

Region's Bishops focus on Vocations, Spirituality, ahead of Guyana meeting

The Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC) will be sponsoring its second training seminar for some 50 Diocesan Vocations Directors and other Vocations promoters from across the region in Castries, St. Lucia 30 July – 3 August, immediately after the AEC Youth Assembly in St. Lucia 19-29 July which more than 1,000 Catholic youth from across the region's English, French and Dutch speaking are expected to attend.

According to a statement from the AEC Secretariat in Trinidad and Tobago, the Region's bishops also confirmed plans for holding its 56th Annual Meeting of all bishops in the

Conference in Guyana 21-28 April at which spirituality and greater collegial cooperation among bishops and dioceses are high on the agenda.

The leaders of the 2.1 million Catholics in the Antilles Bishops Conference also renewed their commitment to the protection of God's Children in the region from Sexual Abuse through ongoing and in-depth training and motivation of all church personnel working with children through the Virtus Programme.

These were some of the decisions of the recent meeting of the Permanent Board of the AEC in Port of Spain 11-

12 January, Chaired for the first time by new AEC President by AEC President Archbishop Patrick Pinder of Nassau, and attended by Archbishops Michel Meranville of Fort de France, Martinique; Charles Dufour of Kingston, Jamaica; Joseph Harris, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago; and Bishops Francis Alleyne, AEC Vice President, Georgetown Guyana; Emmanuel Lafant, Cayenne French Guyana; Nell Tiedemann, Mandeville, Jamaica and Luis Secco, Willemstad, Curacao.

The meeting warmly welcomed Archbishop Joseph Harris of Port of Spain (please turn to page 3)

Opposition parties condemn Kisson's dismissal

A Partnership for National Unity has expressed regret that, so early in his tenure as President, Mr Donald Ramotar would take such a retrograde step by allowing such an incident to occur. APNU was referring to the dismissal of lecturer Mr Frederick Kisson from the University of Guyana. Mr Kisson who was also a columnist of the Catholic Standard for many years learnt of this development on Monday. APNU in a statement said it regarded the termination of the contract of the outspoken political science lecturer and newspaper columnist as a violation of Mr Kisson's right to freedom of expression as a columnist, academic freedom as a lecturer and civil rights as a citizen. APNU, a partnership of ten political parties, said the dismissed lecturer has a natural right to be informed of the reasons for the termination of his contract and called for the lecturer's re-instatement. It also pointed out that it has closely monitored what it called "the ruling party's hostile attitude towards colum-

nists and journalists who criticized President Bharrat Jadeo over the past 12 years."

The Alliance For Change also condemned the dismissal of Mr. Kisson and said it intends to raise this matter with President Donald Ramotar and with the Leader of the Opposition. The AFC also intends to address it in the National Assembly.

The party says the dismissal "reeks of the cut-throat culture" of the ruling PPP/C. "The dismissal of Kisson speaks to the broader national problem; that of Central Government stranglehold over institutions and agencies of the State such as the University of Guyana, the State owned media entities, the National Frequency Management Unit, the Guyana Post Office Corporation and others", the AFC said in a statement.

Chief government spokesman Roger Luncheon has stated that the government played no part in the decision to fire Mr Kisson and that explanations

must be sought from the University of Guyana's Council. "I want to propose that media representatives might want to bring to bear their collective will on the Council to ask them to clarify these matters because we are concerned about the gross misrepresentation of what transpired and speculations about what inspired the Council to act the way it did," he stated at a press conference on Wednesday. ✚

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Bishop's Engagements

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Fri. Jan 27 th | 18:00 hrs Attend Choice Weekend through to 18:00 hrs Sunday 29 th January |
| Thur. Feb. 2 nd | 17:00 hrs attend Mass at Cathedral for celebration of Day for Consecrated Life |
| Sun. Feb. 5 th | 08:00 hrs Mass at St. Teresa
10:00 hrs Marriage Encounter Day of Prayer |

✚ Francis Alleyne, OSB

Are you more honest than 10 years ago?

BY MIKE JAMES

mikejames@acrc.org

Are you more honest today than you were 10 years ago? Honestly?

A Survey of over 2000 adults conducted by the British University of Essex and given wide coverage by the

BBC this last week under the headline "Britons more dishonest than 10 years ago" reports that only 1/3 of those surveyed condemned lying to further one's own interests and only 50% said that extra marital affairs are never justifiable, down from 70% ten years ago. (please turn to page 10)

US Religious Leaders object to treating same-sex unions 'as if they were marriage'

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- A letter signed by more than three dozen U.S. religious leaders objects to the spectre of religious groups being forced to treat same-sex unions "as if they were marriage."

