

Women who lead! The Holy Faith Convent Factor!

International Women's Day Panel Discussion at HFC, Couva on Sun 5 March 2017

Leela Ramdeen, Chair, CCSJ

Good afternoon, my sisters and brothers. As we approach International Women's Day on 8 March, it gives me great pleasure to be able to share with you a few words on my career path as a Woman, and the impact that HFC has had and continues to have on me on my journey to date.

As the UN states: "IWD provides a common day each year for globally recognising and applauding women's achievements as well as for observing and highlighting gender inequalities and issues. But not just on IWD, but all year round, many organizations and individuals work tirelessly to support gender equality through a multitude of initiatives, causes and actions."

<http://www.internationalwomensday.com/freestyle.asp>

The UN has also stated: "For the women of the world, the Day's symbolism has a wider meaning: It is an occasion to review how far they have come in their struggle for equality, peace and development. It is also an opportunity to unite, network and mobilize for meaningful change... is there really inequality between men and women? In one word, yes. "It is true, though, that recent decades have seen progress. Women's access to education and proper health care has increased; their participation in the paid labour force has grown; and legislation that promises equal opportunities for women and respect for their human rights has been adopted in many countries. The world now has a growing number of women as policymakers. "However, nowhere in the world can women claim to have the same rights and opportunities as men. They continue to be among the poorest overall: the majority of the world's 1.3 billion absolute poor are women. On average, women receive between 30 and 40 per cent less pay than men earn for the same work. And everywhere women continue to be victims of violence, with rape and domestic violence listed as significant causes of disability and death among women ...worldwide." (<http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/days/women/why.asp>)

Let us also remember today acts of courage and determination by women like our mothers, our sisters, our aunts, our grandmothers, our teachers.

In June this year I will celebrate my 67th birthday. I can tell you, that my journey on my career path over the years has not been an easy one. However, because of my faith and the sound foundation I received from my parents and from my alma mater, Holy Faith Convent, I am where I am today. I am extremely proud to be a past pupil of this noble institution. Indeed, I owe a debt of gratitude to my teachers at HFC who played a critical role in my development. They will always be embedded in my heart for their dedication and commitment to us, their students and I thank God that some of them have become my close personal friends.

During my years at HFC, I was a member of the Girl Guides and the Legion of Mary. At one stage, I was also a Member of the Student group that represented HFC at Inter-School TV Competition. My focus was English Literature. I recall Sr Magdalena drilling me in her office to see if I would remember quotations from various literary works.

HFC instilled in me the need to keep God at the center of my life; to have high self-esteem and self-confidence; to be the best that I can be; to let my Christian values underpin my life: values such as love, integrity, humility, servanthood/service, hospitality, compassion/empathy, generosity, love, respect for self, for others and for all God's Creation; to dream big, set goals and to work to achieve my dreams/goals; to accept that in life I may fall several times, and that when I do, I must get up, dust myself off and move on. Failures are part of life. Learn from your mistakes. Never give up. It was Confucius who said: "Our greatest glory is not in never failing but in rising every time we fail." HFC also taught me not to be afraid of change and that "If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door," as the saying goes. Too often we sit and wait for opportunities to come our way. Be proactive. Challenge yourself. Don't be afraid to take risks. The French author, Andre Gide, said: "(Wo)man cannot discover new oceans unless (s)he has the courage to lose sight of the shore."

HFC taught me to embrace volunteerism. Share your talents/skills to build the common good. As the saying goes: "Work for a cause, not for applause." "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." Pope Francis' words are noteworthy: "Do not be content to live a mediocre Christian life... The world tells us to seek success, power and money. God tells us to seek humility, service and love." HFC taught me that I am my brothers' and sisters' keeper and that I must use my talents to be a change agent - walking with the 2 feet of Christian love: works of mercy and works of social action. Remember, Faith without good works is dead (James

2:14-26). Pope Francis rightly urges us to do what we can to build God's Kingdom here on earth. In 1993 he told youths: "Offer your...energies and your talents to building a civilization of Christian love...commit yourself to the struggle for justice, solidarity, and peace."

HFC taught me the value of family life. Never underestimate the value of having a good, nurturing family. I was fortunate to have one. My parents loved their 7 children and did their best for us. I left TT in June 1967 when my father, who had been an MP for Caroni East from 1961-1966 lost elections in 1966 and decided to read Law at Lincoln's Inn in the UK. On arrival in London, since my father was engaged in full-time studies and could only work on evenings, it meant that the rest of us in the family had to pool our resources together to sustain ourselves. My brother, Anil, entered the RAF, and my 4 younger siblings were at primary and secondary school, so there were only 2 children – Kamala and I, as well as Pa (part-time) and Ma, who had to work to bring in money to support the family.

