

**RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES** (3<sup>rd</sup> in *Know Your Faith* series at Our Lady of Fatima Parish Hall, Curepe on Wed 27 June, 2012) (6.11 pm on Mon 25 June)

Leela Ramdeen, Chair, CCSJ

Good evening, brothers and sisters. It gives me great pleasure to be able to share with you this afternoon the Church's teaching on one of the Church's key social justice principles: *Rights and Responsibilities*.

I note that there have been 2 previous sessions in this series. Fr Ferdinand Warner has outlined *The historical development of Catholic Social Teaching* and Mr Gerard Tang Choon has focused on the theme: *Social Justice and Spirituality*.

Social Justice and Spirituality and Rights and Responsibilities are inextricably linked. And, as the Australian Catholic Bishops remind us: "There is also a close link between the Church's mission of evangelization and its defense and promotion of human rights."

We are called to develop a spirituality of justice; to build right relationships in our world; to build God's Kingdom of justice, peace, truth, love, freedom and forgiveness. We can only do this if we get the right balance between rights and responsibilities. So, let's reflect on the Church's teaching on this key social justice principle.

With rights come duties and responsibilities. As Catholics, when we think of rights and responsibilities, the first thing we should think about is: "Where do these rights come from? What are the origins of these rights and what are our duties – our duties towards God, our neighbour, to the wider community, to ourselves, and to all God's creation." We must never forget our duty to promote eco-justice and environment sustainability.

Blessed John Paul II said: "**Every generation needs to know that freedom consists not in doing what we like but in having the right to do what we ought.**" Encapsulated in this sentence are the issues of rights and responsibilities. We have rights but these rights relate to what we ought to do. So, not anything goes.

God imprinted a moral order in the hearts and minds of humankind and this should act as our moral compass. It is this order that should influence how we live our lives. We must reflect on the role of the Church, the role of our families, the role of the education system – our schools, the law, the media etc. to help us understand what our rights and responsibilities are.

We also need to understand the *relationship* between rights and responsibilities/duties and place these within a Catholic context. Too often people shout for their "rights" and pay little attention to their "responsibilities."

It is timely that we are discussing these issues. Only last Friday (22 June 2012), the Holy See made an excellent presentation at **Rio+20** (UN Conference on Sustainable Development – 20-22 June 2012) in Rio de Janeiro (see Appendices 1 & II)

You can google “The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church” and see **Section VI on Human Rights – para 152 to 159.**

The Compendium makes it clear in para 153 that **“the roots of human rights are to be found in the dignity that belongs to each human being (Gaudium et Spes)**...The ultimate source of human rights is not found in the mere will of human beings, in the reality of the State, in public powers, but in man himself and in God his Creator. These rights are “universal, inviolable, inalienable. *Universal* because they are present in all human beings, without exception of time, place or subject. *Inviolable* insofar as “they are inherent in the human person and in human dignity” and because “it would be vain to proclaim rights, if at the same time everything were not done to ensure the duty of respecting them by all people, everywhere, and for all people”. *Inalienable* insofar as “no one can legitimately deprive another person, whoever they may be, of these rights, since this would do violence to their nature”.

In his encyclical, *Pacem in Terris* (Peace Earth), Pope John XXIII made it clear that the foundation of all rights is linked to the fact that we are created in God’s image: “...each individual man is truly a person. His is a nature that is, endowed with intelligence and free will. As such he has rights and duties, which together flow as a direct consequence of his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable.”

**Blessed John Paul II** stated in his address at the General Assembly of the UN in 1979 that **“rights are bestowed on human beings by God and grounded in the nature and dignity of human persons. They are not created by society. Indeed society has a duty to secure and protect them.**

Our inherent dignity, therefore, does not depend on whether or not we are rich or poor, live in Westmoorings or Beetham, whether we are tall or short, black or white. Our dignity is inherent because it comes from God and because God made you and me in His image and likeness and because Jesus redeemed us by dying for us and then we are called to be in communion with him.

It is important to recognize that although we are born with dignity, it is also a **goal** that we have to achieve because we could diminish our dignity by sin. How do we fulfil this responsibility to attain this ‘goal’? By seeking the truth, by resisting sin, by practising virtue and by repenting whenever we sin. We all have human frailties. None of us live without committing some kind of sin. When we fall, we must get up, dust ourselves, repent and strive once more to live virtuous lives – to be more like God.

**Para 154** of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church states: “Human rights are to be defended not only individually but also as a **whole**: protecting them only partially would imply a kind of failure to recognize them...The first right ...is the right to life, from conception to its natural death” (Link to consistent ethic of life – You can’t say “I am pro-life but I support euthanasia or the death penalty.” All rights are indivisible so we have to protect them together. There is no a la carte menu in the Catholic Church.)

Human rights apply to every stage of human life and to every political, economic, social and cultural situation. I say this because at some stages in our lives as human beings, many feel they have no rights e.g. many elderly people feel that those around them are fed up with them. Some are placed in homes for the elderly and forgotten by their relatives. (See Minister of Health, Dr Fuad Khan's statement about the number of elderly persons who have been abandoned in hospitals or in St Ann's (600 out of 800 should not be at St Ann's, he says. Also refer to lack of regulatory framework for some of the 131 homes (85 operating – says Dr Khan). There is a high rate of amputations for diabetes – lack of proper care for those with diabetes etc.)

In some countries some who are sick or elderly feel they don't have a right to life – part of our 'throwaway society'. Today some people talk about the right to die. God gave life and only God should be able to take it away. "As of 2011, active euthanasia is only legal in the three Benelux countries: the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Assisted suicide is legal in Switzerland and in the US states of Washington, Oregon and Montana" (Wikipedia).

When we instill in the minds of our elderly and sick that they are burdens, and that they should have a right to die; when they feel they are burdens, some are travelling to far off countries to places where euthanasia is legal – to die – not with dignity, but to die because society makes them feel that without dying they won't be treated well by relatives or friends or the community.