"Altering the civil definition of 'marriage' does not change one law, but hundreds, even thousands, at once," said the letter, "Marriage and Religious Freedom: Fundamental Goods That Stand or Fall Together," released Jan. 12.

"By a single stroke, every law where rights depend on marital status -- such as employment discrimination, employment benefits, adoption, education, health care, elder care, housing, property and taxation -- will change so that same-sex sexual relationships must be treated as if they were marriage," it said.

"That requirement, in turn, will apply to religious people and groups in the ordinary course of their many private or public occupations and ministries -- including running schools, hospitals, nursing homes and other housing facilities, providing adoption and counseling services, and many others." One Catholic Cardinal-designate and four Catholic bishops were among the 39 religious leaders signing the letter.

Other signers included top representatives of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-

day Saints, Assemblies of God, the Church of the Nazarene and the Salvation Army, along with a collection of smaller Protestant denominations, seven pan-Christian associations including the National Association of Evangelicals, and two representatives of Orthodox and Hasidic Judaism.

Religious employers would "face lawsuits for taking any adverse employment action -- no matter how modest -- against an employee for the public act of obtaining a civil 'marriage' with a member of the same sex. This is not idle speculation, as these sorts of situations have already come to pass," the letter said. "Even where religious people and groups succeed in avoiding civil liability in cases like these, they would face other government sanctions -- the targeted withdrawal of government cooperation, grants or other benefits."

The letter cited the case of Portland, Maine, which required Catholic Charities to extend spousal employee benefits to same-sex domestic partners as a condition of receiving city housing and community development funds.

"There is no doubt that the many people and groups whose moral and religious convictions forbid same-sex sexual conduct will resist the compulsion of the law, and church-state conflicts will result," the letter said.

Because those who object to giving equality to same-sex partners have

been marked as "bigots, subjecting them to the full arsenal of government punishments and pressures reserved for racists," the letter predicted other consequences if same-sex marriage were to gain more legitimacy.

"These punishments will only grow more frequent and more severe if civil 'marriage' is redefined in additional jurisdictions," it said. "Because law and government not only coerce and incentivize but also teach, these sanctions would lend greater moral legitimacy to private efforts to punish those who defend marriage."

The push to alter the definition of marriage "warrants special attention within our faith communities and throughout society as a whole," the letter said, because such an action would have "grave consequences," including interfering with the "religious freedom of those who continue to affirm" traditional marriage.

"The promotion and protection of marriage -- the union of one man and one woman as husband and wife -- is a matter of the common good and serves the well-being of the couple, of children, of civil society and all people," the letter said.

The value of traditional marriage transcends any society or government, is "a universal good" and is the "foundational institution of all societies," it said. ✠

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Letters to the Editor



The Fate of the Elderly

Dear Editor,

This theme is infinite and inconclusive but needs to be discussed and debated because of its great importance. It is difficult to accurately define elderly owing to the varied beliefs, concepts or perceptions held by people. Some argue that age is just a number; others believe old age is God's blessings; yet others feel it is a curse - for only the good die young.

Universally, the aged are treated differently depending on the norms of their society. In affluent societies the rate of longevity tends to be higher than in poor ones. Retirement benefits are said to be good in most of the developed world. Hence many persons from the developing countries migrate to industrialized nations to enjoy some of these privileges, mainly health care.

In Guyana, there are different categories of senior citizens ranging from sixty years up and based on general social circumstances. Many aged persons suffer from a list of ailments: diabetes, hypertension, blindness, Alzheimer's, Parkinson and arthritis. Some are cared for by relatives who are well off; others are objectly poor and abandoned.

Luckily our country is richly endowed with resources and our elderly comprise a tiny fraction of the population. We ought to give, locally, some of the benefits other countries provide for their citizens and ours in the Diaspora. Many elderly people depend on remittances from relatives abroad.

In 1982, the late Newton Profit of Adult Education Association sponsored a seminar on the "Care of the Elderly". This was run by a foreign specialist on geriatrics and local medical experts. Government and NGO's should formulate a national plan for the aged population especially the most vulnerable. Our private sector and corporate entities may collaborate.

