

Media Release – for immediate release from:

Msgr Robert Llanos, Vicar General of the Catholic Church, and The Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ) on Wed 20 June, 2012

The Catholic Church would welcome a Gender Policy that recognises the sanctity of all life from conception until natural death and the dignity of the human person; a policy that seeks to build the common good. We welcome a policy that will address gender issues relating to e.g. poverty and social exclusion, crime and violence, incest, housing, the breakdown of family life, education, elder abuse, domestic violence, human trafficking, drug/substance abuse, health care, unemployment/underemployment, environmental degradation, economic injustice and so on. We make a special plea to our Government to excise from the draft Gender policy that is expected to be taken to Cabinet for consideration shortly, any definitions or clauses that seek to:

- redefine the term 'gender';
- legalise abortion; or
- open the door to allow same-sex unions.

Gender: The Catholic Church rejects any attempt to re-define 'gender' which, as the Holy See stated at a UN meeting in March 2011, "asserts that sexual identity can somehow be adapted indefinitely to suit new and different purposes, not recognized in international law.

The Holy See rightly stressed that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court contains the only binding definition of gender. This Statute states that "the term 'gender' refers to the two sexes, male and female, within the context of society. The term 'gender' does not indicate any meaning different from the aforementioned definition."

We join with the Holy See to warn that "this agenda to re-define 'gender', in turn, calls into question the very foundation of the human rights system."

Homosexuality: The Church views homosexual acts as being "contrary to the natural law... Homosexual persons are called to chastity" (Catechism 2357, 2358). Those with this sexual orientation "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided."

God imprinted a moral order in the hearts and minds of humankind and it is this order that should influence how we live our lives. We therefore reject any policies that are not consistent with the nature of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). We are mindful of the words of Blessed John Paul II who stated that: "The natural law is itself the eternal law, implanted in beings endowed with reason, and inclining them towards their right action and end..."

The Catholic Bishops of our region have said: "The Church has always made a clear distinction between **sexual orientation** and **sexual behaviour**. Sexual orientation is morally indifferent

while homosexual behaviour is immoral, objectively speaking. Homosexual acts are contrary to the creative plan of God about the complementarity of the sexes or to the openness to life intrinsic to sexual relations within marriage. While the Church is obliged to preach the truth, it is also obliged by the love of Christ to provide quality pastoral care to persons who have a homosexual orientation and who may be struggling with homosexual behaviour."

Same-sex marriage: The Catholic Church believes that "marriage is a faithful, exclusive and lifelong union between **one man and one woman**, joined as husband and wife in an intimate partnership of life and love." Pope Benedict XVI has warned, of "powerful political and cultural currents seeking to alter the legal definition of marriage." We are prepared to defend traditional marriage" from every possible misrepresentation of their true nature".

Abortion: We reject any attempts to legalise abortion in TT. We believe that "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. The inalienable right to life of every innocent human individual is a constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation (Catechism 2270, 2273). We agree with Mother Teresa that "Abortion has portrayed the greatest of gifts — a child — as a competitor, an intrusion and an inconvenience." We stand by our Church's teaching that "we cannot endorse choices that drastically and unjustly limit the choices of other human beings." We stand as the voice of our vulnerable, voiceless unborn and call for others to open centres such as Mary Care Centre which was established since 1980 as a sanctuary for unmarried, pregnant, young women.

As we strive to move from a culture of death to a culture of life in TT, we must reject the violence of abortion and devise effective strategies to enable our pregnant mothers to have their babies and to care for them. Let us respond to the real needs of our people and demonstrate our love for both mother and baby. We can promote women's health and well-being by developing positive alternatives to abortion.

In his encyclical, *God is Love*, Pope Benedict XVI reminds Catholics that the Church "cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice." We reject moral relativism which denies moral absolutes and calls on citizens who believe that moral truth is objective and not relative to the whims and fancies of the individual, to join us.

Our response to all the threats to life is a moral test for our nation. We renew our resolve to defend and promote life in every phase as a blessing and a precious gift from God, never to be sacrificed, never to be compromised. At a time in our history when many are seeking to push religion off the public stage into the private realm, we urge all those who support our stance to stand together in solidarity. Join us in our *March for Jesus* on Sunday 1 July as we pray for our nation.

Let us make our voices heard as we seek to build a strong nation based on morals and values that will take our beloved country forward.

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