My first job was at Cadby Hall – J. Lyons & Co., which was at that time the largest food factory in the UK. The Company made all kinds of foods, chocolates, ice-cream and so on. I was in good company as PM Margaret Thatcher – before she was married and when she was known as Margaret Hilda Roberts, was employed there as a research chemist at Cadby Hall on emulsifying ice cream (see Wikipedia).

I was employed there as a typist. I landed at Southampton on 20 June and by the end of June I had secured employment. As a youngster, I had taught myself how to type on my father's typewriter. Having discovered that in London at that time a typist could earn more than a Clerical Officer in certain places, I took a typing examination and secured a position working for one of the big bosses at Lyons – Mr Chenusche. I was to learn later on that he only recruited me to work on his team because he found that I was 'exotic'. He loved my accent and the strange clothes that I used to wear. My mother had made me some amazing lace dresses and sent me off to work with white gloves and high-heeled shoes! At a time when English people dressed conservatively and wore dark coloured clothes, my pink, blue and bright multi-coloured clothes made me stand out at the office. Many people thought that I hailed from Wales as they said that I had a 'sing-song' accent.

I remain grateful to Mr Chenusche, though, as he gave me some good tips that would help me to move onwards and upwards. He was a kind man. I saw this as a stepping stone to higher achievements. I read the papers daily looking for other opportunities. Eventually, after a few months, I read that Civil Service Examinations were due to take place. I applied, took the exam, and was appointed as **Executive Officer at the National Savings Bank**, Charles House, London, W14. I worked there from 1967 to 1969 and was responsible for computing customers' interest and dealing with queries relating to customers' accounts.

Those were hard times. You see me standing here looking strong, but, like many women, the journey has not been easy. I lived about 5 miles from work and after work I had to walk about 1 mile to attend evening classes at a Polytechnic to study for my A'Levels. I had left HFC in the middle of my A'Level studies. I remember weeping one night when I kept slipping and falling in the snow. And on another night a young black student in my class who had a crush on me, followed me, grabbed me and tried to kiss me. I pulled away, leaving him with my coat in his hand. I never knew I could run so fast! I had to enroll at another College to avoid any further problems.

By 1969 I had obtained my A'Levels and applied for and secured a job as with the Inner London Education Authority – covering the area of Westminster and Camden (1969 – 1972). I was responsible for allocating Travel passes to students living 3 or more miles from their schools; and was also responsible for allocating Uniform Grants to students whose parents were earning less than a certain sum.

From 1972 – 1976 I was a full-time student at a Catholic Teacher Training College in London: Digby Stuart, Roehampton, where I attained my Bachelor of Education degree. I had always wanted to teach. I think teaching ran in my family. My father had opened his own school in his youth and many of my uncles and aunts have been teachers. I also believe that my career in Education was nurtured at HFC. I saw how fulfilling it was to be a teacher.

From 1976 to 1980 I taught at schools in London. During this time I studied part-time at Froebel Institute, Roehampton, for my Masters Degree in Education. I was always in conflict with my tutors – both at Digby Stuart and at Froebel. In those days some lecturers at Educational Institutions taught students that the views of the

psychologist Arthur Jensen, Prof Hans Eysenck (Jensen's mentor) and the English Educationalist, Sir Cyril Burt, were true, when, as far as many persons like myself was concerned, they were racist views. Their works put forward the ideas that black people were genetically inferior, had lower IQs than white people and that differences in intelligence were assumed to be due to race. Note that: "shortly after Burt's death in 1971, there were allegations, prompted by research of Leon Kamin, that Burt had fabricated parts of his data, charges which have never been fully resolved" (Wikipedia). Check Wikipedia for information on the study of race and intelligence. As Wikipedia states: "In a 1968 article published in *Disadvantaged Child*, Jensen questioned the effectiveness of child development and antipoverty programs, writing "As a social policy, avoidance of the issue could be harmful to everyone in the long run, especially to future generations of Negroes, who could suffer the most from well-meaning but misguided and ineffective attempts to improve their lot."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_race_and_intelligence_controversy

Knowing that my fellow students would be teaching children from the black community, my passion for justice came to the fore and I challenged such thinking over and over again. Indeed, it led me to join a number of anti-racist groups to combat racism – see below.