We have a duty to change this culture of death that Blessed John Paul II talked about in *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life). The culture of death is so pervasive in our society that in order to promote human dignity and to promote human rights, we are the instruments of Christ in this world who have to fight against that culture of death.

### **Para 155 states that**

- *The teachings of Pope John XXIII, (Encyclical - Peace on Earth) – see attached;*
- *the Second Vatican Council, (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes, 26; and*
- *Pope Paul VI's Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations (4 October 1965) and his Message to the Bishops Gathered for the Synod (26 October 1974).*

have given abundant indication of the concept of human rights as articulated by the Magisterium. Blessed John Paul II has drawn up a list of them in the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus (The Hundredth Year)*:

1. ***“the right to life***, an integral part of which is the right of the child to develop in the mother's womb from the moment of conception;
2. the right to ***live in a united family*** and in a moral environment conducive to the growth of the child's personality;
3. the right to develop one's intelligence and ***freedom in seeking and knowing the truth***;
4. the right to ***share in the work*** which makes wise use of the earth's material resources, and to derive from that work the means to support oneself and one's dependents; and
5. the right ***freely to establish a family, to have and to rear children through the responsible exercise of one's sexuality.***

- And see attached Charter of Rights from Pope John XXIII's encyclical, *Pacem in Terris* – Peace on Earth (1963) - attached.
- Blessed John Paul II's Message on the World Day of Peace 1999 focuses on: Respect for human rights: *The secret of true peace*. See: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_14121998\\_xxxii-world-day-for-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_14121998_xxxii-world-day-for-peace_en.html)

**Para 157** of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church highlights **the rights of peoples and nations**: “The field of human rights has expanded to include the rights of peoples and nations: in fact, “what is true for the individual is also true for peoples.” The Magisterium points out that international law “rests upon the principle of equal respect for States, for each people's right to self-determination and for their free cooperation in view of the higher common good of humanity”. Peace is founded not only on respect for human rights but also on respect for the rights of peoples, in particular the right to independence.

“The rights of nations are nothing but “‘human rights' fostered at the specific level of community life”. A nation has a “fundamental right to existence”, to “its own language and culture, through which a people expresses and promotes ... its fundamental spiritual ‘sovereignty’”, to “shape its life according to its own traditions, excluding, of course, every abuse of basic human rights and in particular the oppression of minorities”, to “build its future by providing an appropriate education for the younger generation”. The international order requires a *balance between particularity and universality*, which all nations are called to bring about, for their primary duty is to live in a posture of peace, respect and solidarity with other nations.

**Rights and duties:** Para 156 of the Compendium states: ***Inextricably connected to the topic of rights is the issue of the duties falling to men and women.*** The mutual complementarities between rights and duties — they are indissolubly linked — are recalled several times, above all in the human person who possesses them. This bond also has a social dimension: “in human society to one man's right there corresponds a duty in all other persons: the duty, namely, of acknowledging and respecting the right in question”. *The Magisterium underlines the contradiction inherent in affirming rights without acknowledging corresponding responsibilities.* **“Those, therefore, who claim their own rights, yet altogether forget or neglect to carry out their respective duties, are people who build with one hand and destroy with the other”.**

So, for example, my right to swing my hands ends where your nose begins. I have no right to box you on your nose “just so”, as we say in TT. Human rights come with responsibilities and duties. We must exercise our rights in a way that respects the human rights of others. Thomas Paine, the English writer said: A Declaration of Rights is, by reciprocity, a Declaration of Duties also. Whatever is my right as a man, is also the right of another, and it becomes my duty to guarantee as well as to possess.”

The Church has always sought to educate the faithful, and indeed, the world, about our rights and responsibilities and have spoken out on these issues. For example, in 1891 Pope Leo XIII's

encyclical: *Rerum Novarum* – On the conditions of labour (Latin for: On New Things) focused on the "Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour". "It had discussed the relationships and mutual duties between labour and obtaining capital, as well as government and its citizens. Of primary concern was the need for some amelioration for "*The misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class.*" It supported the rights of labor to form unions, supported collective bargaining, rejected communism and unrestricted capitalism, whilst affirming the right to private property. In this document, Leo set out the Catholic Church's response to the social conflict that had risen in the wake of industrialization and that had led to the rise of socialism. **The Pope taught that the role of the State is to promote social justice through the protection of rights, while the Church must speak out on social issues in order to teach correct social principles and ensure class harmony.** He restated the Church's long-standing teaching regarding the crucial importance of private property rights, but recognized... that the free operation of market forces must be tempered by moral considerations... *Rerum Novarum* also recognized that the poor have a special status in consideration of social issues: the modern Catholic principle of the "preferential option for the poor" and the notion that God is on the side of the poor were expressed in this document... As a framework for building social harmony, Pope Leo XIII proposed the idea of rights and duties. For example, workers have rights and also have duties to their employers; likewise employers have rights and also have duties to their workers (Wikipedia).

It is important for us to learn about the key social justice principles in our Catholic tradition if we are to promote rights and fulfill our responsibilities. (See attached poster)

"The Church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about **building a just society** and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. (US Bishops). <http://old.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml>

### **KEY CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE PRINCIPLES:**

- 1. The Sanctity of Life and the Dignity of the Human Person**
- 2. The Common Good, family and Community**
- 3. Option for the Poor and the vulnerable: the moral test of a nation is how it treats its most vulnerable, and as the US Bishops said, the poor has the most urgent claim on the nation's purse.**
- 4. Rights and Responsibilities**
- 5. The role of Government and Subsidiarity**
- 6. Economic Justice :** The economy must serve people, not the other way around.
- 7. Stewardship of God's Creation:** how we treat the environment is a measure of our stewardship, a sign of our respect for God, the creator.

