



PARISH LINK



MESSAGE FROM LEELA RAMDEEN, CHAIR, CCSJ

On behalf of all members of CCSJ, I would like to wish you all a grace-filled New Year. May the Love and Peace of Christ fill our hearts and inspire us to be credible witnesses to the faith that we proclaim, throughout 2011 and beyond.

In this Newsletter, CCSJ shares with you extracts from the text of Pope Benedict XVI's message for the 44th World Day of Peace, which was observed on January 1st 2011. Since 1968 our Popes have shared a message of peace on the first day of each year. This year the Holy Father chose the theme: "Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace."

At the Press Conference which was held when the Pope's Peace Message was released, Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, said that the Pope chose this theme "because the living of religious freedom – a basic vocation of humankind and a fundamental, inalienable and universal human right, and key to peace – has come under great stress and threat."

Our society in Trinidad and Tobago is enriched by the presence of various faith communities. Religious freedom, which the Pope calls "a weapon of peace", is enshrined in our Constitution. Our National Anthem states that in TT "every creed and race find an equal place". However, we are all aware of the need to work towards achieving equity and equality so that no one is left behind. This is a work in progress as poverty and social exclusion impacts adversely on the lives of many in TT.

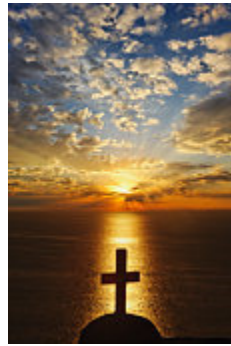
Promoting mutual respect between people of different faiths is an ongoing process. We are fortunate in TT to have an *Inter-Religious Organisation* which facilitates dialogue. The Pope sees dialogue as a vehicle for us to promote religious freedom through mutual respect e.g. dialogue between followers of different religions and dialogue between civil institutions and religious institutions which, he says, "is fundamental for the integral development of the human person and social harmony".

The Pope reminds us that "the right to religious freedom is rooted in the very dignity of the human person." While we in TT are aware of the benefits of living in a multi-faith society, religious intolerance in various parts of our world today is rampant. The Pope's message gives us an opportunity to reflect on the goal of achieving religious freedom as part of our efforts to build peace in our troubled world.

It is important to note that while Pope Benedict believes that "the great religions can serve as an important factor of unity and peace for the human family," he condemns religious fundamentalism and any form of hostility to believers of any faith. As people of the Beatitudes, as peacemakers, we should study the Pope's Peace message and be inspired by the wisdom of his words.

CCSJ encourages you to read the following extracts and reflect on the message with your family and with individuals/groups in your parish community. You can access the entire message on CCSJ's website: www.rcsocialjusticett.org . CCSJ will be focusing on the Pope's Peace Message on our monthly TV programme, Ask Why, on Tuesday 25 January from 8 pm – 9 pm.

Extracts from Pope Benedict XVI's World Day of Peace Message: *Religious Freedom, The Path to Peace.*



1. Religious intolerance - a threat to security and peace

The Pope sees religious freedom as “the litmus test for the respect of all the other human rights (5).” It is with sadness that he notes that 2010 has been marked “by persecution, discrimination, terrible acts of violence and religious intolerance...It is painful to think that in some areas of the world it is impossible to profess one’s religion freely except at the risk of life and personal liberty. In other areas we see more subtle and sophisticated forms of prejudice and hostility towards believers and religious symbols.”

He says, “Christians are the religious group which suffers most from persecution on account of its faith...This situation is unacceptable, since it represents an insult to God and to human dignity; furthermore, it is a threat to security and peace, and an obstacle to the achievement of authentic and integral human development...”

2. *A sacred right to life and to a spiritual life*



“The right to religious freedom is rooted in the very dignity of the human person, whose transcendent nature must not be ignored or overlooked. God created man and woman in his own image and likeness. For this reason each person is endowed with the sacred right

to a full life, also from a spiritual standpoint. Without the acknowledgement of his spiritual being, without openness to the transcendent, the human person withdraws within himself, fails to find answers to the heart's deepest questions about life's meaning, fails to appropriate lasting ethical values and principles, and fails even to experience authentic freedom and to build a just society.”

