sound advice recently. He said we need to revitalize the “sacred”. He is correct. Do not let secularism, individualism, materialism etc define us. Let us transform the culture to reflect **our** identity. With God’s grace, we will achieve our goals.

Be proud of your faith. Lead by example. Now, more than ever, we must strive to transform the world to reflect Gospel values. We are all in this together: “The transmission of the faith is never an individual, isolated undertaking, but a communal, ecclesial event.” (*Lineamenta* for 2012 Synod of Bishops).

A Catechist's Prayer (www.catecheticsonline.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=3731)

Loving Father, Giver of all that is,
Help me to remember that every gift I have comes from you.
Expand my vision so that I can appreciate your goodness
in the world around me.

Jesus, our Redeemer,
You are the path to the treasures of my heart and soul.
Strengthen my commitment to be a catechist
and deepen my capacity to share your truth with those in my care.

Holy Spirit, Love Divine,
All life and energy flows from you.
Illuminate my thoughts and intensify my desire
to grow ever deeper in my faith.

I lift up my prayer to you, God—Father, Son,
and Spirit—in humility and hope.

AMEN. May God bless us all. Thank you.