## 8. Promotion of Peace and Disarmament

**9. Participation:** “All people have a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community.”

## 10. Global Solidarity and Development

### 11. The dignity of work and the rights of workers

### 12. The universal destination of goods

Families and schools can do much to teach children about these principles. I recall speaking to **Ms Thora Best** recently. She is the Principal of Rose Hill RC Primary School in East Dry River, POS. Her annual graduation ceremony for SEA students also includes an appreciation ceremony to acknowledge the dignity of all students – whatever their academic ability. We have a duty to identify what students are good at and to “big them up” for that rather than make them feel they are failures if they are not academically inclined. This does not mean that we should not develop integral human development, as Pope Benedict urges us to do in his encyclical: God is love, but we must recognise, for example, that children do not all develop at the same time, and the gifts that some have will be different from those of their peers. If we are talking about duties, we all have a duty to promote integral human development. This means promoting the development of each dimension of a person and of each person. No one should be left behind.

If children are to fulfill their responsibilities, we must teach them about right and wrong. Thora tells me that she and her staff have 3 pillars of discipline that she promotes at her school. On a daily basis students are encouraged to: ***Aim high, Do unto others as you would have them do onto you, and Do the right thing because it is the right thing to do.*** This reminded me of C.S. Lewis’ statement that “Integrity is **doing the right thing, even when no one is watching.**” Fulfilling our responsibilities is linked to conscience formation. Our Catechism tells us that:

"Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment. . . . For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. . . . His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths... When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking." (1776, 1777).

My mother taught us, her children, to use a simple “barometer” when we are not sure how we should act in a certain situation. She said: “*Ask yourself: What would Jesus do in this situation?*” Of course, since we have free will, we may at times act irresponsibly/sinfully. However, we can reconcile ourselves to God and be restored to new life – through the sacrament of reconciliation/penance.

Children do not come to school as empty vessels. They often live what they learn at home. Parents are the first educators of their children. So home and school must work together to promote integral development of our children. It is in the family that our young people first learn moral and spiritual values and virtues which give meaning to their lives. Blessed John Paul II reminded us years ago that: “The future of humanity passes by way of the family.” He referred to the family as “a society in its own original right”, and the “first and vital cell of society.” It was **Winston Churchill** who said: *“There is no doubt that it is around the family and the home that all the greatest virtues, the most dominating virtues of human society, are created, strengthened and maintained.”*

And how are we preparing our boys for fatherhood and our girls for motherhood (give example of UWI Panel Discussion on Domestic Violence – girl – “If yuh love de man yuh go take de licks.”)

How are we socializing our youths? What are you doing in your own homes/parishes to ensure that you are instilling the right kind of values and understanding of rights and responsibilities in your young children, in your spouses, in the wider community. What is your role?

We have a responsibility to seek to influence our culture rather than allow it to mould us e.g. we have a responsibility at Carnival time to urge people to exercise self-control and modesty in dress and behaviour during the Carnival season. Our children are watching.

**Example – porn and boy in home.**

We live in a time when many people in TT are shirking their responsibilities. Many parents are shirking their responsibilities, many children are growing up without having the benefit of having their fathers in their lives. Children need both mother and father. Both parents have a responsibility for the precious gift(s) – chld(ren) - that God has given them.

(Give example of **22 year old man I met in restaurant** – sing song – 6 year old left at home with cell-phone to contact him.)

A few months ago I met a 22year-old man in a take-away restaurant. He was limping and his foot was bandaged. He told me he had been shot in the foot. He asked if I would give him some money if he sang me a song. I agreed. His song struck a chord in my heart. He sang about his life; a life of trials and tribulations. He sang about holding on to Jesus as the only one who could save him. And as we talked he received a call on his cell phone. It was his 6 year-old son whom he had left at home alone. “Doh worry bout he, man, he cool!” he said, as I expressed my concern for the welfare of his son. There are many families in T&T that are hurting and need healing. We live in a country in which many young children are left on their own. Leaving a cell phone with a young child so you can keep in touch while you’re out will not cut it as far as good parenting is concerned.

**Give example of boy released from YTC** – barrel child – how he became a bandit.

There are a number of issues relating to males in our society that we continue to ignore e.g. the lack of male role models at home, in schools, in communities; the emasculation of some of our

men; the prevalence of gangs and gang warfare – these gangs mainly comprise males; the fact that about 80% of students at UWI are female – where are our young men?

We need more role models and mentors in our communities. Who is guiding our youths? Often where there is a vacuum/gap, gangs step in, and, as Bishop Jason Gordon says, the gang becomes the ‘family’.

I note that the Minister of Education is introducing Character Education and Citizenry Development Programme. In our Catholic Schools, we continue to promote Catholic values and virtues. You will recall that CCSJ ran a *Values and Virtues Formation Programme* for post-SEA students for a few years. You can access the Students’ Workbook and the Teachers’ Guide on CCSJ’s website. The goal is to teach young people about values, virtues, morality and personal and social relationships in order to form their consciences and build their character; to form young people of the Archdiocese and Nation so they can, as Archbishop Gilbert said, “choose truth and authentic values for their lives.” That programme has now been incorporated in the RE curriculum. As Archbishop Gilbert used to say: Virtues inform values and values influence behaviour.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that: “*Virtue is a **habitual** and firm disposition to do good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself/herself ... ‘The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.’ (St Gregory of Nyssa)*” (no. 1803). (See also Part 3, Article 7, p 443-451 of the Catechism for references to “Virtue.”) St. Thomas defines virtue as “*a good habit bearing on activity.*” Therefore, students should be given the opportunity to practise values and virtues. They should understand, though, that not all habits are virtuous. The New Zealand Education Office Ltd. has produced a very helpful document entitled: *Taking the high ground: Virtues and Values in Catholic Schools* (see: <http://www.nzceo.catholic.org.nz/media/resources/publications/schools-valuesvirtues.pdf>). In this document Values and Virtues are defined as follows:

“**Values** are internalised sets of beliefs or principles of behaviour. Not all values are consonant with moral or ethical behaviour, even though they may be strongly upheld. Nor do people necessarily act in accordance with the values they hold.