It was while I was teaching at a school in a depressed area in London that the Authorities came to know of my work to promote success among students, particularly those of Caribbean origin. My efforts led the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) to *head-hunt* me to apply for what I thought was a place on the Primary Curriculum Development Project to promote success among students of Caribbean origin in Primary schools across London's 10 Divisions. After my interview I was appointed as **Director of the Project** (PCDP) and worked on the Project from 1980 – 1984. It is important to note that this the ILEA established this Project even before the publication of The Rampton Report (1981): *West Indian Children in our Schools: Interim report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups* – led by Lord Rampton.

The final report produced by Lord Swann and his team and entitled: *Education for All*, was published in 1985 on the underachievement of pupils of Caribbean origin. My achievements on the PCDP led to my appointment as an Inspector of Schools with the ILEA from: 1984 – 1988.

I will need a few days to share with you some of the challenges I had in the aforementioned roles. I will share just one. As Inspector, I was also responsible for the PCDP. Together, my Team and I produced a resource book entitled: *Positive Books on Black People's History*. It was a compilation of book reviews – focusing on books about people such as Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, Nanny of the Maroons, Queen Nzinga and so on. We listed bookshops where these could be purchased as most of the white owned bookshops never carried such books. We also gave examples of ways in which these books could enhance the curriculum.

Well, all hell broke loose. There was an article in a daily newspaper with a headline which read: “ILEA indulging in thought control.” The face of the then Minister of Education was placed next to the front cover of the booklet. There was an African Mask on the front cover of our book. I was summoned to the Chief Inspector's Office and was told that the Minister wanted the book withdrawn from primary schools where we had distributed them. I threatened to resign stating that my team and I had discovered many racist books, including books in Reading Schemes, in primary schools and no one was calling for their withdrawal.

I offered to go and explain to the Minister the value of the books we were recommending and to share with him some of the racist books we had found in schools. For example, there was a large bible, with full colour on its cover, depicting the murder of Abel by his brother, Cain. Cain is depicted as a black man standing over his cowering ‘white’ brother, Abel. Cain has a menacing look on his face and a weapon in his hand. Nowhere in the bible do we read that Cain was a different colour from Abel. Eventually, the Chief Inspector, David Hargreaves, agreed with me that our book was not promoting “Thought control” and he must have convinced the Minister to let the books remain in schools, as they were not withdrawn.

As well as my full-time jobs, I was always involved in voluntary work. So, for example, in 1984, I accepted the late Cardinal George Basil Hume's invitation to participate on an Advisory Group which he established to collect empirical data in the Diocese of Westminster to determine the Catholic Church's Commitment to the Black Community. In 1985 I took over the role of Chair of the Group and in 1986 we produced a report entitled: “*With you in Spirit?*” Some of the recommendations contained in the report were implemented e.g. the establishment of a continuing Committee for the Caribbean Community. Cardinal Hume was the Chair and I was his Vice-Chair – until I left the UK in 1997.

When PM Margaret Thatcher and the then Conservative Government, decided to disband the ILEA, we all had to apply for jobs in the newly formed Education Authorities or elsewhere. In **1988** I applied for a post in the London Borough of Haringey as Assistant Chief Education Officer. This was a borough where there had been the Broadwater Farm uprising – which some called ‘riots’ on 6 October 1985.

Shortly after my appointment, I was interviewed by the Editor of a Magazine entitled: “Roots”. I found my face on the front cover of the Magazine with a very positive article about my career journey. I think I was the first or second black person to have been appointed to the position of ACEO in Britain. My friend, the late Trevor Carter, would write later on about *the meteoric rise of Leela Ramdeen*, as very few persons, if any, had ever risen from the post of an ordinary Inspector to that of Chief Inspector of Schools. My role as ACEO also included the role of Chief Inspector of Schools. My years in this position were filled with difficulties.

Inter alia, I assisted the Director to coordinate, guide, improve and develop the provision of the Education Service in the Borough and deputized for him as required. In 1992 I was responsible for the day to day running of the Education Service for 3 months while the Director was released to conduct an Education Services Review and to produce a report for Councillors. I acted as Director for a period of 6 months at a very difficult time and had to lead a team in the process of deleting posts and restructuring the Service to remain within a cash limit – to comply with the then Government’s instructions to Local Authorities to cut their budgets.

