

## Mercy and the Environment (Lenten Retreat, St Philips and St James, Chaguanas on 24 Feb 2016)

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Good afternoon brothers and sisters. (The theme of the Retreat is "**The Lord is generous and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**" Ps 145:8 . The two preceding talks on the Monday and Tuesday are respectively, The Mercy of God and The Dispensation of God's Mercy. My Talks on the 24th and 25th are respectively, **Be Merciful to ourselves** and **Be Merciful to our environment.**

Today we will focus on the theme: *Be merciful to our environment.* A key social justice principle is care of God's creation/stewardship of our environment. Our Catechism tells us that we must show "respect for the integrity of creation" (CCC, 2415) and to use the Earth's natural resources prudently. See: Environmental stewardship in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: See 340, 1333, 1359, 1361, 1604, and 2415.

Show video clip: <http://catholicearthcare.org.au/project/laudato-si-an-urgent-appeal-for-action/> ("Here at Catholic Earthcare Australia, we have celebrated the very first World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation by releasing this short video *Laudato Si' – An urgent appeal for action.* It features a number of Catholic leaders offering a unique Australian perspective on Pope Francis' new Encyclical *Laudato si'* (read our full [media release](#)). It is our hope that this video will act as a catalyst for reflection and action across Australia.")

**\*In Psalm 24:1** we read: "To God belong earth and all it holds, the world and all who live in it." In Genesis 2, verse 15, it is written "God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

The writer Patrick Carolan says: "In response to the wonderful gift that God has given us of clean air, life-sustaining water, fruits from the land's harvests and even nourishment from the sea, we are called to not only honour God for these many blessings but to also do so by honouring his creation... We need to recover the spiritual values that respect God's creation."

We know that we do not have a good track record of caring for God's creation; His gift not only to us, but to those who will come after us. Sadly, there is clear evidence that humankind does not honour God's gift of our environment. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church is critical of human beings' "pretension of exercising unconditional dominion over things" (n. 461). The environment, it says, should not be reduced "to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited... A correct understanding of the environment prevents the utilitarian reduction of nature to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited. At the same time, it must not absolutize nature and place it above the dignity of the human person himself... (n 463).

“The bonds that unite the world to God have...been broken. This rupture has also resulted in separating human beings from the world and, more radically, has impoverished human beings’ very identity. They find themselves thinking that they are foreign to the environmental context in which they live. The consequences resulting from this are all too clear: ‘it is the relationship human beings have with God that determines their relationship with each other and with their environment...There is a need to place ever greater emphasis on the intimate connection between environmental ecology and ‘human ecology’”(n464, 466). See also: 457 and 487.

We should heed the words of St Pope John Paul II who said in his 1990 World Day of Peace Message: Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation – also known as: The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility:

“The ecological crisis is a moral issue...There is a growing awareness that world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflict, and injustices among people and nations, but also by a lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources which leads to a progressive decline in the quality of life. The sense of precariousness and insecurity that such a situation engenders is a seedbed for collective selfishness, disregard for others and dishonesty.”

And on 17 Jan 2001 he said:"It is immediately evident that humanity has disappointed divine expectations - humiliating the earth, our home. It is necessary, therefore, to stimulate and sustain ecological conversion."

In 2007 Pope Benedict XVI warned us that: “Our earth speaks to us, and we must listen if we want to survive.” And in his 2010 World Day of Peace Message entitled: If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation he reminded us that: "The Church has a responsibility towards creation...Our present crises...require us to rethink the path which we are travelling together. Specifically they call for a lifestyle marked by sobriety and solidarity.”

He posed some pertinent questions which we should all address:

- “Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions?
- Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of ‘environmental refugees,’ people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it – and often their possessions as well – in order to face the dangers and uncertainties of forced displacement?
- Can we remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources?”

He said: "It is becoming more and more evident that the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyle and the prevailing models of consumption and production, which are often unsustainable from a social, environmental and even economic point of view... Protecting the natural environment in order to build a world of peace is thus a duty incumbent upon each and all. It is an urgent challenge, one to be faced with renewed and concerted commitment; it is also a providential opportunity to hand down to coming generations the prospect of a better future for all."