“**Virtues** are qualities of moral goodness or excellence. Many virtues can be derived from universally accepted principles. To be effective, they need to be nurtured and practised so that individuals live by them, not merely believe in them.”

Our children can only live virtuous lives if we show them the way. So, our responsibility is to model virtuous behaviour at home, at school, in our communities/parishes.

Let me give you an **example** of what can happen when we abrogate our responsibility.

Once there was a **6 year old girl** who suffered from acute asthma. She attended a special school and a bus was provided by the local education authority to take her to and from school. Someone was employed by the authority to look after the children on the bus – to help them on and off the



bus and to administer their medicine if necessary. I'll call the employee Sarah (not her real name).

One evening the little girl's mother waited and waited but the bus did not stop at her house. Frantic, she rang the school. The headmistress contacted her class teacher, the bus driver and Sarah. No one remembered seeing her get on the bus. Indeed, Sarah was certain that she had not got on the bus that afternoon.

The police were contacted. Her mother's main concern was that her little girl may suffer an asthma attack and no one will be there to assist her. The person in charge of this area of work in the authority was contacted at home. I was that person.

As Deputy Director of Education/Head of Quality Assurance, I rushed to the area and asked if anyone had checked the school bus. No one had done so. At about 10.30 pm the little girl was found in the school bus; in a dark, cold bus garage weeping silently.

I Chaired the disciplinary panel that dealt with the issue and, on the evidence, I dismissed Sarah, particularly as she had a habit of not 'walking' the job but simply used to sit behind the driver chatting with him. She appealed and was reinstated. I could not understand how anyone hearing about Sarah's daily practice on the bus, and on the day in question, could overturn my decision. I do not want to go into the politics of the situation. I believe that I had acted correctly within my sphere of responsibility. As I said to the Chair of Education, we should not wait for a dead body before we act in the interest of the child. The woman lived in a rich part of the Borough – she was just earning 'pin money', while the child was from a poor family. I share this story to highlight the fact that when we accept responsibility there are only 3 options open to us: discharge them, resign or be dismissed.

There are **many social ills** that confront us in TT which deny citizens their rights e.g. economic injustice that can lead to poverty and social exclusion; crime and violence – including corruption (at all levels), incest, rape, domestic violence, human trafficking, abuse of the elderly, drug and substance abuse – including alcoholism - and illicit trafficking; breakdown of the family, poor health care, HIV/AIDS, injustice against the differently abled, unemployment/underemployment, deficiencies in the education system, suicide, depression, lack of adequate provision for the mentally insane and for socially displaced persons, bullying in schools, pornography, environmental degradation etc. . If we look at the global situation, people's rights are being violated with impunity daily through e.g. wars, euthanasia, oppressive Government action, cultural practices such as honour killing, gender selection, bonded and forced labour, ethnic and religious conflict, natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes etc.

The Social Exclusion Unit (1997) in England defines social exclusion as follows: "Social exclusion is a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown." These different dimensions of social exclusion are mutually reinforcing. Unless we address these issues, our nation will not make much progress.

As people of faith, we cannot afford to watch silently as the **gap between the rich and the poor** widens into a yawning gap. Our poverty level was 16.7% in 2005. Recently, Minister Ramadharsingh said at a Regional Meeting of Ministers of Social Development (UNESCO MOST meeting), that the figure now stands at 21.8%. It could be higher – see when the 2011 figures of the Survey of Living Conditions are published. Globally, more than 1 billion people live in poverty. Between 25,000 to 30,000 children die daily across the world due to poverty. It is said that the world has enough for people's needs but not for people's greed. Greed is what has brought us to this juncture in our history.

Christians will know of the parable of Dives and Lazarus. Well, right here in TT there are many families living like Lazarus waiting for the crumbs to fall from the table of rich people like Dives.

**And what about the rights of children? Give example of boy in school in Sangre Grande** – no level playing field – mother – ectopic pregnancy. No basic amenities.

Pope Paul VI referred to illiterate people as “**Starved spirits**”. Sadly, there are untold numbers of starved spirits in TT and in our world.

*Every child brings us God's smile and invites us to recognise that life is His gift, a gift to be welcomed with love and preserved with care always and at every moment.* (Pope Benedict XVI).

These words came to mind as I read about the pain that **6-year-old Josiah Governor** must have gone through at the hands of his 25 year-old stepfather, now before the Court charged with his murder. On January 25, he reportedly told police that he used a piece of PVC pipe to beat Josiah because he was not paying attention during a maths lesson. It is also alleged that Josiah was thrown through a window after being beaten.

In CCSJ's media release in January we reported on a case in which another man is alleged to have thrown a 10-month-old baby through a window because the child was crying. He also beat the baby's 3-year-old sister with a baton and beat their mother. It is an indictment on our T&T society that we continue to fail to protect our innocent, defenseless children.

The *Express* Editorial (Jan 25) sums up the situation in T&T:  
“In Josiah's death...the whole society is culpable. Josiah's family failed to fulfil their most basic duty — protect the life of their child. The community failed him, by refusing to get involved even to the extent of reporting the matter to the police. The teachers at Josiah's school failed, either by not noticing that anything was wrong, or failing to deal with the issue if they did notice. The social services failed from the time Josiah was born, by not identifying the mother and her baby as at-risk. And all the adults in Trinidad and Tobago who believe corporal punishment is justified have tacitly contributed to the cycle of violence which all too easily leads to the killing of children.”

As Dr David Bratt said in his Guardian column on 31 Jan 2012 entitled: “Lost children, every child for himself”: “Another bad week for children in T&T. We seem to be having so many of them: weeks of the lost children for whom no one speaks. ...the name, Joshua, will now join the

list of the Akiles, Seans, Daniels, Amy, Emilies, and so on, whose deaths we have come to regret.”

