

Faith in the context of The Year of Faith

Leela Ramdeen (27 Sept 2012 – 6:00 p.m., UWI Chaplaincy)

Good evening brothers and sisters. It gives me great pleasure to share with you my thoughts on the theme: *Faith in the context of The Year of Faith*. Firstly, I would like to pay tribute to Sr Carla Thomas and other Catholic Chaplains and members of the Catholic Students Movement for your efforts to build community; to foster fellowship and spiritual growth among campus Catholics.

Before we talk about The Year of Faith, it is important for us to recall what we believe (refer to the leaflet – *This is our Faith*) and what your role is as a student who is a believer; a follower of Jesus, "The Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn. 14:6). Inter alia, our faith requires us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds, and with all our strength, and to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mk. 12:30-31).

Our Catholic faith is a gift from God. The UK organization, Catholic Truth Society, has produced this leaflet entitled: "What is the Catholic Faith". It gives readers "an idea of the main areas of Catholic belief" and encourages readers to "look into some of them more deeply". It states:

"Faith is our wholehearted response to the love of Christ, when we believe in him and entrust our lives to him. Through faith and baptism our sins are forgiven and we are reborn as sons and daughters of God. We share in God's own life, and the Holy Trinity comes to dwell within our souls. Faith is a pure gift, given by the Holy Spirit. But faith is also something that we must freely choose, by accepting Jesus as our Saviour and believing in his teaching. **Faith is never lived alone...**"

It is important to recognise that we do not journey through life alone, but in community, and that we have a duty to demonstrate our love for God and for neighbour daily. The question is: "Are you equipped for the journey?"

In Lk. 18:8 we read: "*When the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on earth?*" He may find people who say they "believe" but this is not always evident by the way they live their lives. As is stated in a Vatican II document – *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the modern world): "This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age."

Our Catechism (1313) tells us that we are called and empowered to share and to defend our faith by virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation. It also states that "as followers of Christ, it is not enough to have faith; we must also proudly profess it and constantly bear witness to it." (Catechism 1816)

We are called to be a light shining in the darkness. “You are the salt of the earth... the light of the world... No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in the sight of men, so that seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven (Mt 5: 13-16). And, as is stated in James 2: 14-26, Faith without good works is dead.

If we believe in Jesus Christ, we must live our faith daily. When you think of the multi-religious nature of TT/the Caribbean, if all citizens live by the tenets of their faith, we would be a harmonious, peaceful nation. The reality is somewhat different. If we are honest we will acknowledge that we are in crisis in our country, in our region and in our world.

(Share information re various indices and where TT stands e.g. in The World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Index (published recently), TT moved down from 81 to 84. B'dos is at 44! Highlight some of the most problematic factors for doing business in T&T e.g. crime and theft; inefficient government bureaucracy; poor work ethic in the national labour force and corruption. If we are to live our faith, we must be aware of such information and also, e.g. TT's ratings on the Human Development Index. TT has now developed a Human Development Atlas – launched in July - a joint effort of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Trinidad and Tobago and the Trinidad and Tobago Central Statistical Office (CSO). See <http://pesrga.gov.tt/human-development-atlas> - Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development. Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of human development and it measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living.

“The atlas includes the First National Human Development Index, Inequality Adjusted National Human Development Index, Gender Inequality and Multi-dimensional Poverty Index, as well as a collection of maps that show a comparative spatial analysis of human development catalogues at the national level. Minister Tewarie says that the Atlas provides a baseline to establish where the population was in terms of poverty, human development, education and crime issues up to about 2010. The challenge would be to use the information to plan strategic interventions.

UN resident coordinator Dr Marcia de Castro stated that in TT there are growing levels of poverty and inequality observed in income, education, life expectancy and other important social and economic indicators.” See Guardian report: www.guardian.co.tt/news/2012-07-19/cso-report-shows-grande-hardest-hit-equality-index)

Two of the gifts I received in London are a copy of Barbara Reed Mason's booklet: *The Gift of Faith*, and *Year of Faith with John Paul II* – both published by the

Catholic Truth Society. Mason uses “the texts of the Second Vatican Council, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the words of Pope Benedict XVI and Blessed John Paul II, as well as her own insights, to explore this vital area...”

Dioceses in England and Wales, like Catholic dioceses around the world, are preparing resources and events for the Year of Faith (see Zenit: Aug 3, “Highlights in the Plan for Year of Faith”). Earlier this year the Bishops’ Conference in England and Wales distributed to Catholics one million credit-card-sized “Faith Cards.” Next to a picture of a rosary, the wording states: “As a Catholic I, (insert name) am called to: Share with others the joy of knowing Jesus Christ, Pray, Celebrate the sacraments regularly, Love my neighbour as myself, Use the gifts that I’ve been given wisely, Forgive as I have been forgiven. In the event of an emergency please contact a Catholic priest.”

On the other side of the card there are some powerful words by recently beatified **Blessed John Henry Newman**: “*God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. I shall do good and be a preacher of truth in my own place.*” (refer to quotation above from *Gaudium et Spes* – “the joys and hopes” etc.)

Bishop Kieran Conry, Arundel and Brighton, Chair of the Bishops’ Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, said: “The card is also designed to give Catholics confidence to share their faith... Faith is a not a private matter. This is something that Pope Benedict reminded the Catholic community in his recent letter announcing a Year of Faith...”

Here in TT we are linking the Year of Faith with our Mission from Synod – refer to the Mission statement and the 3 Pastoral Priorities: “We are the People of God in Trinidad and Tobago, 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.”