And what has **Pope Francis** been saying about this crisis? It is worth noting, as Catholic News Service states (<http://www.arkansas-catholic.org/news/article/4518>) "Mercy, the family and the environment topped the list of topics repeatedly and insistently discussed by Pope Francis and Catholic leaders across the globe in 2015." Indeed, at his inaugural Mass on 19 March 2013, he said: "I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be 'protectors' of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature."

On Nov 26 2015, just before the UN organized Paris Climate Conference (Nov. 30-Dec. 11 2015) which had the aim of achieving a legally binding and universal agreement on measures to stem climate change and protect the environment, Catholic News Service reports Pope Francis as saying: "The international community is facing a stark and serious choice, "either to improve or to destroy the environment."

"It would be sad, and I dare say even catastrophic, were special interests to prevail over the common good," the pope said Nov. 26 during a visit to the headquarters in Nairobi of the U.N. Environment Program and U.N. Habitat, an agency concerned with urban planning.

(Pope Francis spoke at length about the importance of the conference during his visit to the U.N. offices, and his top aides had a meeting the evening before with Kenya's environment minister and other officials to discuss their hopes and strategies for the Paris meeting. On his way into the meeting with U.N. officials and diplomats accredited to the two U.N. agencies, Pope Francis planted a tree.

While his speech contained ample quotes from his June encyclical on the environment, the pope also referred several times to the significance of planting trees and borrowed several lines from a speech he made in Bolivia in July to a variety of grassroots movements advocating for justice for the poor. In fact, just as in the encyclical, "Laudato Si'," the pope insisted in Nairobi that there is a close connection between environmental destruction and unjust economic and political policies that penalize the poor.

"We are faced with a great political and economic obligation to rethink and correct the dysfunctions and distortions of the current model of development," he said, especially because of their emphasis on exploiting natural resources, but not sharing the benefits with local

communities. Planting a tree, he said, is an "invitation to continue the battle against phenomena like deforestation and desertification," as well as "an incentive to keep trusting, hoping and above all working in practice to reverse all those situations of injustice and deterioration which we currently experience."

The Paris conference, the pope said, "represents an important stage in the process of developing a new energy system which depends on a minimal use of fossil fuels, aims at energy efficiency and makes use of energy sources with little or no carbon content."

Pope Francis told those gathered at Nairobi's U.N. offices that he hopes the Paris conference will result in a "global and 'transformational' agreement based on the principles of solidarity, justice, equality and participation; an agreement which targets three complex and interdependent goals: lessening the impact of climate change, fighting poverty and ensuring respect for human dignity."

To achieve a comprehensive and fair agreement, he said, real dialogue is necessary among politicians, scientists, business leaders and representatives of civil society, including the poorest sectors of those societies.

Pope Francis insisted that human beings are capable of changing course, choosing what is good and making a fresh start. The key, he said, will be to put the economy and politics at the service of people, who are called to live in harmony with the rest of creation.

"Far from an idealistic utopia, this is a realistic prospect which makes the human person and human dignity the point of departure and the goal of everything," he said.

A new respect for human dignity and for the environment are part of the same attitude of giving value to all that God made, he said. Pope Francis called for "the adoption of a culture of care - care for oneself, care for others, care for the environment - in the place of a culture of waste, a throw-away culture where people use and discard themselves, others and the environment."

The idea of a "throw-away culture" is not simply a strong figure of speech, he said, pointing to "new forms of slavery, human trafficking, forced labor, prostitution and trafficking in organs." "Many lives, many stories, many dreams have been shipwrecked in our day," the pope said. "We cannot remain indifferent in the face of this. We have no right." (CNS)

\*The Catholic Church has always been concerned to protect and promote what Pope Francis, in his encyclical, *Laudato si*, calls: “integral ecology” that sees the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, political, social, cultural, and ethical issues. Human and environmental ecology are both inextricably linked. He says: “everything is closely related” and “today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis...

“Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature...we are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental...Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” In such an “economic ecology,” the protection of the environment is then seen as “an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.” if we want to know “why a given area is polluted,” we must study “the workings of society, its economy, its behavior patterns, and the ways it grasps reality.” And in considering solutions to the environmental crisis, we must “seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems.”