Explain reason why I left Haringey. I decided to follow in my father’s and sister’s footsteps and to change my career to Law. I studied for my Solicitors’ exams and was successful:

1994 – 1995 Diploma in Law (CPE), College of Law, UK

1995 – 1996 Post Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice (LPC) College of Law, UK

My mother died in 1995 in London and my father found it difficult to live in the house in Chiswick, London, so I decided to come to TT before he and my sister, Kamala, arrived. I secured a place at Hugh Wooding Law School, TT, where I obtained my Legal Education Certificate (LEC), in 1999 (from 1997-1999). **Since**

1999 – I have been an **Attorney-at-Law in TT**. I am also an **Education Consultant** and for a number of years I travelled back and forth between TT and London to share my expertise as an Education Consultant.

In 2003, before **Synod** here in the Archdiocese, Sr Roberta and Sr Juliet, HFC Sisters, told me that Archbishop Gilbert wanted to see me. At a meeting with the 3 of us, he asked me if I would accept the position as **Episcopal Delegate/Chair of The Catholic Commission for Social Justice, in the** Archdiocese of Port of Spain. I don't know how I left the room saying "Yes". I had so many other plans, but God had work for me to do here. I had bought a 7 bed-room house with a water feature in the living room and a swimming pool. I wanted to open a Retreat Centre. At Synod, Archbishop Gilbert stated that this would be a new position, and that he may not appoint a priest or a man to the post. I sat among the participants at Synod realising that I had to change my plans if I wanted to serve in the Archdiocese.

Another time when I felt like returning to London to live was when I worked with Fr Jason Gordon, now Bishop Gordon in Barbados & SVG, when he ran the Pride in Gonzales Project to reduce crime there and to regenerate that area. On my way to one of the meetings he had organised, a group of youths surrounded my car and started rocking it - trying to turn it over with me in it. I never prayed so hard! It was a Good Samaritan who was going to the same meeting that I was who intervened and told them to leave me alone. The young people said that they were "just kicksing"!

From 2003 to 2007, I was also a member of the Police Service Commission – appointed by the then President George Maxwell Richards. Sadly, to date, there continues to be many deficiencies in our Police Service. Many recommendations have been made over the years that, if implemented, would enhance its performance. We need visionary leaders if we are to build a strong Police Service. Indeed, visionary leadership is needed for all our institutions. It was George Best who stated years ago that TT is in a state of "pre-collapse". We need people at the helm who would dedicate their lives to lift this nation out of the morass in which we find ourselves.

I left CCSJ in March 2006 after the issue re CCSJ's Media Release about the then Chief Justice issue. Those were difficult days. That was another time when I saw my face on the front cover, this time, of a daily Newspaper. It read: "Ramdeen must go."

I tendered my resignation, but Archbishop Gilbert refused to accept it. It must be remembered that the "offending" media release was approved by all members of CCSJ, some of whom resigned afterwards. After my departure from CCSJ in

March 2006, Fr. Michael Moses was appointed to replace me. As you know, he passed away in March 2008. Shortly afterwards Archbishop Gilbert asked me if I would take up the position once again. After an internal battle with myself, and remembering that I had returned to TT to serve, I said: “Yes” once again and today I am still in this position.

When President Anthony Carmona appointed me as a Lay Assessor on the Equal Opportunity Tribunal in March 2015, I met with Archbishop Harris to inform him that this was a full-time position but that the Chairman had informed me that he had no objections to my working on CCSJ part-time. His Grace told me to continue doing what I was doing! So, here I am. I must say that the daily grind of travelling from Tacarigua to Chaguanas, then to Archbishop’s House, and back again at nights, is tiring, but the Holy Spirit fills me with courage and stamina!

The Equal Opportunity Tribunal is the first of its kind in the region. The Tribunal is a Superior Court of Record and has the status of a High Court. There is one other Lay Assessor and a Chairman who is a Judge. Together we adjudicate on matters. See our judgments on tteot.org .

In today’s fast-changing world, you may have more than one career in your lifetime. Do not be afraid to launch out in new directions as you journey on. Knowledge is transferable. As you will note from what I have said, I have had a number of careers to date and continue to accept with humility all that God sends my way. Even when I thought I would retire, God sent me on another journey. If you commit to work in God's vineyard, as I have done, then you must say: "Here I am, Lord, send me!" I have found it useful to evaluate myself regularly - discern and build on your strengths and work on my weaknesses.