3. *Religious freedom and mutual respect*



“Religious freedom is at the origin of moral freedom. Openness to truth and perfect goodness, openness to God, is rooted in human nature; it confers full dignity on each individual and is the guarantee of full mutual respect between persons...A freedom which is hostile or indifferent to God becomes self-negating and does not guarantee full respect for others.”

4. *The family, the school of freedom and peace*



“If religious freedom is the path to peace, *religious education* is the highway which leads new generations to see others as their brothers and sisters, with whom they are called to journey and work together so that all will feel that they are living members of the one human family, from which no one is to be excluded.

The family founded on marriage, as the expression of the close union and complementarity between a man and a woman, finds its place here as the first school for the social, cultural, moral and spiritual formation and growth of children, who should always be able to see in their father and mother the first witnesses of a life directed to the pursuit of truth and the love of God. Parents must be always free to transmit to their children, responsibly and without constraints, their heritage of faith, values and culture. The family, the first cell of human society, remains the primary training ground for harmonious relations at every level of coexistence, human, national and international. Wisdom suggests that this is the road to building a strong and fraternal social fabric, in which young people can be prepared to assume their proper responsibilities in life, in a free society, and in a spirit of understanding and peace.”



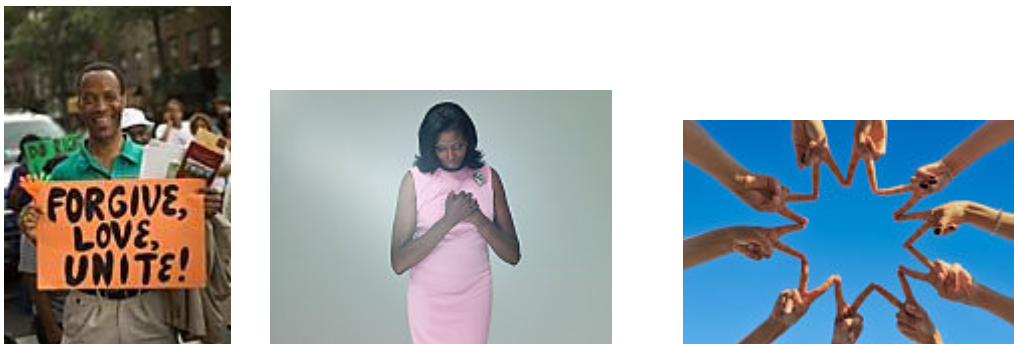
5. *A common patrimony*



“When religious freedom is acknowledged, the dignity of the human person is respected at its root, and the *ethos* and institutions of peoples are strengthened. On the other hand, whenever religious freedom is denied, and attempts are made to hinder people from professing their religion or faith and living accordingly, human dignity is offended, with a resulting threat to justice and peace, which are grounded in that right social order established in the light of Supreme Truth and Supreme Goodness...

“The international order thus recognizes that rights of a religious nature have the same status as the right to life and to personal freedom, as proof of the fact that they belong to the *essential core* of human rights, to those universal and natural rights which human law can never deny. *Religious freedom is not the exclusive patrimony of believers, but of the whole family of the earth’s peoples.*”

6. *The public dimension of religion*



“*Religious freedom, like every freedom, proceeds from the personal sphere and is achieved in relationship with others. Freedom without relationship is not full freedom.* Religious freedom is not limited to the individual dimension alone, but is attained within one’s community and in society, in a way consistent with the relational being of the person and the public nature of religion... The contribution of religious communities to society is undeniable. Numerous charitable and cultural institutions testify to the constructive role played by believers in the life of society. More important still is

religion's ethical contribution in the political sphere. Religion should not be marginalized or prohibited, but seen as making an effective contribution to the promotion of the common good." While recognizing that "religion is a positive driving force for the building of civil and political society", the Pope warns against the enemies of religious freedom – "Fanaticism, fundamentalism and practices contrary to human dignity."

7. *Religious freedom, a force for freedom and civilization: dangers arising from its exploitation*



"The exploitation of religious freedom to disguise hidden interests, such as the subversion of the established order, the hoarding of resources or the grip on power of a single group, can cause enormous harm to societies. Fanaticism, fundamentalism and practices contrary to human dignity can never be justified, even less so in the name of religion. The profession of a religion cannot be exploited or imposed by force. States and the various human communities must never forget that religious freedom is the condition for the pursuit of truth, and truth does not impose itself by violence but "by the force of its own truth". In this sense, religion is a positive driving force for the building of civil and political society...

