

RECONCILIATION WITH CREATION

Executive Summary: *Draft framework towards an Environmental Policy for The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago*

The Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago is concerned to protect and promote authentic human development and environmental ecology which are both inextricably linked. Creation is the work of God and is God's gift to us. Human beings were created in God's image and likeness and given the responsibility to "cultivate and care for" God's Creation (Genesis 2:15). The Church has always urged humankind to care for, preserve, develop and restore the environment.

Our responsibility as stewards of God's creation must be placed within the context of the mystery of the Incarnation of God, which, as St Ambrose says "is the salvation of the whole of Creation".

This *Draft framework towards an Environmental Policy for the Archdiocese* is a call to reflection and action if we are to address the environmental/ecological crisis which, as Pope Benedict XVI says, is a moral crisis. The urgency of the situation is expressed in the Pope's words: "*Our earth speaks to us, and we must listen if we want to survive.*"(2007).

The Pope's third Encyclical, *Charity in Truth* (n.48-51), his Peace Message for 2010, and his Lenten message all send a strong message to us that we cannot afford to be indifferent in the face of environmental degradation.

The Archdiocese's Mission Statement and Synod Resolutions, particularly Res. 3a and Res. 6, include a concern to reconcile ourselves with creation.

Resolution #6 states: "Be it resolved that in keeping with the Catholic position on Creation, our families, schools and parishes recognize our responsibility as stewards of Creation and express this in relevant tangible ways."

Res: 6:1 states: "The Archdiocese to formulate a policy and guidelines on environmental awareness."

The objectives of this draft framework are:

1. To bring the Gospel and the teachings of the Catholic Church to bear on the issue of environmental/ecological justice.
2. To raise awareness of the Catholic Church's commitment to promote human and environmental ecology as key elements to achieve authentic development for humankind and for all of creation.

3. To identify resources and practical ways in which individuals, parishes, schools, the public and private sectors in Trinidad and Tobago can reconcile themselves with God's creation.
4. To motivate individuals and organizations to take responsibility to "cultivate and care for" God's creation (Gen 2:15).

The draft framework is presented for consultation in 7 sections as follows:

- A. Objectives of the *Draft framework towards an Environmental Policy for the Archdiocese*
- B. The Church's teaching on humankind's relationship with the environment.
- C. The Archdiocesan Mission Statement and Synod Resolutions relating to the environment.
- D. Putting Faith into Action
- E. Environmental Issues in T&T
- F. Action to achieve Reconciliation with Creation.
- G. St Francis Pledge to care for creation and the poor.

It seeks to raise awareness of the Church's teaching on the issues concerned. Since most readers may not have time to read the many Church documents that refer to the environment, relevant quotations are included from a variety of Church sources and other sources e.g.

- the Catechism of the Catholic Church: n. 340, 1333, 1359, 1361, 1604, 2415;
- The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church: a correct understanding of the environment: n. 463, 464, 466, 457 and 487;
- Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (See their 2 key Pastoral Letters in 2003 and 2005: "*Stewardship and the revitalization of parish life in the Caribbean*" and "*Caring for the Earth – Our responsibility.*")

If we are to put our faith into action, we must be aware of the See, Judge/Reflect, Act Process which informs our decision-making about current issues. (See website of: *Office of Social Justice, Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, USA*: www.osjspm.org).

The draft framework includes a number of useful references e.g. the 1991 US Bishops' Pastoral Statement: *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*: This provides a helpful framework for parishes, schools and communities. Their 7 themes of ecological responsibility, which are drawn from Catholic social teaching, are useful for "religious teaching and moral debate" (Bishops of New Mexico):

Section E highlights some key environmental issues/threats facing T&T. Each year we see the ways in which ecological destruction impacts on us and on our lives. We must play our part to address environmental issues in T&T also, e.g. oil pollution of beaches; water pollution from effluents such as agricultural chemicals, industrial wastes, and raw sewage; deforestation; soil erosion; flooding caused in part by the littering of our waterways; destruction of our mangroves, wetlands and coral reefs; illegal forestry and quarrying; unsustainable hunting; slash and burn

practices; and unplanned/unmanaged construction. Some of the local endangered species are mentioned in the draft Policy e.g. the loggerhead turtle and the piping guan.

Section F lists action which we can take to achieve reconciliation with God's creation. The tips are not exhaustive e.g.