To achieve our mission as Catholics, we must commit ourselves to rediscover the vocation to be Catholic so that the practice of our faith and parish and community involvement will lead to a deeper discipleship and commitment to Church and to community.

If we are to live our faith and build “the civilization of love,” we must move from a culture of death to a culture of life which is underpinned by respect for all life from

conception until natural death and for all God's creation. We must create communities in which the sanctity of life and the dignity of each person are respected and promoted.

Archbishop Harris' advice to those gathered on 30 May, 2012, at the Annual Meeting of the Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies of the Antilles, also applies to us. He urges us all to build harmony in our lives and "as agents and facilitators of that harmony to live the unity in diversity which is the Trinity. His Grace also said that we are missionaries, not by what we speak but by the example of our lives. Our task also is to go out into a world, broken and divided in so many ways, and make others in love with Christ. His words were 'think hard, work hard and pray hard' so that God will send us that spirit of courage to preach harmony in a troubled world."

While we must address the needs of our people, the Catholic Church is universal and, as Martin Luther King Jr. said: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Therefore, we must be alert to current global challenges that we face and seek solutions to them. For example, our world is becoming more and more secular. We are living in an age where *secularism, moral relativism, individualism, greed and selfishness* are rampant. Many are seeking to push religion off the public stage into the private realm. (Give example of IAHR Seminar on 21 Sept at IIR).

Pope Benedict XVI's words in his encyclical, *Charity in Truth*, are pertinent: "Without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is." Proverbs 29:18 tells us that "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The Catholic Church has a vision that can take us out of the crises we face and renew the earth. Our vision tells us that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers:

"The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts." (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World – *Gaudium et Spes*)

Now is the time to stand together in solidarity; to make our voices heard as we seek to build a strong nation based on morals and values that will take our beloved country and the world forward. Our response to all the threats to life and to religion is a moral test for us, for TT and for the world. We can only respond effectively if our faith is strong and if we are truly striving to be witnesses to our faith by living holy, virtuous lives.

Indeed, the vocation of all Catholics is to be holy – "...be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt. 5:48)". We will spend all our lives striving to be perfect. Even the saints were not perfect. We will fall, but when we do, if our faith is

strong, we will get up, dust ourselves, reconcile ourselves with God and strive again to live holy, virtuous lives – it's a continuous process of conversion.

Our former Archbishop Edward Gilbert, C.S.Sp., used to say: "Virtues inform values and values influence behaviour." St Gregory of Nyssa (no. 1803) reminds us that "The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God." To become like God, we must love Him and love our neighbour and we can only demonstrate this by practising virtues and gospel values – at home, at school/university in the community, so that they will become a 'habit'.

(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-](http://www.nzceo.catholic.org.nz/media/resources/publications/schools-valuesvirtues.pdf)

[valuesvirtues.pdf](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.)

In his encyclical, God is Love, Pope Benedict XVI reminds Catholics that the Church "cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice." We will not stand by and allow people to trample on our beliefs. We reject moral relativism which denies moral absolutes. The lure of moral relativism is real. It is what has led us to the state we are in today – e.g. the global economic crisis. It feeds greed and individualism. 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, for Christians, above all reflects Jesus Christ – who is the same today, yesterday, and forever.”

(Moral Relativism - What's It All About?)

“Moral relativism is the view that ethical standards, morality, and positions of right or wrong are culturally based and therefore subject to a person's individual choice. We can all decide what is right for ourselves. You decide what's right for you, and I'll decide what's right for me. Moral relativism says, "It's true for me, if I believe it... Essentially, moral relativism says that anything goes, because life is ultimately without meaning. Words like "ought" and "should" are rendered meaningless. In this way, moral relativism makes the claim that it is morally neutral... Studies indicate 75% of American college professors currently teach that there is no such thing as right and wrong. Rather, they treat the questions of good and evil as relative to "individual values and cultural diversity." The problem with this, according to O'Reilly, is that

"they see the world not as it is, but as they want it to be. And annoying questions about moral absolutes and unacceptable behaviour are usually left unanswered.")
<http://www.moral-relativism.com/>

Catholics believe that moral truth is objective and not relative to the whims and fancies of the individual, to join us. Moral relativists believe that if it feels good, just do it. So there are those who want to change our laws to de-criminalise abortion etc. Catholics are pro-life for all life from conception until natural death. As Pope Benedict XVI said: "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."

We only have to look at the behaviour and lack of modesty of many of our people during the carnival season to realise that morals and values are going down the drain, as we say. Our faith tells us that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Although human dignity is a permanent part of our character, given by God, it is also a goal, an achievement. This means that we must be constantly be seeking to realize our human dignity e.g. by maintaining our self-respect.

It is worth remembering the words of Pope John Paul II – Oct 8, 1995 in the USA: "Democracy stands or falls with the truths and values which it embodies and promotes. But these values themselves must have an objective content. Otherwise they correspond only to the power of the majority, or the wishes of the most vocal."

We stand by our Church's teaching that "we cannot endorse choices that drastically and unjustly limit the choices of other human beings." We stand as the voice of our vulnerable, voiceless unborn and call for others to open centres such as **Mary Care Centre** which was established by the late Archbishop Anthony Pantin in 1980 as a sanctuary for unmarried, pregnant, young women. Eternal Light Community (ELC) supports CCSJ/the Archdiocese in day to day running of the Centre. Publicity material for the Centre states:"The objectives of the Centre are two-fold:

- To provide a safe and secure environment for the pregnant mother to give birth to her child.
- To enable the young mother to be employable at the end of her stay at the Centre.