And since his article there have been more atrocities meted out to our children – e.g. 2 year old Aaliyah Johnson whose 18year old mother is now before the court for allegedly cuffing her in her stomach and rupturing her liver. She allegedly taught the child to drink beer and beat the child to death when she drank some of her beer. Where were all the religious people in the community? Who was looking out for the child? Today so many could say share the horror stories of this little child’s short life, yet no one came to her aid. We all have to take some of the blame. If we are not part of the problem, let’s become part of the solution.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, UK, states: “The future of any community depends on its ability to ensure the health and well-being of the next generation... All children deserve an equal opportunity to experience healthy growth and development. When child abuse and neglect interferes with that opportunity, we put our future at risk.”

While we need our Government to put in place and implement legislation, policies, a fully functional Children’s Authority and appropriate infrastructure to protect the nation’s children, we, our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, must also take action to promote justice for them. We can make a difference; we can prevent child abuse.

And what about the rights of our **elderly citizens**? Minister Fuad Khan, Min. of Health, said recently, “out of 800 elderly patients admitted to St Ann’s Hospital, 600 were what he described as “social cases” — people left to fend for themselves... There may be legitimate instances, among the hundreds of elderly people left behind in local hospitals, of families who are genuinely unable to care for their aged, but it’s possible that the public healthcare system, with the best of intentions, may be abetting scams to cheat infirm citizens out of their pensions and property.

Shaliza Hassanali’s report in The Guardian on 3 June states that “the same problem of abandonment exists at the Port-of-Spain General Hospital, the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex (EWMSC), the San Fernando General Hospital and at the gerontology unit at the St James Medical Complex. Health Minister Dr Fuad Khan on Thursday confirmed that the dumping of senior citizens is on the rise. Senior citizens are being dumped at public hospitals by relatives—some heading off on holidays, others unable to cope with the pressure and stress of being full-time caregivers.... Khan said some patients at St James have been living there between 20 and 30 years. ”

And see problems e.g. re diabetes and leg amputations in some of these homes for the elderly. **Sadly**, there appears to be no regulatory systems to monitor the quality of care in homes for the elderly. A significant number of senior citizens in some of these homes have had one of their legs amputated because they have diabetes and it appears that the necessary care is not forthcoming in some of these homes. According to Dr Kenwyn Nicholls who is working with CCSJ on a Project entitled: *Diabetes: Prevention and Management*, we have one of the highest levels of amputations in the Western hemisphere per capita due to diabetes.

Recently (12 March 2012), Director of the Diabetes Outreach Programme with the Trinidad and

Tobago Health Sciences Initiatives (TTHSI), Dr Paul Ladenson named diabetes as possibly the leading cause of blindness and foot amputations in Trinidad. Dr Ladenson is Professor of Endocrinology, Medicine, Pathology, Oncology, Radiology and Radiological Science at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Maryland, USA. According to the Express Newspaper, “he emphasised that this country faces an epidemic that if left unchecked has significant economic, human and health consequences.

“President of the Academy of Diabetes Clinicians of T&T, Dr Claude Khan, stressed that there is an explosion of diabetes in this country and called for more resources to be invested in the primary care settings for diabetes care, to prevent serious complications from the disease.” Diabetes is not the only challenge facing our families in TT. Many are being buffeted and blown by winds of darkness and death.

The Catholic Church believes that the economy should work for the people. The people are the object; people are more important than things. What is the use of having tall imposing buildings when so many of our people go hungry daily, when the differently-abled face endless hurdles to accomplish even simple tasks, when our health care system remains deficient in so many ways, when so many families are dysfunctional and there are no real safety-nets for them. You know the saying about giving a man a fish. Well, we keep giving our men and women fish and are not teaching them how to fish.

Each human being is of worth and each of us is diminished when the dignity of any one of us is trampled upon. It was Martin Luther King Jr who said: “*Injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere.*” This is why we must all come out and March for Jesus on Sunday 1 July. We need to pray for God to heal our troubled land and our world. But remember that we must also act. Let parables such as the Good Samaritan, Lazarus and Dives, the Prodigal Son etc. guide us as we seek to live our faith and serve the common good.

The protection of citizens’ constitutional and legal rights requires more than laws, policies, procedures and practices that reflect their dignity and worth as human beings, made in God’s image and likeness. What is also required is a change of **mindset** on the part of both men and women, boys and girls. It is, though, useful to know about some of the instruments that have been created to seek to “guarantee” our rights.

**The Preamble of our TT Constitution** (1 August 1976) focuses on human dignity and human rights also. **Chapter 1** of the Constitution focuses on: *The recognition and protection of fundamental human rights and freedom.* The Preamble states:

“Whereas the People of Trinidad and Tobago-

a. have affirmed that the Nation of Trinidad and Tobago is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, faith in fundamental **human rights and freedoms**, the position of the family in a society of free men and free institutions, **the dignity of the human person and the equal and inalienable rights** with which all members of the human family are endowed by their Creator;

b. respect the principles of social justice and therefore believe that the operation of the economic system should result in the material resources of the community being so distributed as to subserve the common good, that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all, that labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate in inhumane conditions by that there should be an opportunity for advancement on the basis of recognition of merit, ability and integrity;

c. have asserted their belief in a democratic society in which all persons may, to the extent of their capacity, play some part in the institutions of the national life and thus develop and maintain due respect for lawfully constituted authority;

d. recognise that men and institutions remain free only when freedom is founded upon respect for moral and spiritual values and the rule of law;

e. desire that their Constitution should enshrine the above mentioned principles and beliefs and make provision for ensuring the protection in Trinidad and Tobago of **fundamental human rights and freedoms**;

Now, therefore, the following provisions shall have effect as the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago...”

You can also read **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (1948) which is closely linked to the rights not only of the individual but of others. Without respect for the rights of others, anarchy would reign. We must exercise our rights in a way that respects the rights of others. As Jack Straw, former Home Secretary of Britain rightly stated in 1999, “Rights flow from duties - not the other way round. One person’s freedom is another person’s responsibility.”