- Read, Pray, Reflect on the story of Creation in Genesis.
- Look around, discover and reflect on the beauty of God's creation and of our connection to it – locally and globally.
- Learn about and educate others on the causes and effects of environmental degradation and about action that can be taken to promote the integrity of creation and to reconcile ourselves with God's creation.
- Examine and assess your lifestyle and consumption. Pledge to make changes that will improve the ways in which you impact on and interact with the environment. There is much that each of us could do e.g.:
- Strive to Live Simply.
- Reuse, Recycle, Reduce, Restore. Practice these 4 R's for sustainable living. As far as possible to buy products from recycled materials.
- Prevent Pollution and Reduce Your Carbon Footprint.
- Become an Advocate for God's Creation.
- Enjoy nature and live in harmony with it. This is God's plan for His creation.
- Evaluate the impact of your activities on the environment. See Catholic Earthcare Australia to find out how to conduct an environmental audit in your parish, home, school, and community.
- Promote sound environmental management practices/best practice in ecological stewardship, e.g. energy efficiency, water conservation, waste avoidance, composting, using environmentally responsible products, and car-pooling.
- Assist in implementing Synod Resolutions, for example Res: 6:3: Organize/encourage participation in events that promote good stewardship of God's creation e.g. turtle watching, reforestation/replanting of trees, beach cleanup etc. Organising/getting involved in clean-up activities and promoting anti-litter campaigns help to build pride in our communities and in our country.
- Consider establishing/supporting the establishment of an agricultural programme – including compost making and tree planting, in your parish and your local Catholic primary and secondary school. Urban schools can use pots for planting if there is no green space around the schools. See 'Grow Box' programme. It is important to promote food security in our homes, communities and throughout T&T. (see Synod Res. 6:5).
- Plan activities to mark UN International Days e.g. World Environment Day on June 5 and the Archdiocese's Respect for Life Week each year.
- Schools and catechetical teams should "Integrate into formal education and lifelong learning the knowledge, values and skills needed for a sustainable way of life" (Earth Charter). (These could also be promoted through non-formal education and youth work).

Environmental issues can be addressed in all areas of the curriculum. Activities could include: debating sessions, quizzes, poetry/essay writing, making/displaying posters, photographic exhibitions of the natural environment, agricultural projects (see 'd' above), field trips/eco-tours, and providing opportunities for students to practice the 4 Rs for sustainable living in their communities.

- As a key institution in the Archdiocese, the Catholic Religious Education Development Institute (CREDI) should promote environmental awareness among its students and encourage relevant research that will facilitate the mission of the church in its efforts to promote reconciliation with creation. .

Let us be transformed by God's grace to a new humanity. May God bless our efforts. The draft Policy ends with the St Francis Pledge. Each of us should make this pledge to care for God's creation and the poor and vulnerable. (See <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/the-st-francis-pledge/>)

"Environmental pollution is making particularly unsustainable the lives of the poor of the world...we must pledge ourselves to take care of creation and to share its resources in solidarity." (Pope Benedict XVI during his Angelus address on Sunday, Aug. 27, 2006).

"I/We Pledge to:

- **PRAY** and reflect on the duty to care for God's Creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.
- **LEARN** about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of climate change.
- **ASSESS** how we-as individuals and in our families, parishes and other affiliations- contribute to climate change by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc.
- **ACT** to change our choices and behaviours to reduce the ways we contribute to climate change.
- **ADVOCATE** for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor and vulnerable."

NB: This draft framework is being circulated for consultation by the Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ), on behalf of the Catholic Church in T&T. It will be published in a 4-page pull-out supplement in Catholic News on 14 March, 2010. Hard copies can be obtained from CCSJ's office. A 6 page Reference Section to the draft framework and a more detailed supporting document are available on request. All are currently accessible on CCSJ's website: www.rcsocialjusticett.org.

The consultation period will run from Tues 23 Feb. - 30 June, 2010. All comments are welcome. These will inform the preparation of the Archdiocese's Environmental Policy. Inter alia, the document is intended as a study guide and action plan for all people of goodwill. Comments can be submitted via e-mail at: rcsocjus@carib-link.net, verbally, or in writing to Leela Ramdeen, Chair, CCSJ, Justice Desk, Archbishop's House, 27 Maraval Road, Port of Spain. Tel: 290 1635 or 299 8945