The Centre opens wide its door to young, pregnant, unmarried women from throughout the region regardless of their background or religious beliefs and tries to impart to them that the value of life is sacred. The young women are taught most importantly to pray for others as well as themselves."

As students, you have an important role to play to take us from a culture of death to a culture of life. All around us there are signs that many have lost respect for human life – at all levels of society. If we are to make any progress, we must take urgent action to stem the tide. Let's build a nation of which we can all be proud; a nation that is worthy of the struggles and sacrifices of our forebears; a nation in which the sanctity of life

and the dignity of the human person are paramount. To do this, we all need to strengthen our Faith.

Remember the words in John 8:31-32 “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” If you are to continue in God’s ‘word’, you must allow the light of the Catholic faith to bear on all areas of study in which you are engaged.

“Bad house” will forever be calling you, but remember the words of St Paul: “...test everything; hold fast what is good.” (1 Thes 5:21). And I know when he said ‘test’, he did not mean try it e.g. illicit drugs. Follow the guidance given in *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II (The Church in the Modern World), that is, we must scrutinize “the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel.” Gospel values are often not the values of our society. You will only be able to differentiate between the 2 if you are rooted in your faith. God has imprinted a moral order in our hearts and minds and it is by renewing our faith constantly that we will maintain this moral order.

Amidst the crisis that we face, let us grasp the opportunities that exist. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in his encyclical, *Charity in Truth*, that “the current crisis obliges us to re-plan our journey, to set ourselves new rules and to discover new forms of commitment, to build on positive experiences and to reject negative ones. The crisis thus becomes *an opportunity for discernment, in which to shape a new vision for the future.*”

The Year of Faith will give us an opportunity to “re-plan our journey.”As you know, Pope Benedict XVI has proclaimed a **Year of Faith** for the entire Catholic Church. It begins on October 11th and will conclude on Nov. 24, 2013 — the feast of Christ the King. The Vatican has established a website relating to The Year of Faith - <http://www.annusfidei.va> . See also the Logo for the Year of Faith. (**take posters and Newsletters**).

° October 11th is also the 20th anniversary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church
° TYF also marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council which was opened under Pope John XXIII on 11 October 1962 and closed under Pope Paul VI on

December 1965.

° The Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will meet in Rome from 7 – 28 October on the theme “The new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith.” The *Lineamenta*, the preparatory document for the Synod, is worth reading. It tells us, among other things, that the entire Catholic Church is in need of a new evangelisation which has a new focus, new methods, and new energy.

The Year of Faith was first announced at a Press Conference on 21 June, 2012 by Archbishop Rino Fisichella and Msgr. Graham Bell, respectively president and under secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation. Archbishop

Fisichella said that The Year of Faith aims, above all, “to support the faith of believers who, in their daily trials, never cease to entrust their lives to the Lord Jesus, with courage and conviction. Their precious testimony, which does not make the news ... is what enables the Church to present herself to the world today, as she did in the past, supported by the strength of the faith and the enthusiasm of ordinary people.

"The Year of Faith falls into a broader context which is characterised by a generalised crisis that also touches the faith. ... The crisis of faith is a dramatic expression of an anthropological crisis which has abandoned man to his own devices. We must overcome the spiritual poverty affecting so many of our contemporaries who do no longer perceive the absence of God from their lives as a void that needs to be filled.

The Year of Faith, then, is an opportunity which the Christian community offers to the many people who feel nostalgia for God and who desire to rediscover Him".

He said that the programme of events for the Year "touches the daily life of all believers and the ordinary pastoral care of the Christian community, in order to rediscover that genuine missionary spirit which we need in order to give life to the new evangelisation". He stressed that during the Year of Faith "priority will be given to **prayer**, and especially to the **Eucharist** as source and summit of all Christian life".

He also presented at that Press Conference “the logo of the Year of Faith in which the image of a ship symbolizes the Church. The mast of the vessel is a cross with full-blown sails which form the monogram of Christ (IHS) and in the background is a sun representing the Eucharist...The Year also has an **official hymn** entitled: "Credo, Domine, adauge nobis fidem". (I believe, Lord, increase our faith).” Other resources will also be made available to the Faithful. A Calendar of events is available on the official website.

In light of the upcoming Year of Faith, CCSJ’s theme for **RFLW** this year in our Archdiocese is: **Respect Life: Be living witnesses to our Faith**. RFLW will run from 6 – 13 Oct. I know that you will be observing **Catholic Week** during that very week. The 2 themes are inextricably linked. (Share Calendar of Events for RFLW).

In our Archdiocese we are striving to revitalize Catholic Culture and Identity. (refer to Mission of the Church since Synod – 3 pastoral priorities – “We are the People of God in Trinidad and Tobago, building the Civilization of Love - reconciliation with God, neighbour, creation and self - through:

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To achieve our mission, we must commit ourselves to rediscover the vocation to be Catholic so that the practice of our faith and parish/community involvement will lead to a deeper discipleship and commitment to Church and to community.