I urge you to read this encyclical '*Laudato Si*' - *Praised be to You: On the Care for Our Common Home*. It was released on 18 June 2015. CCSJ distributed to parishes a summary of the encyclical in our June 2015 Newsletter and it can be accessed online also under “Parish Link”. I have distributed some copies of the Newsletter.

This 192-page document calls for global action on climate change and environmental degradation a moral imperative for all humans. “In the encyclical — the first in the Church’s history to confront the environment — the pope assailed the consumerism and wastefulness of modern life, linking stewardship of the natural world with justice for ‘the poorest and most vulnerable people’ and calling for a transformation of economic systems and political policies in order to avert environmental catastrophe” (environment.yale.edu).

Mary Evelyn Tucker, Yale Univ (a senior lecturer and research scholar at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies (F&ES) and the Yale Divinity School and Co-Director of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology) says that: “the message calls for an “integral ecology” that brings together concern for people and the planet. The pope is saying to the world that climate change brings moral change. The health of both people and the planet will require a transformation toward care for creation and concern for future generations.”

The title of the encyclical is taken from St Francis of Assisi's Canticle of the Creatures which reminds us that the earth, our common home "is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us." As the Holy Father says: “This encyclical is aimed at everyone: Let us pray that everyone can receive its message and grow in

responsibility toward the common home that God has given us.” The encyclical is a wake-up call and a call to dialogue and action.

Several main themes run through the text of *Laudato Si*. These themes are addressed from a variety of different perspectives:

- \*the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet,
- \*the conviction that everything in the world is connected,
- \*the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology,
- \*the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress,
- \*the value proper to each creature,
- \*the human meaning of ecology,
- \*the need for forthright and honest debate,
- \*the serious responsibility of international and local policies,
- \*the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle (16).

At the heart of *Laudato si* is the question: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?...We need only recall how ecosystems interact in dispersing carbon dioxide, purifying water, controlling illnesses and epidemics, forming soil, breaking down waste, and in many other ways which we overlook or simply do not know about.”

He lists various aspects of the crisis that we face e.g. climate change, deforestation and loss of habitat, water quality and water shortages, the extinction of species, fossil fuels and so on. He says that if we want to know “why a given area is polluted,” we must study “the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality....the pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world.”

And in considering solutions to the environmental crisis, we must “seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems.” So, for example, we in TT need to change our habit of throwing things out of our car windows or as we walk along – clogging up drains, waterways etc and when the rain comes we are then amazed

that we are inundated with floods! (Read extracts from Paulo Kerhanan's article in his column in the Guardian (13 Feb 2016) entitled: "Why are we so nasty?")

Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si* (215): "Humanity is called to take note of the necessity of changes in lifestyles, of production and of consumption, to combat this [global] warming, or at least the human causes that produce it or accelerate it. I urgently appeal...for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all... we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor... All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start."

What are some of the ways in which we in TT contribute to the degradation of our environment - locally and internationally (e.g. black exhaust fumes - no enforcement of legislation; waste water - see Ads - save water - we are in dry season; no value for flora and fauna - some species in TT almost extinct - pawi etc. Do we really appreciate our natural surroundings? Just go to Manzanilla, Maracas etc and see how people just dump their rubbish on the beaches. Indiscriminate quarrying and cutting of our hillsides/mountainsides - rain washes away the soil - landslides, clogging of waterways.

The Church's social teaching requires us to take action; to swim against the tide. Please visit CCSJ's website and read our 2010 document entitled: *The draft framework towards an Environmental Policy for the Archdiocese of Port of Spain*. In the foreword of the document, our then Archbishop Edward Gilbert, said:

"Unless people are properly motivated, there is little hope they will persevere in the long term process of protecting and sustaining the environment. Resolution 6 from the Synod gives three practical ways for teaching and witnessing to the theology of the Church on the Environment: the family, the school and the parish... The journey of environmental education and action will not be easy. Although consensus is developing among scientific experts, we shall have to face challenges: indifference among the general population and even resistance due to national, regional and international economic pressures. However, Gospel values must be preached. It is our responsibility to future generations to use every means at our disposal to preach it well."