The Australian Bishops reminds us in their pastoral letter to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1998 that “Pope John XXIII’s great Encyclical Letter *Pacem in terris* (1963) was the first papal document to refer specifically to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to acknowledge its importance. Described in the addresses that *Blessed* John Paul II gave, in 1979 and 1995, to the United Nations General Assembly as the “fundamental document” of that organization, as **“a milestone on the long and difficult path of the human race”** and as **“one of the highest expressions of the human conscience of our time”**, the Declaration responded to the grave concerns raised by the Second World War, when “disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of humanity”...

“In the words used by the Pope in 1998 World Day of Peace Message, it was “a solemn act, arrived at after the sad experience of war and motivated by the desire formally to recognize that the same rights belong to every individual and to all peoples”.

“The spirit of the document’s 30 articles is enshrined in these words from its preamble: ‘Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’.

**“The most fundamental of the rights** enumerated in the Declaration are the right to life, the right to freedom (including freedom of thought, conscience and religion) and the right to participate fully in society. Other rights flow from or complement these. The document sets down those political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights which are basic to every human person’s dignity and development. They include: freedom of opinion, expression, association and assembly (political rights); equality before the law (a civil right); the rights to own property and to receive sufficient recompense for labour to enable oneself and one’s family to enjoy an adequate standard of living (economic rights); the rights to education, to participate in the arts and to share in scientific advances and benefits (social and cultural rights). A number of these and other rights could be described collectively as the right to be free from the burden of poverty and socio-economic disadvantage.

“The inviolable and inalienable rights listed in the Universal Declaration have certain other essential characteristics, notably their universality and indivisibility. They are universal in the sense that they apply equally and without exception to every human person everywhere and at all times, irrespective of race, gender, age, culture, conduct or any other circumstance. And they are indivisible in the sense that economic, social and cultural rights are just as essential as civil and political rights. The government which allows a person to vote but excludes him or her from education, health care, adequate housing or work opportunities is transgressing that person’s human rights.

“The Church’s teaching has frequently upheld these characteristics of human rights. In his 1998 Message for the World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul II said: “These distinctive features must be strongly reaffirmed in order to reject the criticism of those who would use the argument of cultural specificity to mask violations of human rights and the criticisms of those who weaken the concept of human dignity by denying juridical weight to social, economic and cultural rights. Universality and indivisibility are two guiding principles which at the same time demand that human rights be rooted in each culture and that their juridical profile be strengthened so as to ensure that they are fully observed”.

\*\*\*Sadly, our world is becoming more and more secular. Many people are moving away from God e.g. at Christmas even here in TT many people greet each other saying: Happy Holidays. Even many Christmas Cards and signs in some shops reflect this change. There are many ways in which God is being removed e.g. from schools etc around the world. We’re living in challenging times. The **language of human rights** – based on the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, is now **cloaked in secularism** e.g. some women who try to justify abortion (which we know as a grave, moral evil), say: “It’s my body; I can do with it as I wish.” There are those who wish to push religion off the public stage and into the private realm. This kind of thinking is linked to individualism which is so rampant today.

Sometimes we make up our own ‘rights’ and fail to acknowledge our responsibilities. On 9 March, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI denounced gay marriage in a speech to US bishops visiting Vatican City. Pope Benedict XVI has warned about "powerful political and cultural currents seeking to alter the legal definition of marriage". He stressed that the bishops should do what they could to ensure traditional marriage would be "defended from every possible misrepresentation of their true nature".

As Lawyers for Jesus stated at our recent Press Conference on the draft Gender Policy in TT, the process in each country often starts off with a change in the definition of the terms ‘gender’ and ‘family’. Genesis tells us that God made male and females. He also made ‘man’ for ‘woman’ and vice versa. We also have to reject abortion as anti-life. In Deuteronomy 30: 15-20 we read that God put before us life and death and told us to “choose life” - that means all life, including that of the unborn.

We have a duty to stand up for what we believe even if what we are saying is counter cultural. We are expected to preach the Word in and out of season. If we read the signs of the times, we will note attempts to expand ‘rights’ which are really not rights.

This is linked to moral relativism and individualism – “if it feels good, do it.” People think they can “make up” their own “truth”. Conscience formation is critical if we are to steer our people away from this kind of thinking. As Edward Sri says:

“According to a relativist, all truth claims are subjective, merely reflecting one’s own feelings, opinions, or desires. A relativist might say, “You can have ‘*your* truth’ and I can have ‘*my* truth’, but there is no ‘*the* truth’ to which we are all accountable... Morality is not up for grabs. And in striving for excellence we must always seek to embody *the* truth, which above all reflects Jesus Christ – who is the same today, yesterday, and forever.”

Catholics believe that moral truth is objective and not relative to the whims and fancies of the individual.

In his handbook entitled: *Vocation of The Business Leader: A Reflection* (March 2012), Cardinal Turkson speaks about **obstacles to promoting human dignity and the common good**. “The transformative developments of our era—globalisation, communications technologies, and financialisation—produce problems alongside their benefits: inequality, economic dislocation, information overload, financial instability and many other pressures leading away from serving the common good... Obstacles to serving the common good come in many forms—lack of rule of law, corruption, tendencies towards greed, poor stewardship of resources—but the most significant for a business leader on a personal level is leading a “divided” life. This split between faith and daily business practice can lead to imbalances and misplaced devotion to worldly success. The alternative path of faith-based “servant leadership” provides business leaders with a larger perspective and helps to balance the demands of the business world with those of ethical social principles, illumined for Christians by the Gospel... Financialisation of business worldwide has intensified tendencies to commoditise the goals of work and to emphasise wealth maximisation and short-term gains at the expense of working for the common good.

The **broader Cultural Changes** of our era have led to **increased individualism, more family breakdowns, and utilitarian preoccupations with self** and “what is good for me”... Business leaders increasingly focus on maximising wealth, employees develop attitudes of entitlement, and consumers demand instant gratification at the lowest possible price. **As values have become relative and rights more important than duties, the goal of serving the common good is often lost.**

**Individualism** has led to a focus on individual ‘rights’ without a concern for the rights of others/the wider community. We cannot build the common good by focusing only on individual rights. Unless we have some core/shared values, it may be difficult to **develop a culture of responsibilities**. Individualism and moral relativism pose major challenges to rights and responsibilities. Many today have no respect for themselves, for others, and for God’s creation. Indeed, for many God is not even in their lives – they have pushed him out. And there are many who are seeking to push religion off the stage and into the private realm.