There are a number of documents which will help us to deepen our faith during The Year of Faith:

1. Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Letter "*Porta Fidei*" (The Door of Faith).
2. The Lineamenta for the Synod of Bishops who will be gathering at the Vatican from 7 – 28 October 2012 to discuss: *The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*.
3. The *Note with Pastoral Recommendations for the Year of Faith*, published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This Note reminds us that this year will be "a propitious occasion for the faithful to understand more profoundly that the foundation of Christian faith is "the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." Founded on the encounter with the Risen Christ, faith can be rediscovered in its wholeness and all its splendour. "In our days too faith is a gift to rediscover, to cultivate and to bear witness to" because the Lord "grants each one of us to live the beauty and joy of being Christians."... **The Year of Faith** is intended to contribute to a renewed conversion to the Lord Jesus and to the rediscovery of faith, so that the members of the Church will be credible and joy-filled witnesses to the Risen Lord in the world of today - capable of leading those many people who are seeking it to the "door of faith." This "door" opens wide man's gaze to Jesus Christ, present among us "always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). He shows us how "the art of living" is learned "in an intense relationship with him."
4. In *Porta Fidei*, the Holy Father asks that during the Year of Faith we read/study the four Constitutions or "pillars of the Council": *Lumen Gentium* – on the Church; *Sacrosanctum Concilium* – on the Sacred liturgy; *Dei Verbum* – on Divine Revelation; *Gaudium et Spes* – on the Church in the Modern World. See also the nine decrees and three declarations. The declarations are: *Gravissimum Educationis* – on Christian Education; *Nostra Aetate* – on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions; *Dignitatis Humanae* – on Religious Freedom. He encourages us to **learn about the great figures of our Faith** e.g. Mary, the Apostles, the saints, martyrs, and confessors (*Porta Fidei*, 13); and to intensify our **witness of charity**, which is faith in action.

In his homily on Oct 16th, the Holy Father said the Year of Faith would give "renewed energy to the mission of the whole church to lead men and women out of the desert they often are in and toward the place of life: friendship with Christ who gives us fullness of life...It will be a moment of grace and commitment to an ever fuller conversion to God, to reinforce our faith in him and to proclaim him with joy to the people of our time."

On Oct 17 he released his Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei*, The Door of Faith, to formally announce the Year of Faith. In it he speaks of "the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ." He asks us to live fully this year as a "special time of

grace... Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy,” (Porta Fidei).

Many of us entered the Catholic Church when we were baptised as babies. After First Communion and Confirmation, the challenge has always been to keep our faith alive through ongoing catechesis. I ran a session for young Catholics (16-20 year olds) in London recently and when I asked for a show of hands of how many of them when they “Google”, check out and read about the lives of the saints; about the latest news from our Church etc. Sadly, very few hands were raised. There is so much on the internet that can help to deepen our understanding of our faith e.g. the Catechism of the Catholic Church is on the internet. Check it out. Take a bit at a time.

The future of our Church depends to a certain extent on our ability to witness to our faith. Let’s heed the words of Pope Benedict XVI who said in 2009: “...the future of Christianity and of the Church in Rome... depends on the commitment and witness of each one of us.” The laity, he said, must be recognised as “co-responsible”, for the Church’s being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity.” Parishes should be centres where “it is possible to experience faith, to put charity into practice and to organise hope.” Too often we depend on our Parish priests to initiate activities when we can offer our services and share in the mission of the Church since we are all part of the Church.

The Holy Father hopes that this Year of Faith will help us to appreciate the gift of Faith. Yes, as I said before, Faith is a gift from God – given to us freely. We exist because of God’s grace. Use this year to deepen your relationship with God; to strengthen your commitment to share your faith with others – particularly by the way in which you live your lives.

In Acts 1:8 we read: “You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.” To be true witnesses we must have a close encounter with Christ. Only then can we really meet the many challenges we face and address the needs of our time. It is worth recalling the words of Pope Paul VI who said in 1975:

“Modern man and woman listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” This statement reminds me of a story I read – taken from: Catholic Mission, Adapted from “The Far East” Magazine - <http://www.cinews.co.uk/2011/February/Wed02/churchtalk.htm> .

A Priest tells the story about a young African called Kahua. “Kahua lived in the hills above a vast savannah (open grassland) in East Africa. One day he came down to the savannah and turned up at the Catholic compound where he met the priest.

“Kahua asked for a job for six months and as the priest urgently needed someone he

was given a job working closely with the priest. It turned out that Kahua was honest and industrious, imaginative and reliable and above all, he got on with everyone so the priest came to rely on him.

“So the priest was shocked when just short of the six months, Kahua came to tell him that the time was almost up and he would be leaving next week. “No Kahua, you can’t go. I need you. I know I have been cranky and difficult at times and I probably haven’t paid you enough but I promise to be better and make it up to you.”

“Kahua explained that it really wasn’t about money. He reminded the priest that he lived in the hills and that one day when he was thinking about his life he had looked out on the savannah below where he saw the Christian compound and the Muslim mosque. He knew they were among the great world religions and thought they might have the answers he was searching for.

“So he told the priest, “I thought I would go and work for you and the Imam (Muslim pastor) for six months each and then I would know which religion was best for me. Now it is time to go and work for the Imam.”

“Good heavens, Kahua, why didn’t you tell me?” muttered the priest.

“But the fact is most people don’t tell us. They watch us. It is our witness not our sermons that is important.

“People want to see that in everyday life we are compassionate, patient, kind, and rarely jealous, angry or petty. I don’t think people expect us to be perfect but they want to see that our faith makes a difference. They want to see that in good times and even when under pressure we still have hope in our hearts, faith in the future and room for others.

“Kahua was smart in wanting to learn about religion not from the Priest’s or Imam’s sermons but from working with them. The quality of our works and lives speak more powerfully than anything we can say. Witness and teaching belong necessarily together. The problem with much of our apostolic endeavour is that our witness doesn’t measure up to our teaching....”