There are 2 key Pastoral Letters from Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (2003 and 2005) which will help us to address environmental issues from a Caribbean perspective also: "Stewardship and the revitalization of parish life in the Caribbean" and "Caring for the Earth – Our responsibility." The Bishops recognize that "stewardship" is a wider concept than using time, talent and treasure to build up parish communities. They said: "The truth is that all human

beings are called to be stewards, stewards of God's gift of creation, the primary sacrament of His love. To thankfully take responsibility for the integrity of creation is an important part of what it means to be made in God's image (Genesis 1, especially 26-31). We constantly need to be reminded, and to proclaim to the world: 'The earth and its fullness belong to the Lord, the world and all that dwell in it.' (Psalm 24:1) We are all in the world not as owners but as tenants and stewards...God is sovereign of all that exists and has instilled in every creature, including humans, laws and purposes which must be observed

\* Various Conferences of Bishops around the world have produced relevant Pastoral Letters on this issue e.g. see: *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching: A Pastoral Statement of the United States Catholic Conference, November 14, 1991* . <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/renewing-the-earth.cfm>

This Pastoral Letter provides a helpful framework for parishes, schools and communities. The goals of the Statement are:

1. "to highlight the ethical dimensions of the environmental crisis;
2. to link questions of ecology and poverty, environment and development;
3. to stand with working men and women and poor and disadvantaged persons, whose lives are often impacted by ecological abuse and tradeoffs between environment and development;
4. to promote a vision of a just and sustainable world community;
5. to invite the Catholic community and men and women of good will to reflect more deeply on the religious dimensions of this topic; and
6. to begin a broader conversation on the potential contribution of the Church to environmental questions."

As the **US Bishops** state: "The web of life is one. Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human. Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of all of creation."

Seven themes of ecological responsibility: In their Statement the US Bishops propose 7 themes of ecological responsibility. These themes, which are drawn from Catholic social teaching, are useful for "religious teaching and moral debate" (Bishops of New Mexico):



- “a God-centered and sacramental view of the universe, which grounds human accountability for the fate of the earth;
- a consistent respect for human life, which extends to respect for all creation;
- a worldview affirming the ethical significance of global interdependence and the common good;
- an ethics of solidarity promoting cooperation and a just structure of sharing in the world community;
- an understanding of the universal purpose of created things, which requires equitable use of the earth's resources;
- an option for the poor, which gives passion to the quest for an equitable and sustainable world;
- a conception of authentic development, which offers a direction for progress that respects human dignity and the limits of material growth.”

**The Australian Catholic Bishops** said in their 2002 Pastoral Letter entitled: *A new Earth - the environmental challenge*: "Because we are part of God's creation, human beings are connected with all creatures, the natural world, indeed the whole universe. The two accounts in Genesis show that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, and are to be responsible for the care of all creation, a God-given role which, as Christians, we must take seriously. Human greed, violence and selfishness have a destructive impact, on people and the environment. Wherever sin and its consequences in the world have fractured our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others, and with the whole of creation, reconciliation is needed..."

"In justice, it is an urgent task for Christians today to be reconciled with all creation, and to undertake faithfully our responsibility of stewardship of God's gifts. To achieve such reconciliation, we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God's creation through our actions and our failure to act. We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart. God calls us to turn away from wrongdoing and to behave in new ways...we have an ethical duty to respect the gifts of creation, to give thanks for them, and to use them in accord with the will of God, as best we can interpret it....In (St) Pope John Paul II's words, 'Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power; contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and serenity.'"

Creation is the work of God and is God's gift to us. We are asked during this Year of Mercy – and always, to be “merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful”. We human beings did not do anything to deserve all the many gifts that God has given to us. We receive these gifts because of the mercy of God. As stated in Genesis 1, God created everything – the heaven, the earth, the

birds, the plants, the land, the ocean, and “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

Man and woman were created in God’s image and likeness and given the responsibility to “cultivate and care for” God’s Creation (Genesis 2:15). Our Church has always urged humankind to care for, preserve, develop and restore the environment. The teaching of the Magisterium on this issue is clear. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church reminds us that we are charged to care for “its harmony and development.” (n. 451).

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”. And in Colossians 1:15-20 we read: “all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross.”