One prosperous businessman declared he feared to become old; so he preferred to die young. In every society people should be confident that if they grow old, they would enjoy the basics at an affordable cost: right diet, clothing, housing, medical care and transportation among other benefits. This can be achieved with the payment of living wages, salaries and pensions.

Malcolm Maynard

Ascension on Facebook

Dear Editor,

The Roman Catholic Church of the Ascension in New Amsterdam now has its very own Facebook page. The page will update viewers on the internet about important church dates and times as well as events; messages from Parish Priest Msgr Terrence Montrose; Photographs from parish events and Masses as well as any other aspect of the life of the parish church that may be of importance to parish members

both at home and overseas, and Catholics generally in Guyana.

Please 'Like' us on Facebook and spread the news to families and friends. It is one of the only Catholic churches in Guyana to have its own space on Facebook, which has become one of the most popular social media forums to disseminate information in recent times.

Pope Benedict XVI has strongly urged that God's message and Word as well as the work of His people be spread and shared using the most modern methods available so that a wider audience can be reached and more can be touched.

The Church of Ascension's Facebook page is just a little way of expressing our faith in New Amsterdam and letting people around know what is happening in our parish—and special things do happen in New Amsterdam (parish), very special things.

Politicians should stay out of Religion

Dear Editor,

"No Christmas message delivered by Guyana's President" was a critical comment circulated by OneVoiceCanWin. As a committed Christian, I always resent (all my life) politicians sending messages on religious occasions/festivals- be it Christian, Hindu, Muslim or other faiths. It is manifestly cheap politics, hypocritical and often patronizing and twisting the real religious message in order to score some political points. This can fool no one. It is always laughable to read some of the twisted messages some politicians issue on the holy events.

They had better take heed that God is not mocked. Let the religious leaders speak up and proclaim the Gospel message; not the business of the politicians in this context. Politicians should use national events to send their messages and score all the political points they want.

Leave the Christian Churches and its leaders to spread the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am also sure that the religious leaders of other faiths can convey the message of their faith effectively enough, and do not need the politicians for this. They should get on with nation building.

Samuel J. Gookarran

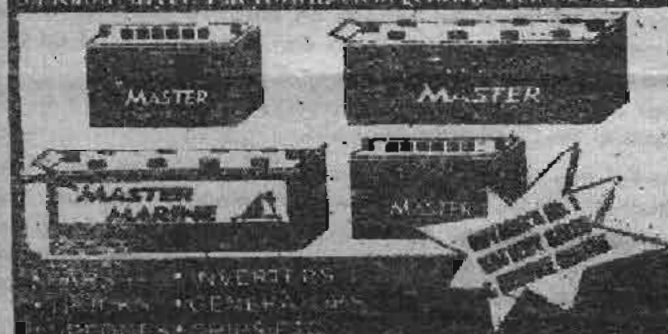
Editor's Note

The relation between "God and Caesar" is an old issue on which different religious communities take varying views. A review of recent events in the Arab world for example shows that the role of religion in evolving circumstances is rapidly changing. Religions are increasingly engaging in national and international political and economic dynamics in many countries. At the same time, various political actors have mobilized religions and religious groups in struggles for political power.

We see the messages of politicians in Guyana to our various religious groups on their special days as among other things a recognition of the importance of these religions in society. What would be the reaction if our politicians completely disregarded or even denigrated them?

The Compendium of the social Doctrine of the Catholic Church (2005) describes the political community as a place where the human person is the foundation, and so everything must be directed to serve and help the human person. The Second Vatican Council says "The mission of the political community is "to direct the energies of all citizens toward the common good, not in a mechanical or despotic fashion, but by acting above all as a moral force which appeals to each one's

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Silence also Communication

In a noisy world of constant communication people need silence more than ever. This is the View of Pope Benedict XVI expressed in his message for World Communications Day 2012, which was released Jan. 24 at the Vatican press office.

The Pope does not condemn the social media and the Internet, in fact he feels that far from being the enemy of calm and quiet, social media and the Internet can lead people to virtual sanctuaries that offer silent reflection, thoughtful dialogue and true meaning in life. He says however that silence is required to make sense of this constant stream of information that people now receive via television, radio and the Internet.

While the Pope's message stresses the importance of silence within the context of a digital environment it is also relevant to the everyday society in which we live.