Our Faith also calls us to be “teachers”, to share our faith with others; to know your Faith so that you can stand up for what you believe. If we read the signs of the times we will see that as Catholics we are swimming against a tide of individualism, selfishness, moral relativism (see Cardinal Turkson’s document: The Vocation of the Business Leader for some of the social ills today).

The Holy Father says: “Intent on gathering the signs of the times in the present of history, faith commits every one of us to become a living sign of the presence of the Risen Lord in the world.vWhat the world is in particular need of today is the credible

witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end.” (Porta Fidei, 15).

Do not underestimate the power of **prayer and the Eucharist** to help us become true witnesses to our faith. (Refer to Prayer leaflet to be circulated by SIT shortly – show white leaflet). Jesus did not say that it will be smooth sailing to follow Him. Throughout our lives our Faith will be tested. Some may lapse in their faith, but, as the Holy Father says in Porta Fidei, “the door of Faith is always open...” And you bet your life that Jesus will be like the Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son – running to meet us with open arms when we stray and seek to return to His loving arms. (Refer to **Catholics Return** – catholicreturn.org) – run by LWC - based on a US programme.

Since Prayer involves us speaking to God, I believe that it can also take the form of, if you can call it, “quarrelling” with God. I think there is one time in my life when I quarrelled with God.

I recall my battle with God when my mother died due to hospital negligence. After watching her die in hospital, I was angry with God. For weeks I quarrelled with God on my computer. I would spend hours writing to Him about my frustration; my anger; my sorrow and then I deleted it all and started again the following night. My anger prevented me from accepting God’s will; from healing. I thought I was a “big time” Catholic woman until that time. Interestingly, it is my faith that saw me through my pain. It is my enduring Catholic faith that helped me to get back on track. Sometimes, when we shut our ears when God is speaking to us, he sends others to lead us through our grief. In this case, it was the late Cardinal Basil Hume who counselled me and helped me through my bereavement. (Refer to my role on his Caribbean Committee).

I share this with you to highlight the fact that in all our lives there may be times when we are knocked off course. However, if the foundation of our faith is solid; if the seed was sown on rich soil, we will pull through and continue to be true witnesses to our Faith. The Year of Faith provides a good opportunity for spiritual renewal/conversion. “The renewal of the Church is also achieved through the **witness** offered by the lives of believers: by their very existence in the world, Christians are called to radiate the word of truth that the Lord Jesus has left us Porta Fidei #6)”

If we are to keep our faith alive, we must do as the Holy Father said in Porta Fidei: “We must rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples (cf. *Jn* 6:51)” # 3.

I urge you during the Year of Faith to reflect on our scriptures e.g. discuss the implications of **the parables** for your lives in today’s world. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parables_of_Jesus

(Matthew 13L1-9) Parable of the sower: “He said, ‘Imagine a sower going out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fall on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up straight away, because there was no depth of earth; but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Listen anyone who has ears!’”

But to produce a good crop we must be proud of our faith. (Relate experience when I was an Inspector of schools – **God bless**). And being proud of our faith means being prepared to live as Jesus did. In all situations ask yourself: “**What would Jesus do?**” That is our litmus test. (Relate incident when I was a member of the Police Service Commission in TT). We are called to live Gospel values daily.

What are some of these values? Check out our scriptures –

- the 10 Commandments;
- Micah 6:8 –“...this is what God asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God”;
- the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12 – The Sermon on the Mount) and Luke 6:20-22 (The Sermon on the Plain)
- Matthew 25: 31-46 – The Last Judgement: “...For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome’ naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me...in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.” Remember the story of Lazarus at the rich man’s (Dives) gate (Lk 16:19-31). We will be judged by whether we are merciful. And read parables of love and forgiveness – The Good Samaritan, the 2 Debtors, the Unforgiving Servant.

Our Faith requires that we walk with the 2 feet of Christian service: Works of Mercy and works of social action (The Good Samaritan and the story of Moses – Let my people go. Archbishop Harris has asked the Faithful to do at least 1 thing for Jesus each day. He wants us to promote the works of mercy:

The Corporal Works of Mercy (see Leaflet on Faith): To feed the hungry; To give drink to the thirsty; To clothe the naked; To shelter the homeless; To visit the sick; To visit the imprisoned; To bury the dead

The Spiritual Works of Mercy: To warn the sinner; To teach the ignorant; To counsel the doubtful; To comfort the sorrowful; To forgive all injuries; To bear wrongs patiently; To pray for the living and the dead.

Love of God and love of neighbour requires that we don’t only feed the hungry etc., but we challenge unjust structures that keep the poor downtrodden. The words of

Archbishop Dom Helder Camera of Olinda and Recife, Brazil, are instructive. He said: “*When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor are poor, they call me a communist.*”

In his encyclical, *On the Development of Peoples*, Pope Paul VI stated that “development” cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person. “What we hold important is the human, each person and each group of people, and we even include the whole of humanity.” (Populorum Progressio #14).

He urged us to work to take people from less human conditions to more human conditions (20). Pope Benedict XVI takes up this concern in his encyclical, *Charity in Truth*. He says that integral human development is the development of all dimensions of a person and of each person.

To promote integral human development we must open our eyes to the needs of those around us e.g. how do we reach out to the socially displaced children/street children and barrel children on our streets – many of whom are growing up without any guidance, mentors or role models? I am a Director of Credo Foundation for Justice – refer to the homes that CFJ run – Sophia House, Aylward House, Drop-in and Development Centre, Parent Empowerment Programme. (elaborate)

(Give information about the Social Justice Foundation – The Good News Media Project: Video production with youths at risk (Toco, Matelot, Mayaro, Rio Claro, Wallerfield etc.) They have been successful in getting 2 of their films in the Film Festival – shown 2 days this week. Need to harness the creativity of our youths.