Along your life’s journey, remember to assist others. We live in a world in which there is much selfishness and greed. Too many are only concerned about their own personal aggrandisement. I know that all of you at HFC will be true servant-leaders; shining models of selfless-service. Too often 'service' is seen as a weakness. As a Eucharistic people, we are called to serve; to encounter Christ in others. Along my journey, I accepted invitations to **volunteer** for a number of positions. For example:

(see above - **1984 – 1986** Chair of Cardinal Hume’s Advisory Group on the Catholic Church’s Commitment to the Black Community in Westminster. The group produced the report: “*With you in Spirit?*” Some of the recommendations contained in the report were implemented e.g. the establishment of C5 – see below)

Since 1984 Feature speaker at numerous events in TT and abroad.

* Lecturer in Britain and Europe on issues such as: Education, Justice and Peace, Inter-Faith dialogue/cooperation, Ecumenism and Theology.

1986– 1989 Member of the Education Committee of the Arts Council of Britain.

1986 – 1997 Vice-Chair of Cardinal Hume’s Committee for the Caribbean Community (C5). The Cardinal was the Chair during his lifetime. Asked by the Cardinal to attend a number of major events during this period e.g.

* was one of Westminster’s representatives at the European-wide Ecumenical Event (4 days) in Basle, Switzerland on the theme: *Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation*.

* was invited by the British Council to speak in Madrid at a European-wide Conference on *The Education of Children from Minority Ethnic Communities*.

1986 – 1988 Member of Committee established by Cardinal Hume to produce Equal Opportunities Guidelines for Catholic Schools in Westminster. Title of Guidelines - *Learning from Diversity*.

1988 – 1997 Member of the UK’s Catholic Bishops Conference: *Committee for Community Relations* (National Body).

1988 – 1993 Chair of the London Region Society of Chief Inspectors and Advisors of Schools (covering 35 Local Education Authorities across London).

1989 – 1991 Vice-Moderator of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland: Churches Commission for Racial Justice. Continued as a member of the Education Committee until 1997. During this time the Committee played a major role in producing study packs entitled: “*One Race*”, for use in parishes, schools etc. across England and Wales in preparation for/marking Racial Justice Sunday – an annual event in England.

1989 – 1995 Foundation Governor of Cardinal Vaughan Secondary School, W14 (appointed by the late Cardinal Hume).

1989 – 1997 Chair of Westminster’s Asian, African and Caribbean Catholic Committee.

1989 – 1991 Member of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, UK.

1989 - Keynote speaker with Cardinal Hume at the first *Congress of Black Catholics* in the UK.

* Assisted in planning the Congress and producing the Congress Report with the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ).

* Member of CARJ since 1980

* Invited in 2003 to play a key role – Congress Reporter - at the second such CARJ Congress which was open to all ethnic groups.

1980s - 1990s:

* Member of a Committee established by the ILEA to ensure that schools involved in the Notting Hill Carnival were doing so in an appropriate manner – across the curriculum and with a concern, inter alia, to promote students' achievement.

* Judge at the Notting Hill Carnival on a number of occasions (including 2016) – on the streets as well as at the Gala to judge best: King, Queen, Male and Female Individuals and so on. I Chaired the Panel of Judges on one occasion.

1990 - 1997 Member of the Mary Seacole Memorial Association, UK (Jamaican nurse – heroine during the Crimean War)

1992 – 1994 Co-Chair of the UK's Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA) - (Cross-Party Alliance). Ken Livingstone, former MP and former Mayor of London, was the other Co-Chair.

1994 – 1997 Co-President of UK's National Black Alliance of Asian, African & Caribbean Organizations (NBA).

1995 – 1997 Vice-President of The National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR)

* NAAR, ARA and the NBA were responsible for arranging for individuals such as Jesse Jackson and Maya Angelou to come to England to address the public on racial justice issues.

1994 – 1997 * Member of the Council of Management of 'Christians Aware', International Ecumenical Organization in the UK.

* Member of the National Board of Catholic Women: England and Wales

* Executive member of English ARC (Anglican and Roman Catholic Relations).
Part of International Organization: ARCIC.

1988 – 1992 One of the ‘Women of the Year’ invited to attend the ‘Women of the Year Luncheon’ organized each year by the Marchioness of Lothian at the Savoy Hotel, London.

1994 – 1997 Chair of the Indo-Caribbean Cultural Association, UK.

1994 – 1997 Chair of the Board of Trustees: Mahogany Arts Ltd., Charitable Organization, UK

1994 – 1996 Member of the UK Lawyers’ Christian Fellowship (President: Lord Chancellor).