The sincere search for God has led to greater respect for human dignity. Christian communities, with their patrimony of values and principles, have contributed much to making individuals and peoples aware of their identity and their dignity, the establishment of democratic institutions and the recognition of human rights and their corresponding duties.



Today too, in an increasingly globalized society, Christians are called, not only through their responsible involvement in civic, economic and political life but also through the witness of their charity and faith, to offer a valuable contribution to the laborious and stimulating pursuit of justice, integral human development and the right ordering of human affairs. The exclusion of religion from public life deprives the latter of a dimension open to transcendence.”

8. *An issue of justice and civility:
fundamentalism and hostility to believers compromise the positive secularity of states*



“...religious fundamentalism and secularism are alike in that both represent extreme forms of a rejection of legitimate pluralism and the principle of secularity. Both absolutize a reductive and partial vision of the human person, favouring in the one case forms of religious integralism and, in the other, of rationalism. A society that would violently impose or, on the contrary, reject religion is not only unjust to individuals and to God, but also to itself. God beckons humanity with a loving plan that, while engaging the whole person in his or her natural and spiritual dimensions, calls for a free and responsible answer which engages the whole heart and being, individual and communitarian.

Society too, as an expression of the person and of all his or her constitutive dimensions, must live and organize itself in a way that favours openness to transcendence. Precisely for this reason, the laws and institutions of a society cannot be shaped in such a way as to ignore the religious dimension of its citizens or to prescind completely from it. Through the democratic activity of citizens conscious of their lofty calling, those laws and institutions must adequately reflect the authentic nature of the person and support its religious dimension. Since the latter is not a creation of the state, it cannot be manipulated by the state, but must rather be acknowledged and respected by it.

Whenever the legal system at any level, national or international, allows or tolerates religious or antireligious fanaticism, it fails in its mission, which is to protect and promote justice and the rights of all.”

9. *Dialogue between civil and religious institutions*



“With due respect for the positive secularity of state institutions, the public dimension of religion must always be acknowledged. *A healthy dialogue between civil and religious institutions* is fundamental for the integral development of the human person and social harmony.”

10. *Living in love and in truth*



“In a globalized world marked by increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies, the great religions can serve as an important factor of unity and peace for the human family. On the basis of their religious convictions and their reasoned pursuit of the common good, their followers are called to give responsible expression to their commitment within a context of religious freedom. Amid the variety of religious cultures, there is a need to value those elements which foster civil coexistence, while rejecting whatever is contrary to the dignity of men and women...”

Christians, for their part, are spurred by their faith in God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, to live as brothers and sisters who encounter one another in the Church and work together in building a world where individuals and peoples shall not hurt or destroy...”

11. *Dialogue as a shared pursuit*



“For the Church, dialogue between the followers of the different religions represents an important means of cooperating with all religious communities for the common good. The Church herself rejects nothing of what is true and holy in the various religions...

The Church...’proclaims, and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (*Jn 14:6*); in Christ, in whom God reconciled all things to himself, people find the fullness of the religious life’. Yet this in no way excludes dialogue and the common pursuit of truth in different areas of life...

The year 2011 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *World Day of Prayer for Peace* convened in Assisi in 1986 by Pope John Paul II. On that occasion the leaders of the great world religions testified to the fact that religion is a factor of union and peace, and not of division and conflict. The memory of that experience gives reason to hope for a future in which all believers will see themselves, and will actually be, agents of justice and peace.”

12. *Moral truth in politics and diplomacy*



“Politics and diplomacy should look to the moral and spiritual patrimony offered by the great religions of the world in order to acknowledge and affirm universal truths, principles and values which cannot be denied without denying the dignity of the human person.”

13. *Beyond hatred and prejudice*



“Despite the lessons of history and the efforts of states, international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and the many men and women of good will who daily work to protect fundamental rights and freedoms, today’s world also witnesses cases of persecution, discrimination, acts of violence and intolerance based on religion.