Sr Juliet Rajah has written the following prayer for our Prayer Supplement which will be published in Catholic News on 7 Oct for Respect For Life Week: “Lord, many times by our silence we fail to recognize all that opposes life such as crime and violence, unjust wars, abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, torture, subhuman living conditions, incest, domestic violence, pornography, arbitrary imprisonment, slavery, prostitution, human trafficking, disgraceful working conditions, child labour, forced labour and forced migration, religious intolerance, racism, sexism, class bias, and the many forms of stigma and discrimination. Giver of Life may we be promoters of life. Grant us the grace to recognise when life is threatened and the courage to oppose all that threatens fullness of life.” (adapted from *Gaudium et Spes*, The Church in the Modern World, 27, 1965)

Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the UN, has said: “Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society’s margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies.”

The lives of too many of our youths are being wasted. Tell story of Radio interview with boy just out of YTC – how he become a bandit... barrel child. Family life is under constant attack today from various social ills. 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?

See Newsday Editorial about the threat to marriage.

Refer to offenders and the concept of Restorative Justice - **Anthony Pantin Rehabilitation Centre**, San Raphael. Blessed John Paul II, July 2000 – Message for the Jubilee on Prisons reminds us: “Not to promote the interests of prisoners would be to make imprisonment a mere act of vengeance on the part of society...For all to play their part in building the common good they must work, in the measure of their competence, to ensure that prisoners have the means to redeem themselves, both as individuals and in their relations to society.”

- Refer to Seminar on Fri 5 Oct at the Law Faculty Lecture Theatre, UWI – Seminar on the Death Penalty (DP) – in advance of the World Day against the DP (World Coalition against the DP – 10th Anniversary on 10 Oct.)

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%. Yes, 21.8% of our people (and it could be higher when the 2011 figures of the Survey of Living Conditions are published), live in poverty. 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. The poor deserve a place at the table of life also.

And what about the education of our families? We cannot say that we have free education when there is no level playing field and some children are denied education because their parents do not have the money to pay taxis to take them out of areas in which the roads are so bad that taxis hike up the price to e.g. \$10 per person or if students miss schools to help their parents sell in markets etc. Our forebears saw education as the way out of poverty. However, our education system leaves much to be desired. Each year we celebrate the achievement of the top 100 SEA students while the system continues to fail thousands. And our education system is not geared to meet the needs of students who now live in a technological age; it's not geared to promote character development or to develop creative, innovative, critical thinkers.

Too many of our people are socially excluded. 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.”

The sociologist, Hilary Silver (associate professor of sociology and urban studies at Brown University, Providence, USA) provides another definition of this sociological term: “Social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live” (Wikipedia).

These different dimensions of social exclusion are mutually reinforcing. Unless we address these issues, our nation will not make much progress. And you and I have a role to play in addressing these issues.

At the core of our belief as Catholics is our acknowledgement that God created each of us in His image and likeness. Each of us is endowed with an inherent, inviolable and inalienable dignity. This belief has implications for us as we seek to promote authentic human development of ALL humanity.

To build a culture of life, parishes must develop programmes to assist the victims of crime and their families in our country. And while we believe that those who commit crimes should be held accountable, as Catholics, we have a duty to play our part in their rehabilitation and to reach out also to their families. The social justice principle of “Solidarity” means “we are all really responsible for all”. As our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, we embrace a Restorative Justice approach to criminal justice.

We can and must reach out to assist those who have strayed from the right path. That is how we will build community and the common good. It is no use wringing our hands saying that between 60 % – 65% of those who leave our prisons reoffend, when we do little or nothing to assist them and their families while they are incarcerated or when they are released. Jesus came so that all of us – including those who have sinned, may have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). We must reach out to those who have offended to help them turn their lives around and to live productive lives as God intended. (Refer to Prison Ministry – Fr Robert Christo and his team also). Love of God and of neighbour must lead us to seek to restore fractured relationships in society. We love the sinner, not the sin. Let’s help the sinner return to God’s loving arms.

Let’s “seek approaches that understand crime as a threat to community, not just a violation of law; that demand new efforts to rebuild lives, not just build more prisons; and that demonstrate a commitment to re-weave a broader social fabric of respect for life, civility, responsibility, and reconciliation.” (US Bishops’ document: *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* (2000)).

And what about **the poor and vulnerable** among us in TT/the world? Too often officials think that simply by giving the socially excluded food, that is all that is required to meet their needs. Hampers alone will not *cut it*. Our faith tells us that integral human development requires us to address the multi-dimensional needs of each human person if we are to defend/enhance **the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person**.

These are 2 key social justice principles as are: family, community and participation in society; rights and responsibilities; the option for the poor and vulnerable; solidarity; the common good; the dignity of work and the rights of workers; the right to participate in/build up society; economic justice; ecological justice – care of God’s creation/stewardship, the principle of subsidiarity (governments should not intervene in matters that can be taken care of or resolved by families or communities - “the responsibilities and limits of Government... no higher level of organization should perform any function that can be handled efficiently and effectively at a lower level of organization by persons or groups that are closer to the problems and closer to the ground. Oppressive governments are always in violation of the principle of subsidiarity...” <http://cm-ngo.net/TenFoundationalPrinciples.html>); etc. – see handout.