We are one human family and while we seek to address environmental issues that impact on us now, let us remember that we are not to hand over to future generations God’s creation depleted of its resources. (cf. Gen 1:4,10,12,18,21,25). (Gen 1,27). Gen 1:31), (cf. Gen 1:26-30). The “common good” includes a concern for those who will come after us. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis quotes *Gaudium et Spes*, the Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" which defines the common good as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment.”

As Thomas Reese says, "the common good calls for respect for the human person as well as the overall welfare of society and the development of a variety of intermediate groups. It requires social peace, stability and security, 'which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice' (*Laudato Si*). For Pope Francis it is obvious that “where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.”

Pope Francis’ vision of integral ecology and the common good includes justice between generations. In *Laudato Si* he says that “the world is a gift we have freely received and must share with others.” This includes future generations. “The world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.” Or as the Portuguese bishops, whom he quotes, said, the environment “is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next.”

"This interconnectedness means that 'environmental exploitation and degradation not only exhaust the resources which provide local communities with their livelihood, but also undo the

social structures which, for a long time, shaped cultural identity and their sense of the meaning of life and community.' In various parts of the world, he notes, indigenous communities are being pressured 'to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture.' Pope Francis also talks about the ecology of daily life 'in our rooms, our homes, our workplaces and our neighbourhoods.' We attempt to shape our environment to express our identity, but 'when it is disorderly, chaotic or saturated with noise and ugliness, such overstimulation makes it difficult to find ourselves integrated and happy.'"

As Reese notes, Pope Francis "also calls for a 'social ecology' that recognizes that 'the health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life.'" This includes the primary social group, the family, as well as wider local, national, and international communities. When these institutions are weakened, the result is injustice, violence, a loss of freedom, and a lack of respect for law -- all of which have consequences for the environment. Pope Francis also argues that it is important to pay attention to 'cultural ecology' in order to protect the cultural treasures of humanity. But 'Culture is more than what we have inherited from the past; it is also, and above all, a living, dynamic and participatory present reality, which cannot be excluded as we rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment.'"

Are we committed enough, as disciples of Jesus, to meet the challenge that the Holy Father has thrown out to us? If we love God and all His creation, we will acknowledge our interconnectedness/interdependence. Rejecting our "throwaway" culture requires us to change our mindsets; to have a radical conversion of hearts, minds and lifestyles. A major theme in the encyclical is the link between poverty and the earth's fragility. Environmental degradation impacts adversely on the poor above all. Dialogue and education, says Pope Francis, are the two keys that can "help us to escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us". We need courageous leadership at all levels to build right relationships. Let us join hands as we set out on the "long path of renewal"; as we embark on new paths to authentic freedom."

The Australian Bishops rightly stated in their 2001 Pastoral Letter: "Action is needed on many fronts. The principle of subsidiarity suggests that responsibility for decision-making and action should be kept as close as possible to those most directly affected by a decision or a policy. Individuals, community groups, governments at all levels, businesses and faith communities all have roles to play.

"Politicians and public servants can do much to protect and rejuvenate our ecosystems and natural resources. Stronger environmental protection legislation, accelerated research into safe and renewable energy sources, further education in ecological responsibility, programs to

address pressing environmental issues such as global warming, land clearing, salination and the sustainable management of natural resources are all needed.

"Retraining and new employment opportunities are needed for workers displaced by such changes. When we vote... individuals and community groups can encourage, support and challenge governments by assessing the environmental policies of the different candidates.

"Consumers and traders can promote environmentally healthy practices by exercising their right of choice and advising a business of the reason for their decision. Shareholders, too, should use their votes responsibly on corporate resolutions and the election of board members. Those in leadership and managerial roles, from family firms to transnational corporations, are encouraged to demonstrate ethical business practices and good corporate governance.

"The Pope makes it very clear that it is: A serious abuse and an offence against human solidarity when industrial enterprises in the richer countries profit from the economic and legislative weaknesses of poorer countries, to locate production plants or accumulate waste which will have a degrading effect on the environment and on people's lives.

"Community and conservation groups have already done much to raise our awareness of environmental issues and to advocate policies to protect the integrity of creation...

"Catholic parents, as the primary teachers of their children, can help them discover the wonders of nature. Catholic parishes, schools, dioceses and organisations have an essential role to play. They are challenged to be examples of best practice in ecological stewardship."