There also exist...more sophisticated forms of hostility to religion which, in Western countries, occasionally find expression in a denial of history and the rejection of religious symbols which reflect the identity and the culture of the majority of citizens. Often these forms of hostility also foster hatred and prejudice; they are inconsistent with a serene and balanced vision of pluralism and the secularity of institutions, to say nothing of the fact that coming generations risk losing contact with the priceless spiritual heritage of their countries.

Religion is defended by defending the rights and freedoms of religious communities. The leaders of the great world religions and the leaders of nations should therefore renew their commitment to promoting and protecting religious freedom, and in particular to defending religious minorities; these do not represent a threat to the identity of the majority but rather an opportunity for dialogue and mutual cultural enrichment.”

14. *Religious freedom in the world*

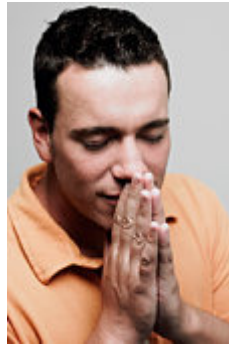


“Finally I wish to say a word to the Christian communities suffering from persecution, discrimination, violence and intolerance, particularly in Asia, in Africa, in the Middle East and especially in the Holy Land, a place chosen and blessed by God. I assure them once more of my paternal affection and prayers, and I ask all those in authority to act promptly to end every injustice against the Christians living in those lands. In the face of present difficulties, may Christ’s followers not lose heart, for *witnessing to the Gospel is, and always will be, a sign of contradiction.*

Let us take to heart the words of the Lord Jesus: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted ... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied ... Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven” (*Mt 5:4-12*). Then let us renew “the pledge we give to be forgiving and to pardon when we invoke God’s forgiveness in the *Our Father*. We ourselves lay down the condition and the extent of the mercy we ask for when we say: ‘And forgive us our debts, *as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us*’ (*Mt 6:12*)”.

Violence is not overcome by violence. May our cries of pain always be accompanied by faith, by hope and by the witness of our love of God. I also express my hope that in the West, and especially in Europe, there will be an end to hostility and prejudice against Christians because they are resolved to orient their lives in a way consistent with the values and principles expressed in the Gospel.”

15. *Religious freedom, the path to peace*



“The world needs God. It needs universal, shared ethical and spiritual values, and religion can offer a precious contribution to their pursuit, for the building of a just and peaceful social order at the national and international levels.

Peace is a gift of God and at the same time a task which is never fully completed. A society reconciled with God is closer to peace, which is not the mere absence of war or the result of military or economic supremacy, much less deceptive ploys or clever manipulation. Rather, peace is the result of a process of purification and of cultural, moral and spiritual elevation involving each individual and people, a process in which human dignity is fully respected. I invite all those who wish to be peacemakers, especially the young, to heed the voice speaking within their hearts and thus to find in God the stable point of reference for attaining authentic freedom, the inexhaustible force which can give the world a new direction and spirit, and overcome the mistakes of the past...

Religious freedom is an authentic weapon of peace, with an *historical* and *prophetic mission*. Peace brings to full fruition the deepest qualities and potentials of the human person, the qualities which can change the world and make it better. It gives hope for a future of justice and peace, even in the face of grave injustice and material and moral

poverty. May all men and women, and societies at every level and in every part of the earth, soon be able to experience *religious freedom, the path to peace!*”

Questions for discussions - from Education for Justice (www.educationforjustice.org)

1. In what ways is religious freedom a safeguard of human dignity?
2. What are some of the current examples you can site in the world today that demonstrate a denial of the right to religious freedom?
3. What role can religion play in contributing positively to integral human development?
4. Why are the search for truth and religious freedom essential for promoting the common good?
5. How can the denial of religious freedom be a threat to security and peace?

On Jan 24, 2002, more than 200 leaders of the world’s 12 major religions (including Pope John Paul II) met in Assisi, Italy – the largest meeting of world religious leaders ever. As journalist David Waters said, they “talked and prayed. They unanimously agreed to condemn ‘every recourse to violence and war in the name of God or religion.’ They also said, ‘No religious goal can possibly justify the use of violence by man against man.’ And that, ‘Whoever uses religion to foment violence contradicts religion’s deepest and truest inspiration.’ They called their statement the *Assisi Decalogue for Peace*. It consists of 10 mutual commitments to work for peace and justice in the world.” On 24 Feb. 2002 the Pope sent a copy to all of the world’s heads of state – together with a covering letter. (See: www.vatican.va/.../hf_jp-ii_let_20020304_capi-stato_en.html).