The US Bishops have produced some useful material e.g. www.faithfulcitizenship.org. We can only be faithful citizens if our consciences are well-formed. **Conscience formation** is critical if we are to respond appropriately to the moral ills of our time e.g. abortion, euthanasia, cloning, the death penalty, war, crime and violence - including corruption, domestic violence, incest,

Although we face many challenges in TT, we must acknowledge those who, on a daily basis, live their faith, seeking to do as Martin Luther King Jr. said, and “lift our bruised and battered brothers and sisters to a higher, more noble place.”

All is not lost. There are thousands of foot soldiers working quietly in organisations such as SVP,

Living Water Community, Zion Community, Eternal Light Community, CCSJ etc. Your task as students is to either organise yourselves to address some of the needs of your brothers and sisters in our communities/parishes, or join an organisation and help it to achieve its goals. Give examples of the good work of e.g. SVP – tell of young man infected by HIV by his girlfriend. He bought a bottle of gramoxone to drink and kill himself. Tell of way in which SVP assisted him. Give example of Cyril Ross nursery – singing there at Christmas – bringing Christmas joy – and all year through.

You may recall recently when Deborah de Rosia, ELC, stood surety for Kezi Doughty in the sum of \$50,000 and welcomed her into one of ELC’s homes. Kezi was the pregnant mother of nine who appealed a five-month jail sentence for child abandonment and was granted \$50,000 bail.

Something is seriously wrong with a society that fails to use its human ingenuity to find innovative ways of promoting human development; of assisting parents in the task of parenting; of working to promote integral human development. Every child is a gift from God. Our task is to assist parents in meeting their parental responsibilities. On July 1 Fr Harvey challenged us in his address at the March for Jesus: “Who will march with Jesus into the lives of the mothers imprisoned because they failed as parents.... We put Kezi in a cell and think that we are solving the problems of her family. Surely we can do better.”

In our 2011 AGM report, CCSJ states: “The list of social ills in TT is long. In our land of plenty, there are tens of thousands who live on the margins. We can and must do more for them. As Catholics, we cannot afford to walk on the other side and ignore their plight. We must stand in solidarity with them and speak out on their behalf...”

“Archbishop Harris has said we must move from veneration to imitation. If we imitate Christ; if we ‘put’ on Christ, we will see Him in our neighbour and embrace Works of Mercy...There is an urgent need for personal witness to make visible the presence of Catholics in society...It is time for us to re-discover our vocation to be Catholic and to remember that discipleship and social justice go hand in hand. Let us embrace our mission with renewed vigour...Justice is at the heart of who we are and what we believe.”

During the Year of Faith, we are required to reflect on whether or not we are standing on the side of justice. When we sing: “*Whose side are you standing on? I am standing on the Lord’s side*”, we must accept the responsibilities that go with standing on the Lord’s side. We must accept that standing for justice is an integral part of being a Catholic. Our scriptures are replete with examples of the need for us to build God’s Kingdom of justice e.g.

“This is what the Lord asks of you, only this: to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly

with our God” (Micah 6:8).

“... let justice flow like water, and integrity like an unfailing stream” (Amos 5:24).

“The Lord loves virtue and justice...” (Psalm 33:5) and see Psalms 82:3-4, 106:3 & 140:12;

Proverbs 28:5 & 29:7; Deuteronomy 16:20 and 27:19; Job 37:23; Leviticus 19:15; Jeremiah

22:3; Isaiah 1:17, 10:1-2; 30:18; 51:4-5, 61:8; Ezekiel 34:15-16; Zechariah 7:9; Matthew 12:18,

23:23 & 25:45; Luke 10:30-37 & 11:42; and Acts 17:30-32.

Our mandate to build a just society also comes from the Church’s social doctrine/teaching, which, as the US Bishops remind us, “provides us with a rich treasure of wisdom about building

a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of our society. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and Episcopal documents.”

As the Synod of Bishops 1971 document, *Justice in the World* (6) states: “**Action on behalf of justice is a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel.**” Since Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (On the condition of the working classes), our Popes have been urging us to act for justice.

The opening lines of the Preface of *Gaudium et Spes* – The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World are worthy of reflection and remind us of our responsibility to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world:

“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.

*Share CCSJ’s vision and mission statement:

CCSJ’S VISION

We envision a transformed national/world community where Justice, Peace and Love prevail, as

divinely ordained by God, and which:

- ensures human rights, duties and human dignity
- celebrates diversity and promotes equality
- promotes the common good, respect for human life and ecology justice.

MISSION

To be a fearless united voice challenging injustice, awakening social consciousness and fostering

integral development. We strive to do this through:

- Social Justice Education and Advocacy
- Promoting people-centred development, and
- Working for the transformation of inequitable structures and systems.

(CCSJ seeks to promote Gospel values that can empower people to be active participants in

bringing about God’s Kingdom here on earth, and to implement strategies for Social Justice

Education and advocacy, and promote people-centred development and the transformation of

inequitable systems and conditions.)

Yes, our country, our region, and our world are desperately in need of healing. In his speech on 15 Sept in Lebanon, the Holy Father “spoke of various assaults on human life, including unemployment, poverty, corruption, a variety of addictions, exploitation, different forms of trafficking, and terrorism, adding that "we run the risk of being enslaved by an economic and financial mindset which would subordinate 'being' to 'having'!"

"The destruction of a single human life is a loss for humanity as a whole," he said. "Mankind is one great family for which all of us are responsible. By questioning, directly or indirectly, or even before the law, the inalienable value of each person and the natural foundation of the family, some ideologies undermine the foundations of society."