### **Some environmental issues in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T):**

"We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future...We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations." (Earth Charter)

**Promotion of Biodiversity and eco-tourism:** We are blessed in T&T with rich biological diversity but we must do more to conserve it. The United Nation has declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity. Inter alia, the aim is to educate and to raise public awareness of the reasons for conserving biodiversity. During 2010 the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) in T&T will organize a number of activities and programmes to "enhance public education and awareness and to promote the protection of biodiversity." The EMA states in its 2010 Calendar:

“Biodiversity is the foundation upon which all human life is maintained. Yet, biodiversity loss is occurring at a rapid rate. Over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems faster and more extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history. Species are going extinct at 1,000 times the rates typical of Earth’s past.”

As part of T&T’s plan to develop tourism T&T is promoting eco-tourism. Yet some areas of our environment are under threat.

**Threats to T&T’s environment:** 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, for example:

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; and unplanned construction.”

An increase in the unmanaged development of hillsides is causing environmental, social and economic problems in Trinidad and Tobago. Improved environmental awareness and deepening environmental concerns in recent years have focused attention on the need to move towards a more sustainable pattern of development.” (Baban, SMJ, Thomas, D, Canisius, F & Sant, KJ 2007, 'Managing development in the hillsides of Trinidad and Tobago using geoinformatics', Sustainable Development).

“Slash and Burn” (cutting down and burning trees in order to clear land for temporary agriculture) which is practised in T&T as a method of farming, can harm biodiversity, pollute the air and make the ground infertile. “Forest fires have taken their toll on Trinidad’s forests, especially on the slopes and ridges of the Northern Range. Most are the products of ‘slash and burn’ agriculture, which has consequently led to large areas of secondary growth forest... Mining which results in a loss of topsoil, vegetation and fauna is of particular environmental concern.” (The Encyclopaedia of Earth: [www.eoearth.org/article/Trinidad\\_and\\_Tobago\\_dry\\_forests](http://www.eoearth.org/article/Trinidad_and_Tobago_dry_forests)).

**Some endangered species in T&T:** While T&T is blessed with a wide range of flora, fauna and wildlife, there are a number of endangered species in T&T, for example, the gentle manatee. The Encyclopedia of the Nations states: “On the west coast of Trinidad is the Caroni Bird Sanctuary, famed for its marshland and mangroves, where flocks of scarlet ibis roost. Little Tobago is reputed to be the only place aside from New Guinea where the bird of paradise lives in the wild. Endangered species on Trinidad include the Trinidad piping guan, tundra peregrine falcon, loggerhead turtle, and red siskin.”

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in T&T The United Nations Development Programme ([www.undp.org.tt/environment/index.html](http://www.undp.org.tt/environment/index.html)) , working in T&T, says: “From reforestation to ecological crop management, the environmental assistance needed in Trinidad and Tobago spans far and wide.... The tranquility of Trinidad's Northern Range and North Coast belies problems of watershed degradation, coastal erosion and pollution which are typical of many Small Island Developing States.”

**See article: Giving hope to our endangered species**

**TT Guardian:** Sunday, May 17, 2015 <http://www.guardian.co.tt/lifestyle/2015-05-17/giving-hope-our-endangered-species> See extracts below:

“In 2014, there were 2,464 animals and 2,104 plants that have been labelled “critically endangered” and therefore face a high risk of extinction in the wild. (International Business Times, UK)

Among the top five critically endangered species is the hawksbill turtle, which is an annual visitor to our twin islands...

The hawksbill is a critically endangered sea turtle found in the tropical reefs of the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. The turtles have a distinctive pattern of overlapping scales on their shells which have made them highly valuable and commonly sold as “tortoiseshell” in markets...These ancient creatures are 100 million years old and are a fundamental link in marine ecosystems, helping to maintain the health of coral reefs and seagrass beds.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, widely recognised as the most comprehensive, objective global approach for evaluating the conservation status of plant and animal species, T&T is home to over ten species of concern. Among these includes the critically endangered and environmentally sensitive species, the pawi or pipile pipie.

The Environmental Management Authority (EMA) is embarking on a national survey to gauge the public’s awareness of the pawi and of its current status in Trinidad...The pawi is endemic to Trinidad, with estimates in 2001 indicating a population of 77 to 200 individuals. Much of its known remaining habitat has been designated as a national park under the protection of the Matura Environmentally Sensitive Area (Mesa).