1986 – 1997 Counsellor: Young Offenders in London

1988 – 1997 Mentor: Affiliated to a number of Mentoring programmes in London

Since 1988 Author of numerous articles/chapters in books e.g. ‘Catholics in Public Life’, ‘The Rising Tide’ (about my contribution – and that of others - to the Inner London Education Authority), ‘Contemporary Issues in Catholic Education,’(book published following International Symposium on Catholic Education held at the Von Hugel Institute, Cambridge University, UK, at which I was a contributor).

Since 1999 I have been writing on a weekly basis on social justice issues in TT and worldwide. Many of these articles have been published in the print media.

* I wrote a weekly column in the Trinidad Guardian, from May 2003 - July 2008, focusing specifically on social justice issues.

* I write a weekly column in TT's Catholic News.

2003 - 30 Jun 2007: Member of the *Police Service Commission* in T&T (1 of 5 persons). Appointed by the then President of the Republic of TT, His Excellency, George Maxwell Richards.

Since 2004: Member of the Education Discussion Group (EDG) in TT – established by the late Prof John Spence. I am the current Chair of EDG which

aims “to encourage exchange of views on the relevance of education to the causes and effects of the country’s problems with a view to solving them systematically.” The group comprises 20 prominent Educationalists in T&T.

2004-2007: Member of the *Parole Introduction Committee*. Appointed by TT's Cabinet, inter alia, to determine the kind of infrastructure that will be required if TT is to introduce Parole.

Since 2001: Director of Credo Foundation for Justice, Trinidad. Charitable organization run by the Holy Faith Sisters (4 homes for socially displaced children). * Associate member of the Holy Faith Sisters.

(Mar 2003 –Mar 2006 and 1 Dec 2008 to Present: Episcopal Delegate/Chair of TT’s Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ). Information regarding the work undertaken by the Commission can be accessed on its website: www.rcsocialjusticett.org.)

* *As part of my work on CCSJ, I produce a monthly TV programme entitled: Ask Why - focusing on social justice issues (TT Channel 10).*

Since 2010: Facilitator of the Catholic Archdiocese’s VIRTUS Programme: Protecting God’s Children (www.virtus.org/)

2007 – Present: Director on Board of the Social Justice Foundation – The Good News Project (TGN Media) – Youth training Youth in Sustainable Skills for the Knowledge industry of the future. Providing training in all aspects of Communication Technology using all current and future media for Communications, Video Production, Radio Broadcast, Still Photography, Internet and Computer Technology Applications. TGN Media offers full services as a Production House. The Team’s work is focused on TT’s Rural Communities and on the region as a whole. Once again, TGN Media has 2 new entries in TT’s annual **Film Festival in 2013:** “Mystery of the Soucouyant” and “Glorious Childhood Games: Back in D’ Day”.

2008 to Present: Director on Board of Directors of the Catholic Religious Education Development Institute (CREDI) (see:<http://credi.edu.tt>). – a Catholic Tertiary Level Education Institution in TT.

June 2009 -2015: Honorary Member of the Inner Wheel of St Augustine, Trinidad, a local chapter of the International Inner Wheel club (the sister organisation of the Rotary Club) – engaged in charitable works.

2013 – Oct 2015: Board Member of the Faith Based Network of TT (FBNTT). The mission of FBNTT is to address issues relating to *health and family life* through collaborating with individuals, communities and organizations to improve the quality of life of persons living in Trinidad and Tobago.

Involvement:

* **September 22 – 27, 2015:** Was part of the Archdiocesan team of 3 persons, led by Bishop Robert Llanos, who attended the 8th World Meeting of Families (WMOF) held in Philadelphia, USA. Also participated in activities relating to Pope Francis' visit to that city from September 26–27 as he ended his six-day visit to the United States. The theme of the WMOF was *Love is our Mission: The Family Fully Alive*.

* **May 21 – 24, 2015:** Represented the Archdiocese of Port of Spain at an International Conference held in Rome from May 21 – 24 entitled: *Women and the post-2015 development agenda – The challenges of the Sustainable Development Goals*. The Conference was organised by Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP), The World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO) and the World Women's Alliance for Life and Family (WWALF).

* **October 24 – 27, 2013:** Represented the Archdiocese of Port of Spain at:
a. an international conference held at the Vatican entitled "*New Anthropological Horizons and the Rights of the Family*", on October 24. It was organised by the Pontifical Council for the Family (PCF). I was fortunate to meet Pope Francis during his private audience with PCF Members and Consultors.

b. a pilgrimage of 150,000 families (including single persons) from around the world to the Tomb of St Peter for the Year of Faith. The theme of the pilgrimage was "*Family, Experience the joy of Faith*." The Pilgrimage concluded on Oct 27 when Pope Francis presided at a Mass in St Peter's Square in the midst of those who had gathered from around the world.