***I end** with the words we say in the Renewal of our Baptismal vows used at Confirmation (and other special occasions) we say - "This is our Faith, this is the Faith of the Church, we are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus Our Lord." Through our baptism we are called to be the Body of Christ in the world. Therefore, let us go forth as stout heralds of our faith as we recall the words of Pope John Paul II who said on Oct 22, 1978 when he stepped out on the balcony at St Peters Square and signalled his mission. He said:

“Be not afraid! Open up, no; swing wide the gates to Christ. Open up to his saving power the confines of the State, open up economic and political systems, the vast empires of culture, civilization and development...Be not afraid!

Let us pray: Lord, we recall the words of St Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) when she said:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks with
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.

Lord, we pledge to put You at the centre of our lives. Help us to have discerning eyes as we strive to see, judge, and act in your name. Give us generous hearts to become instruments of your work. Amen.

(See Prayer Supplement in Catholic News on Sun 7 Oct for RFLW).

I thank you.

THE NATURAL RIGHTS OF THE HUMAN PERSON.

Compendium: The specification of rights

155. *The teachings of Pope John XXIII,[314] the Second Vatican Council,[315] and Pope Paul VI [316] have given abundant indication of the concept of human rights as articulated by the*

*Magisterium. Pope John Paul II has drawn up a list of them in the Encyclical **Centesimus Annus** (Enumeration and breaks added for emphasis):*

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.*

Also see:

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/social.html>

One characteristic of the human person is self-mastery. This dominion has two aspects. First, control by reason and will over the other faculties makes a person's acts free and responsible; second, his being and the natural ends proper to it entitle the person to rights and liberties, as well as to duties, in his relations with others. These rights (and duties) are called natural rights (or fundamental rights--an expression much used by John XXIII) or inalienable rights of the human person (as John Paul II often calls them).

Usually these rights are stated in general terms; it then belongs to the interpreter to explain them more precisely. The main fundamental rights are as follows (MM 11-27; UN--Address of John Paul II to the 36th General Assembly of the United Nations, Oct. 2, 1979):

- 1) the right to life, liberty, and security of person;
- 2) the right to physical and moral integrity;
- 3) the right to sufficient and necessary means to live in a becoming manner (food, clothing, housing, rest, health care, social services);
- 4) the right to security in case of sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, unemployment, and any involuntary loss of the means of subsistence;
- 5) the right to due respect for one's person and good name;
- 6) the right to religious freedom and to freedom of conscience-and of thought;
- 7) the right to declare and defend one's own ideas (freedom of expression); the right to culture and access to objective information about public events;
- 8) the right to education and, in relation to it, freedom to teach;

- 9) the right to free choice of a state in life and the right to establish a family (marriage);
- 10) the right to work, to free choice of a position or profession, and to a just wage;
- 11) the right to private property, including ownership of the means of production (MM 96);
- 12) the right of assembly and of association;
- 13) the right to form unions and to strike (MM 14);
- 14) the right to choose one's residence, to travel, and to emigrate;
- 15) the right to participate actively in public life;
- 16) the right to personal participation in attaining the common good;
- 17) the right to the legal protection of one's rights;
- 18) the right to citizenship.

The rights given above are fundamental and inalienable in a general way, but they are not absolute. They must be seen in the context of the common good. They can cease to apply in specific cases when the common good is at stake (for example: freedom of expression ceases to be a right if it is used to express in public something contrary to the welfare of others--calumny, inciting to crime, justification of crime, etc.

INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT - Each person needs to develop spiritually, physically, socially, culturally, mentally, politically, and educationally - it's *the whole person!* And you will know of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences: <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/gardner.htm>.

Justice involves more than Charity. While it is important to offer direct services to people who are oppressed, we have to do more than that to promote human dignity. We have to become advocates and be a voice for the voiceless.

"Lack of education is as serious as lack of food; the illiterate person is a starved spirit" (Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, n.35, 1967).

- Importance of nurturing faith in The family which is the bedrock of our society. Strong families build strong communities which in turn can build a strong nation. It is in the family that our young people first learn moral and spiritual values 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."

- Archbishop Edward Gilbert said in his New Year's Eve homily a couple of years ago: "The nature of the family is to form people, to train them to learn values, help them to learn virtues so they know how to live their lives...I ask the grandparents to teach the grandchildren if you see the parents not teaching them. Parent, teach your children, if you do not teach them how are they going to learn?"

- Where are our grandparents? You will have read Minister Fuad Khan's statement about the number of our senior citizens whose families just abandon them in hospitals

where they remain for years. Also, many of our senior citizens have been placed in homes for the aged.

There are no proper regulatory systems to monitor the quality of care in these homes. Some families hardly go to visit their “loved ones” whom they place there.

- Let us address the many social ills that pervade our land e.g. poverty and social exclusion, incest, domestic violence, crime, corruption, and human trafficking. More than 21.8% of our people live in poverty. Our neighbour is he/she who has need of us. Let’s commit to support families in our communities and to raise our voices to those in authority urging them to ensure that the economy works for ALL the people.

- Prof Karl Theodore’s “Situation analysis of children and women in TT” reports “a growing trend in child abuse, and that mothers were the main perpetrators of physical abuse in the homes. A high level of sexual exploitation in TT, involving mainly sex with females under 16 years, and high incidence of rape”, have also been reported. The publication also reports an increase in violence in schools, particularly bullying, at the secondary school level (Newsday June 5).

- Our forebears saw education as the way out of poverty. However, our education system leaves much to be desired. And do we have a plan to motivate our critical thinkers to remain/return to TT and help build families/TT?