Other fauna species which are environmentally sensitive in T&T include **the ocelot, the West Indian manatee, the white-tailed sabrewing hummingbird and sea turtles, namely: the olive ridley, the green, loggerhead, leatherback and the hawksbill.**

In addition to the EMA’s designation of Environmentally Sensitive Species, the National Wildlife Policy, 2013, provides guidance on the sustainable management of undomesticated animals and plants found in T&T, whether introduced, resident or migratory, their parts or derivatives thereof, and their habitats. (see article for objectives of the Policy).

Education and sensitisation is probably the best option to encourage people particularly within rural communities to abstain from hunting protected species and rather become part of the drive to safeguard these amazing creatures.

Other simple practices such as hunting within the prescribed season—October 1, to the end of February—catching only the specified number of game, size and type of game available during the season; opting to abstain from wild meat for a year or two, or even exploring options of game farming.

Both flora and fauna species require a committed, strategic and sustainable intervention to protect what we have left and to encourage proliferation of what was lost.

Some of the major direct and indirect causes for wildlife loss in T&T include:

- Increasing transformation of remaining natural areas to industrial, and commercial landscapes
- Forest fires, which remove soil-stabilising vegetation on hillsides
- Quarrying (strip mining for sand, limestone and gravel)
- Agriculture and residential squatting, including marijuana cultivation in forested areas
- House construction on sensitive hillsides or in forested areas; unsustainable agricultural practices (slash and burn, overuse of agricultural chemicals); invasive alien species; pollution of rivers, coastal and marine waters; natural disasters such as storms, hurricanes, drought, floods etc, coastal erosion; unsustainable extraction of wildlife, including illegal logging, illegal hunting and overhunting (of game and protected species), and over harvesting of non-timber forest products (eg, herbs, horticultural species and raw materials for craft) and
- Weak legislation and poor enforcement of existing wildlife conservation regulations.”

**What are some of the other practical things that you and I can do to promote environmental stewardship?** See examples below:

• **Pray, Reflect on the story of Creation in Genesis.** As individuals or in study/prayer groups/parish groups, pray for a conversion of heart – what St. Pope John Paul II called an “ecological conversion”.

• **Look around, discover and reflect on the beauty of God’s creation and of our connection to it – locally and globally.**

‘Ever since the creation of the world, God’s eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been seen through the things God has made’ (Romans 1:20). In his 1990 Message for World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul II wrote: “Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power; contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and serenity”. The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns ([www.maryknollogc.org](http://www.maryknollogc.org)) states that:

“...we must learn again to love this Earth, to take time to be present to the beauty and mystery of the planet that is our home. It is within this amazing but damaged biosphere that we live and move and have our being. We cannot destroy it without destroying the life it holds within it. Contemplation of the sacredness of Earth is one step towards changing our presence from threat to healing... sharing our concerns, reflections, and actions with others can help move our consciousness to a more integrated way of understanding the natural world as we work to reframe our traditional Catholic Social Teaching within the perspective of this Earth that is our home”

The following verse taken from Marjorie Padmore’s song,

“God bless our Nation,” is useful for reflection on the natural gifts that God has bestowed upon us in Trinidad and Tobago: “God bless our isles of tropic beauty rare Of flaming poinciana And shady immortelle The warm and sparkling waters That beat upon our shores Beat out a tune that seem to tell We take a pride in Our Liberty.” Reflect also on the line in T&T’s National Anthem: “...this our native land, we pledge our lives to thee...”

- 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/ 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 Justice, Peace and Community Week in October 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).

- Play your part individually and as a parish to reach out to the "least of our brothers and sisters" – particularly since human ecology and environmental ecology are inextricably linked.

Do visit CCSJ's website also to read our document on the environment. We list a series of resources that you can access for further information.

During this Lenten season, not only should we give up certain things, but we should take on things - like responsibility for promoting good stewardship of God's creation. If each of us play our part, we will go a long way to protect God's gifts to us.

Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth. Psalm 104:30.

You will now have an opportunity to ask me questions or make comments on today's theme.

I thank you.

(share environmental card and Newsletters)