Decalogue of Assisi for Peace

1. We commit ourselves to proclaiming our firm conviction that violence and terrorism are incompatible with the authentic spirit of religion, and, as we condemn every recourse to violence and war in the name of God or of religion, we commit ourselves to doing everything possible to eliminate the root causes of terrorism.
2. We commit ourselves to educating people to mutual respect and esteem, in order to help bring about a peaceful and fraternal coexistence between people of different ethnic groups, cultures and religions.
3. We commit ourselves to fostering the culture of dialogue, so that there will be an increase of understanding and mutual trust between individuals and among peoples, for these are the premise of authentic peace.
4. We commit ourselves to defending the right of everyone to live a decent life in accordance with their own cultural identity, and to form freely a family of his own.
5. We commit ourselves to frank and patient dialogue, refusing to consider our differences as an insurmountable barrier, but recognizing instead that to encounter the diversity of others can become an opportunity for greater reciprocal understanding.

6. We commit ourselves to forgiving one another for past and present errors and prejudices, and to supporting one another in a common effort both to overcome selfishness and arrogance, hatred and violence, and to learn from the past that peace without justice is no true peace.

7. We commit ourselves to taking the side of the poor and the helpless, to speaking out for those who have no voice and to working effectively to change these situations, out of the conviction that no one can be happy alone.

8. We commit ourselves to taking up the cry of those who refuse to be resigned to violence and evil, and we are desire to make every effort possible to offer the men and women of our time real hope for justice and peace.

9. We commit ourselves to encouraging all efforts to promote friendship between peoples, for we are convinced that, in the absence of solidarity and understanding between peoples, technological progress exposes the world to a growing risk of destruction and death.

10. We commit ourselves to urging leaders of nations to make every effort to create and consolidate, on the national and international levels, a world of solidarity and peace based on justice.

Social Justice Resources Now Available (Contact Lorna or Theresa on 290 1635)



Ask Why DVD Series:

- *Pope's 2010 Peace Message: If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation.* Panel: Msgr. Jason Gordon and Fr. Joe Harris. Presenter - Sr Teresa Vialva
- *Lenten Theme:* Panel: Mike James and Derek Walcott. Presenter – Sr Teresa Vialva
- *Draft framework towards an Archdiocesan Environmental Policy:* Panel: Leela Ramdeen and Wendy Lee Yuen. Presenter – Sr Teresa Vialva
- *Poverty and Social Exclusion:* Panel: Gary Tagallie, Natalie Alexis and Leela Ramdeen. Presenter – Sr. Teresa Vialva
- *Discussion on Draft framework towards an Archdiocesan Environmental Policy:* Nisha Ali, Science Teacher. Presenter – Sr Teresa Vialva
- *Values and Virtues Formation Programme:* Panel: Francisca Rousseau (Principal) and Joy Rush (Teacher) - Newtown Girls' RC School. Presenter – Sr Teresa Vialva
- *Respect for Life Week:* Panel: Anna Ackbarali, Richard Smith (CCSJ's Parish Link Coordinators). Presenter – Leela Ramdeen, CCSJ's Chair
- *Good Governance:* Panel – Boyd Reid and Diana Mahabir-Wyatt. Presenter - Sr Teresa Vialva
- *Morals and Values:* Panel: Msgr Robert Llanos and Surendra Arjoon. Presenter - Leela Ramdeen

- **Take-a-Bite DVD Series:** *Overview of Social Justice* – Msgr Jason Gordon, *Human life and dignity* – Sr Diane Jagdeo O.P., *Rights and Responsibilities* – Leela Ramdeen, *Stewards of God’s Creation* – Dr John Agard, *Global Solidarity* – Fr Malcolm Rodrigues.
- **Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching** (Kenneth R. Himes): \$80 TT
- **Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church** (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace): \$140 TT

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 Please send all correspondence and feedback to Leela Ramdeen, Chair,
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