* Represented Archbishop Edward Gilbert and now, Archbishop Joseph Harris (TT) at various meetings/events in Trinidad and Tobago e.g. In December 2012 I represented the Archdiocese at a Conference entitled: *Human Rights, International Law & the Family* – held in Kingston, Jamaica and organised by the Jamaica Coalition for a Healthy Society.

* **October 17-19, 2011**, in Madrid: Participated in the First International Conference on *The Death Penalty in the Great Caribbean*. It was organised by The Community of Sant'Egidio, in collaboration with the International Commission Against the Death Penalty, the International Academic Network for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, the Bar Association of Puerto Rico, The Puerto Rican Coalition Against The Death Penalty, and the Death Penalty Project. The Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation sponsored the Conference.

This led to the formation of a Working Group of 5 persons, including me: **The Greater Caribbean for Life (GCFL)**. I helped to organise an International Conference on 1 Oct 2013 in Trinidad and Tobago (TT) on the Theme: *The Death Penalty: neither right, nor effective*. Partners in this initiative included: Community of Sant'Egidio, and the World Coalition against the Death Penalty. On 2 Oct 2013 GCFL was formally constituted at a meeting in TT and I was elected **Chair of the organisation (GCL)**. GCFL's ultimate goal is to achieve the permanent abolition of the death penalty in every country of the Greater Caribbean and the creation of a culture of respect for the human right to life and the inherent dignity of all human beings. See: www.facebook.com/GCFLife .

* **May 16-18, 2011**: Represented the Archdiocese of Port of Spain, TT, at an International Congress in Rome - organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, on the Theme: *Justice and Globalization: From Mater et Magistra to Caritas in Veritate* (to mark the 50th Anniversary of Mater et Magistra). We had a private audience with Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

* **March 20-21, 2009**: Was the sole representative from the Caribbean at a conference at the Vatican, entitled *Life, Family, and Development: The Role of Women in the Promotion of Human Rights*. It was organized and sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (Cardinal Martino), the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations and the Rome-based World Women's Alliance for Life and Family.

* **February 14, 2007**: Appeared with Fr Leonard Alfonso on Fr Mitch Pacwa's 1 hour TV programme on EWTN, Alabama, USA to discuss pro-life issues.

* **October 28 – 29, 2005**: Sole representative from the Caribbean at an International Conference organised by The Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace in Rome on the theme: *Women, Development and Peace in 2005*.

* **October 27, 2004:** One of 2 Caribbean delegates at the first World Congress of Ecclesial Organizations Working for Justice and Peace. It was organized by The Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace in Rome. The other Caribbean representative was former Archbishop Kelvin Felix, St Lucia. We had a private audience, together with other delegates, with the late Blessed John Paul II.

* **December 14-15, 2004:** Represented the Holy See at the Sixteenth Meeting of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board, Montego Bay, Jamaica and reported on the proceedings to the Papal Nuncio in TT for onward transmission to the Vatican. See:

http://data.unaids.org/governance/PCB03/pcb_16_04_16_report_en.pdf

Awards: While our duty as Catholics is to serve selflessly, God does not want us to decline all offers of awards that are offered to us. Over the years I have received a number of awards, the most significant being:

* **2007:** in recognition of my contribution during my tenure as a member of the Police Service Commission, Trinidad & Tobago (2003-2007)

* **2005:** Papal Medal for representing the Holy See at a UN/AIDS Conference in Jamaica in 2005.

* **1994:** Catholic Woman of the Year in the UK (for working to promote Racial Justice).

* **December 8, 2012:** *Archbishop Anthony Pantin Award* in the category of *Social Work and Community Development*. I was one of 31 individuals and organisations recognised by the archdiocese for our “humble contribution to nation and Church.” This was part of the Archdiocese’s celebration of the 50th Anniversary of TT’s Independence.

* **January 26, 2014:** Award from the Inter Religious Organisation (IRO) in TT – presented at the IRO’s National Day of Prayer & Thanksgiving 2014: "For your selfless cooperation to the IRO in our many initiatives in serving the Nation and your loyal and dedicated service to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago”.

* **January 10, 2015:** Received the Bharat Samman Pravasi Award for Community Development from the Non-Resident Indians (NRI) Institute in New Delhi, India.