In the media we frequently read the complaints from decent, law abiding citizens who have to endure the torture

of excessive noise on a very regular basis. One particularly poignant incident was recently related by our correspondent from New Amsterdam who reported that even the people attending Christmas services at the Catholic and Anglican Churches in New Amsterdam found it very difficult if not impossi-

travel. There is the noise from construction equipment and generators. Loud foul-mouthed gangs who roam the streets often hurt our ear drums by day and night. Of particular concern is of course, as we mentioned earlier, the excessively loud music from buses, cars, homes, nightspots and numerous other places. Not only does this music offend but it often seems to be a major element in, or contributory factor to, gatherings that are particularly loud and aggressive.

Silent contemplation also "immerses us in the source of that Love who directs us towards our neighbors so that we may feel their suffering and offer them the light of Christ, his message of life and his saving gift of the fullness of love," the pope writes.

Even some drivers have complained that loud music in areas where there is heavy traffic can be very dangerous as it makes concentrating difficult.

So silence is not only indispensable for healthy spiritual and emotional lives, a lack of it can constitute a threat to ear drums and to life and limb itself. ✚

CATHOLIC STANDARD

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ble to participate in those events because of the incessant, deafening noise coming from music sets in the streets.

The sources of unwelcomed noise are many and are increasing daily in our country. There is the loud exhausts of motor cycles and cars bent on breaking the speed limit within every corner they

DESPAIR is the loss of hope or a state of hopelessness. "The emotion of despair can paralyze and debilitate even the strongest of souls. Pressures from every side can be perplexing; persecution can make us feel as though we've been struck down."

Do we surrender to despair or try to overcome it? By turning to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and reinstating hope, for without hope we falter. Many situations in our lives can be disturbing with feelings of frustration disappointment and failure surfacing. There are many examples of such situations:

- How does a parent feel when a healthy child happily leaves the home to go on an outing but never returns? The report is received that the child had drowned while taking a swim. A few hours before, there was an energetic, loving child talking with that parent and then suddenly everything seems lost. The parent then asks herself why did this happen? Why did it happen to my family? Amidst the search for answers, hope and fear may dominate the mind filling it with despair.

- What is the reaction of parents, when a message is received that there was an accident in which their child perished? The mind then searches to find what has brought about such a tragedy in their home. Acknowledging that

God is love, they wonder whether they were deserted and the love of God flowing to them ended. Despair then surfaces and haunts them, removing them all peace and tranquility which they previously enjoyed. They search to find some explanation as to why such a tragedy came to their door steps cannot be found. Despair then becomes evident followed by feelings of hopelessness.

- What happens to the family who a few hours before lived comfortably and happily in their home, when suddenly there is a fire which destroys everything leaving them homeless and in a state of despair. Not surprisingly they become bitter and wonder why such devastation they must go through. Fear and insecurity then lead to despair.

- The dedicated worker with years of service and good performance appraisal may suddenly experience loss of employment. With a family to maintain, feelings of hopelessness may ruin happiness, and despair may dominate thoughts. Life then seems more complex and the burden of despair contaminates the mind.

- What are the thoughts of a dedicated and committed wife whose life revolves around the family, suddenly been told that divorce proceedings have commenced and separation will follow? Heartbreak, annoyance, a desire to hit back all emanate from the feelings of despair.

The examples cited are not uncommon and seriously affect the wellbeing of those experiencing such situations with a need to replace emptiness with fulfillment. A writer advocated and I quote:

Viewpoint by Vibert Parvatan

This treasure can fill the emptiest of vessels, after all a jar is designed to hold something! That Treasure is God himself, living within us, bringing his abundant life."

When life is filled with despair, we must not give up. Instead we can turn to God, our loving Father to regain focus. Despair flourishes in the absence of faith and hope. We cannot alone carry the many burdens of life, we have to trust in the Lord and lean on him. When in despair life seems dark and gloomy, while living in hope, days could be cheerful and bright. We should not be driven to despair as stated in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."

In our quiet moments we have to accept, that some things will happen which we may never understand. We should attempt not to seek logic but faith and trust in the Lord. There will be time when the burden seems too much to carry. But our faith must be strong as we seek the master's intervention as stated in that beautiful hymn: *What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.*

We must constantly strive to remove despair and replace it with hope and love, so that we could face the uncertain fu-

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Are you more honest than 10 years ago? (From Front Page)

Professor Paul Whiteley, the study's author and director of the Essex Centre for the Study of Integrity, said he thought part of the reason young people were found to be more likely to be dishonest than older people was because "the role models are not very good". "If you think about it, you know, footballers that cheat on their wives; some journalists that hack into phones; behaviour in the City, where people are selling financial instruments they think are no good but do not say so. These kind of things," he said.