Sadly, we live in an era in which too often individualism and moral relativism have created a culture of pseudo-rights without responsibilities. I say pseudo-rights, since so-called rights e.g. to do what one likes to one’s body and e.g. to the foetus that is growing inside one’s body, denies the rights of the unborn human being who also has rights.

How is our Church and our Archdiocese tackling all these social ills? We know that in October Bishops will be gathering for a Synod in Rome to discuss the theme: *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*. A document (Lineamenta) has been prepared and you should try to read at least some parts of it. Pope Benedict XVI has also called for the faithful to celebrate a Year of Faith, beginning on 11 October 2012 and ending on 24 November 2013, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the twentieth anniversary of the publication of The Catechism of the Catholic Church.

For quite a while our Church has been telling us that we must find new methods, new forms of expression and a renewed enthusiasm to evangelize – to pass on our faith to others.

Proverbs 29:18 tells us that “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Our Archdiocese has a vision and a mission. I want to place issues relating to rights and responsibilities within this mission which emanated from Synod. Our mission statement states: We are the people of God in TT, building the Civilization of Love – reconciliation with God, neighbour, creation and self – through:

- The new Evangelization
- Revitalizing Catholic Culture and Identity
- Regenerating the Moral and Spiritual Values of our Society.

Embedded in this mission statement are our rights and responsibilities. A key aspect of our Mission Statement is to build the Civilization of Love – ‘build’ is an active verb; it lays a responsibility/obligation on us. Let us fulfil our responsibilities to SEE, JUDGE and ACT – to be true witnesses of Christ. It is only by doing so that we can be “agents of harmony”, as Archbishop Joseph Harris has urged us to be in our communities/world.

And what about the **Homeless/socially displaced**? On 20 June, 2012, the media reported that

There has been a 13% increase in the number of socially displaced persons on our streets. Minister Ramadharsingh responded by saying that he “will hold a series of public consultations on the issue of vagrancy in the nation's capital in the coming months.” Too often we consult and this is followed by little or no effective action that addresses the need of our people.



I'm a Director of Credo Foundation for Justice - run by the Holy Faith sisters – 4 homes. Many of those children in the homes have sad tales to tell about how they arrived on the streets.

We are our brother's and sister's keepers and we have to look at what our roles and responsibilities are towards our neighbour – including those who are seen by society as vagrants – they are our brothers and sisters.

**In conclusion**, let us focus on **the rights and duties of our Church** – 6 main areas. Our Church has a **right to proclaim the Gospel to everyone in TT and across the world**. We have a right to let the rest of the community know what we believe as Catholics. **The Church has a right to announce moral principles** e.g. Canon Law 747 states:

**Can. 747§1** It is the obligation and inherent right of the Church, independent of any human authority, to preach the Gospel to all peoples, using for this purpose even its own means of social communication, for it is to the Church that Christ the Lord entrusted the deposit of faith, so that by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, it might conscientiously guard revealed truth, more intimately penetrate it, and faithfully proclaim and expound it.

**Can. 747§2** The Church has the right always and everywhere to proclaim moral principles, even in respect of the social order, and to make judgments about any human matter in so far as this is required by fundamental human rights or the salvation of souls.

The Church has rights of a secondary nature (to the primary end of preaching the Gospel and unfolding the deposit of faith explicitly) to pass judgment on issues which pertain to the salvation of souls. This can be done either in expounding on moral principles of the social order or passing judgment on human matters insofar as required for the salvation of souls.

**Can. 748§1** All are bound to seek the truth in the matters which concern God and his Church; when they have found it, then by divine law they are bound, and they have the right, to embrace and keep it.

**Can. 748§2** It is never lawful for anyone to force others to embrace the catholic faith against their conscience.

(So the Church has the right always and everywhere to announce moral principles, including those pertaining to the social order, and to make judgement on any human affairs to the extent that they are required by the fundamental rights of the human person or for the salvation of souls. We know as a Eucharistic people that we can't afford to remain indifferent to the injustices that confront us in our society/world. Our Church has a responsibility and a right to guide and form our consciences. Our moral code comes from the teachings of Christ, from scriptures and from our social teaching. We know that as people of the beatitudes we should hunger and thirst for justice. Our 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment tells us Thou shall not kill. We know what our Commandments tell us. The Church has a right/duty to teach us and help us on the path to salvation so e.g. we can build right relationship with God, with each other and with all creation. The Church has a duty to

proclaim and defend human rights, to denounce sin and injustices and violations of human rights and the Church also has a responsibility to influence society and societal structures where necessary. There are many more areas where the Church has rights and responsibilities. These are just a few. Finally, let us become a people who know our own rights and responsibilities and who respect the rights of others. And let us respond to Pope John XXIII's words in *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), that we should develop a new world order, infused with Gospel values.

## APPENDIX 1

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### **Holy See Intervention at Rio+20**

**"The right to water, the right to food, the right to health and the right to education are intrinsically linked to the right to life and to the right to development"**

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil, JUNE 22, 2012 (Zenit.org). Here is the text of the intervention given today by the head of the Holy See Delegation at the Rio+20 conference, Cardinal Odilo Pedro Scherer. Cardinal Scherer is the special envoy of Benedict XVI.

Madame President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My delegation warmly thanks the Government of Brazil for hosting this important Conference on sustainable development, expresses gratitude to the people of Brazil for their warm hospitality, and is pleased to participate in this timely gathering of representatives of the international community meeting at this significant juncture in human history.