And in all that you do, remember to try to balance your life – family, work, play. For example, my interests are: Theatre, music, writing children's stories, international relations, and travelling.

**I wish to remind you that learning is a lifelong process. By now all of you will have learned that life is not perfect. There will be disappointments as you go forward. Some of the greatest scientists, thinkers, inventors, business people, public figures, musicians, writers, artists and athletes did not succeed the first time they tried. My message to you is: 'Never give up!'... Remember the words of the author, JK Rowling: "It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all - in which case you fail by default." We can learn from our failures, and grow and develop. You will face many challenges as you journey on. However, your faith, and the grounding you have received both at home and at HFC, will help you to weather any storm. Believe in yourself and in your ability to face the future with confidence.

It was Nehru who said that achievement requires character, discipline, united action and the readiness to sacrifice the individual self for the larger cause. As you journey on, reflect on whether or not you are ready to do this to achieve your goals. Corruption plagues communities around the world today. Do not fall prey to corruption. Guard your reputation, your honour jealously. As Iago said in Shakespeare's play: Othello (Act 3, Sc 3, 155-161) "Good name in man and woman, dear my lord, Is the immediate jewel of their souls. Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing; 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands; But he that filches from me my good name Robs me of that which not enriches him, And makes me poor indeed."

Today, we are the Body of Christ in the world and each of us must strive to live our faith by acting on the biblical mandate given to us. As the Body of Christ, let us show mercy out of love rather than duty e.g. to build community; to strengthen family life; to address poverty and social exclusion as well as deficiencies in our various institutions.

The following words should form our breastplate prayer: 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 liberty to captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To let the oppressed go free, and To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4: 18 -19).

Never let your achievements make you indifferent to the needs of others. As St Teresa of Avila said: *“Christ has no body but yours. No hands, no feet on Earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which He looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world.”*

I have produced a **handout with some tips** which you may find useful as you journey on. May you be creative, innovative, ethical and resourceful, and may you stay rooted in your faith as you journey on. Strive for excellence in all that you do. And do not forget to plough back some of your time, talent and treasure to take your school and our beloved T&T forward.

Go forth and break the proverbial glass ceiling and let your light shine like a beacon in our troubled world. Stand up for your dignity. I affirm each of you and thank God for the gift that you are.

I thank you.

FEMININE GENIUS

In his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The joy of the Gospel - on the Church's primary mission of evangelization in the modern world), Pope Francis stated:

"The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess. I think, for example, of the special concern which women show to others, which finds a particular, even if not exclusive, expression in motherhood. I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because “the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace” and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures (103).

What does the Church mean by ‘feminine genius’?

In March, the Holy Father, in addressing an international audience of men and women religious, reminded those gathered that it is important to ensure that women have a voice and are listened to, he said, because the Church needs their specific contributions.

“When we men are dealing with a problem, we arrive at a conclusion, but if we deal with the same problem along with women, the conclusion could be different. It could lead along the same path, but would be richer, stronger, more intuitive,” he said. “Women in the Church must have this role,” because the Church needs “the feminine genius”.

There are 2 documents which you should read – both written by **Pope St John Paul II’s**. The first is his landmark apostolic letter for women,

- - **Mulieris Dignitatem** (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women (August 1988).

As one writer says, in this letter he introduced the concept of ‘feminine genius’, which began “a quiet revolution of a new feminism characterized by an integration of gospel values.”

In 1995 St Pope John Paul II wrote a Letter to Women in which he said:

“Thank you, every woman, for the simple fact of being a woman! Through the insight which is so much a part of your womanhood you enrich the world's understanding and help to make human relations more honest and authentic.” He goes on to say: and she finds in her a source of constant inspiration. He ended his letter by praying: “May Mary, Queen of Love, watch over women and their mission in service of humanity, of peace, of the spread of God's Kingdom!”

At a press conference on July 28, 2013, Pope Francis said:

"A Church without women is like the college of the Apostles without Mary. The role of women in the Church is not simply that of maternity, being mothers, but much greater; it is precisely to be the icon of the Virgin...what helps make the Church grow!...I believe that we have much more to do in making explicit this role and charisma of women in the church...We need to develop a profound theology of womanhood."

On Oct 12 2013, on the Commemoration of the 25th anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, he said:

"Woman has a particular sensitivity to the 'things of God', above all in helping us understand the mercy, tenderness and love that God has for us. I also like to think of the church not as an 'it' but as a 'she'. The Church is woman, she is mother, and this is beautiful. You must consider and go deeper into this."