Relativist morality of course is not new.

George Orwell, celebrated humanist and author of "Animal Farm" critique of communism, in his Notes on Nationalism, an equally severe critique of other ideologies in 1945 as World War II was ending, wrote

"Actions are held to be good or bad, not on their own merits, but according to who does them, and there is almost no kind of outrage - torture, the use of hostages, forced labour, mass deportations, imprisonment without trial, forgery, assassination, the bombing of civilians - which does not change its moral colour when it is committed by 'our' side..."

Take 3 examples of contemporary examples of international "moral relativism"

Two weeks ago a video surfaced on YouTube of 4 American soldier snipers in Afghanistan urinating on the bodies of dead Afghan militants while making coarse comments for the video. While "declarations" were made on all sides condemning the action, 80% of internet feedback on the action measured by the Washington Post was firmly in support of the American soldier action. A typical response

"When you see children and corpses used as road blocks for IEDs, when the stench of death permeates the air around you day in and day out, then urinating on a deceased enemy that a few minutes earlier was trying to kill you is somehow minute in the scheme of things. Lopping off heads and slitting throats is somehow not barbaric?"

There is universal condemnation of "terrorist acts" in which civilians are tar-

geted. However, just recently a nuclear scientist in Iran was killed by a car bomb in the latest of a series of assassinations of scientists involved in Iran's nuclear programme. The Sunday Times gave a detailed report on the involvement of Israel's secret service in the assassination. Israeli newspapers gave wide approving coverage to the report and attack. The day before the assassination the Head of the Israeli Defence Forces publicly testified that Israel was sabotaging Iran's nuclear program through what he called a series of "unnatural" acts.

In 2008 Former President Carter confirmed the open secret that "Israel has 150 or more nuclear weapons" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_weapons_and_Israel). Despite refusing to sign the Nuclear Non proliferation Treaty, Israel received technical assistance from the UK and France in developing its nuclear programme. However, US and EU sanctions are being imposed not on Israel but on Iran for its incipient nuclear power programme which could then be the basis of building nuclear weapons. (Memories of the invasion of Iraq to destroy what turned out to be nonexistent "weapons of mass destruction"). The "relativist justification" for action against Iran but not against Israel is that Israel's weapons help it advance common Western economic and political interests.

There are other voices, however, that do not support the "moral relativism" which says that "Actions are held to be good or bad, not on their own merits, but according to who does them"

In his World Peace Day message January 1, 2012 on Educating Young People in Justice and Peace, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that Freedom is a precious value, but a fragile one; it can be misunderstood and misused. "Today, a particularly insidious obstacle to the task of educating is the massive presence in our society and culture of that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires.

He urged upon young people in particular the example and witness of the true satisfaction preached and lived by Christ:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (Mt 5:6). They shall be satisfied because they hunger and thirst for right relations with God, with themselves, with their brothers and sisters, and with the whole of creation."

Some persons commenting on the survey of the decline in honest in the UK defended the results by claiming the questions reflected an outdated false morality. "Who should have second thoughts about quickly pocketing a £20 note found on the street?" asked one reader. So would you?

This reminded me of a visit to Damascus in April last year, just 3 weeks before the Arab Spring uprising hit Syria. Our family noticed a Cambio on a busy Damascus street (not far from the Straight Street mentioned Acts where St. Paul was taken after being struck down on the Road to Damascus) and I had taken out my wallet from my pocket to extract money to change into Syrian pounds. As we were stepping into the Cambio, suddenly a voice from behind called out, "Monsieur, Monsieur". A man came up, pressed a US\$50 into my hand with a "you just dropped this from your pocket" and hurried off into the crowd before I could say more than a confused and grateful "Thank you".

For some, honesty still remains the best policy. ✚

Christian Unity Week in B/V, Triumph

The traditional Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was held in the Beterverwagting/Triumph area from Sunday 15th to Sunday 22nd, January. The week began with a service at the Congregational church followed each afternoon at 5.00pm with services at the Lutheran, Baptist, Moravian, Presbyterian, Anglican and AME Zion. The week came to an end with a Service at St. Peter' R.C. Church, conducted by Fr. Anil Tirkey SJ. In his homily Fr. Anil reminded the congregation about the need for Christian love since we are all God's people who share the same faith in the goodness of God and his son Jesus. This was followed by the sharing of light refreshments to the sizable congregation present. ✚