Now is the opportune time to address the many threats to the human family and its earthly home posed by the persisting injustice of hunger, poverty and underdevelopment which continue to plague our societies. It is the firm hope of the Holy See that this opportunity may provide the occasion at last to set aside the hermeneutic of suspicion underpinning partisan self-interest and protectionism in favour of a true solidarity between us, especially with the poor. This is the time to commit ourselves to a more just distribution of the abundant goods of this world and to the pursuit of a more integral development which corresponds to the dignity of every human being.

For the Holy See, this requires above all maintaining the proper relation of the means to its end. Standing at the centre of the created world is the human person - and, therefore, also at the centre

of sustainable development, as affirmed by the First Rio Principle. Each individual human life, from conception until natural death, is of equal value and dignity.

Any new model of development, such as the "green economy," must be anchored in and permeated by those principles which are the basis for the effective promotion of human dignity, namely: responsibility, even when changes must be made to patterns of production and consumption; promoting and sharing in the common good; access to primary goods including such essential and fundamental goods as nutrition, health, education, security and peace; solidarity of a universal scope, capable of recognising the unity of the human family; protection of creation linked to inter-generational equity; the universal destination of goods and the fruits of human enterprise; and the accompanying principle of subsidiarity, which permits public authorities at all levels to operate in an efficacious manner for the uplifting of each and every person and community. This is all the more marked in international relations where application of these principles between and within states favours an appropriate transfer of technology, the promotion of a global commercial system that is inclusive and fair, as well as respect for obligations in aid-for-development and the determination of new and innovative financial instruments which place human dignity, the common good, and the safeguarding of the environment at the centre of economic activity. The unique and fundamental role of the family - which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares the fundamental group-unit of society - deserves special mention here because education and development begins in the family, where all these principles are transmitted to and assimilated by future generations so that their members assume their proper responsibility in society.

The right to water, the right to food, the right to health and the right to education are intrinsically linked to the right to life and to the right to development. Therefore, we must be bold in affirming them, and equally resolved to safeguard the evident reality that these rights are at the service of the human person. The risk of obscuring this correct relationship seems particularly to be the case in the right to health, where the promotion of a conception of health can be observed that profoundly menaces the dignity of the human person. Imposing death upon the most vulnerable human lives - namely, those in the safest sanctuary of their mothers' wombs - cannot conceivably be brought under the nomenclature of health-care or simply health. This performs no true service to authentic human development or its true appreciation; indeed it constitutes the greatest violation of human dignity and unjustifiable disservice because development, at all stages of life, is at the service of human life.

Madame President,

The ongoing economic and financial crisis has risked undermining the great progress made in recent decades in technological and scientific development. Engaging such problems honestly and courageously will challenge the international community to a renewed and deepened reflection on the meaning of the economy and its purposes, as well as a renewal of models of development which will not allow the 'why' of development to be overwhelmed by the urgent 'how' of technological solutions. This examination must include not merely the economic or ecological state of health of the planet, but must also require taking stock of the moral and cultural crisis, the symptoms of which are now evident in all parts of the world. This is undoubtedly a complex challenge to confront, but the Holy See stresses the importance of

moving from a merely technological model of development to an integrally human model which takes as its point of departure the dignity and worth of each and every person. Each individual member of society is called to adopt a vocational attitude which freely assumes responsibility, in genuine solidarity with one another and all of creation.

Madame President,

In conclusion, Madame President, it is people who are charged with stewardship over nature; but as with everything human, this stewardship necessarily possesses an ethical dimension. In the discharge of this right and duty, a just solidarity with our fellow human beings is always implicit, including those yet to be born. This requires of us a duty towards future generations who will inherit the consequences of our decisions. In this regard, this Conference provides an opportunity for governments to come together to help chart a course for advancing development for all people especially those who are most in need.

Once again, Madame President, we express our gratitude for the leadership of Brazil in hosting this Conference, and sincerely hope that this will help promote the future that together we all need.

Thank you.

## APPENDIX II

### [2nd Edition of a Pocket Guide to Sustainable Development](#)



This guide was jointly initiated by Stakeholder Forum and the Commonwealth Secretariat in response to the perceived ‘knowledge gap’ on the history and dynamics of global governance for sustainable development.

Download the [English guide](#).

<http://www.stakeholderforum.org/fileadmin/files/PocketGuidetoSDGEdition2webfinal.pdf>

“On 24 December 2009, the UN General Assembly agreed to host the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. The Conference is also commonly referred to as ‘Rio+20’ or ‘Earth

Summit 2012', after the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or 'Rio Earth Summit', that took place in 1992.

The Conference will address three objectives and two themes. 1 One of the themes is the 'institutional framework for sustainable development'. The 'institutional framework' essentially refers to the governance of sustainable development globally, regionally, nationally and locally – the role of institutions, processes, structures, guiding principles, integration, co-ordination and communication in providing an enabling framework for implementing commitments to sustainable development. Governance has always been recognised to be a critical tool for advancing sustainable development at all levels, though the role of global institutions and the relationships between them have been hotly debated since the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg in 2002.

It is widely recognised that the rapid advance of globalisation since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 has far exceeded the ability of the global system to respond to the sustainability challenges that this has caused. Despite the many positive contributions by global institutions to advancing sustainable development objectives, and in particular promoting increased consideration of environmental issues, global governance for sustainable development is no longer 'fit for purpose'. Establishing and developing institutional arrangements at the global level that effectively reflect our global interdependence is no easy task, and it is hoped that the UNCSD in 2012 will advance some solutions in this area.

There is a wealth of concepts, processes and proposals – both current and past – that are relevant for consideration in a discussion of the 'institutional framework for sustainable development governance'. It is important to note that this discussion need not be confined to the Rio+20 process alone, but is part of a much wider debate on global governance, in which Rio+20 will play a significant role.

This publication seeks to provide an overview of what has become an often complex and convoluted topic, in the hope that this will enable governmental and non-governmental stakeholders alike to have a more comprehensive understanding of the 'landscape' for sustainable development governance, as well as an enhanced awareness of the variety of ideas and proposals for reform.”