

A Pastoral Letter

Deepening
the Spirit of Solidarity
in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain

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Introduction

The word “**Deepening**” in the title of this Pastoral Letter is deliberately highlighted because the spirit of solidarity is already active in the Archdiocese. It has been present historically both within the Archdiocese and also in the relationships the Archdiocese has had with the Caribbean Church and the Church Universal.

The Archdiocese has shared priests, religious and laypersons for ministry in other Dioceses. It has shared priests who have served as bishops in other dioceses in the Caribbean. It has been exceptionally generous during times of natural disaster in helping other nations of the Caribbean and the world to begin the recovery process. It has supported the needs of the Church Universal to the best of its ability. As early as 1972-1973, it established a system of financial sharing within the Archdiocese that still continues today.

This brief list of examples of supportive initiatives flowing from a spirit of solidarity must be acknowledged in a public manner. However, due to new and challenging circumstances, the spirit of solidarity in the Archdiocese must be deepened through prayer which will motivate an explicit and conscious decision by the people of the Archdiocese **to collaborate in solidarity** to build the future of the Archdiocese.

The Structure of the Pastoral Letter

The Pastoral Letter has seven parts. Each part builds on the preceding part:

- 1) The Archdiocese of Port of Spain in 2007
- 2) The Theology of Solidarity
- 3) The Spirituality of Solidarity
- 4) Building the Future in a Spirit of Solidarity
- 5) Synod 2008
- 6) Four Requests
- 7) Conclusion

1 The Archdiocese in 2007

The Archdiocese of Port of Spain has arrived at a point in its history when it is no longer possible for it to respond to the ordinary and the extraordinary challenges of Archdiocesan life in the same way as in the past. The reasons for this challenging reality are many and they have been developing for a very long time. During the 2006 consultations with the various levels of leadership in the Archdiocese, data on the Archdiocese over the last 25 years were presented in the form of Geographical Information System maps, statistical projections on personnel and contemporary graphs on budgetary analysis.

The participants in the consultations began to understand the urgency of addressing the issues together as an Archdiocese. I anticipate that this situation of challenge will last for almost a generation. It will require ongoing attention for at least the same period of time.

The observation I have made about the challenges we must face together as an Archdiocese should not be a reason for discouragement. It can be seen as an invitation to a deeper level of discipleship. However, my observation is definitely a reason for careful analysis and for being open to collaborating more closely in a spirit of solidarity as we work together to build the future of the Archdiocese. While the Church must be faithful to the mission it has received from the Lord, it must also bring a theologically sound and pastorally flexible approach to its contemporary responsibilities to the people it serves.

The teaching of the Lord has not changed, but the world has changed. Secularization, secularism and neo paganism are with us and they have had a profound influence on how people throughout the world think, act and relate to each other. As an Archdiocese, we cannot act as if these influences have not touched some of our Catholic people and the national society in which we minister to make Christ visible. The process of facing our challenges together will certainly require a persevering solidarity. It will also call us to be open to personal and communal conversion.

Encouraging Information

In the situation of challenge in which the Archdiocese finds itself, there is some encouraging information on three levels:

- 1) As a result of two Synod sessions, the agenda for building the future has already been substantially established through dialogue and the process of adjustment has already begun;
- 2) The level of talent and skills in the Archdiocese and the willingness of faith-filled people to collaborate are really quite significant. They are a definite strength.

3) The fact that 24 single and married men have responded to the invitation of the Archdiocese to consider the permanent diaconate is itself a sign of hope for the future.

Challenging Information

1) The availability of priests and religious for full time administrative positions and to provide pastoral ministry to the people has been a growing challenge for many years. It will become even more problematic in the future due to the issue of aging. In addition, the Archdiocese has to face the legal requirements in the Nation that require foreign priests and religious who are serving the people pastorally to leave the Archdiocese for a year every three years. These factors have made staffing all pastoral responsibilities in the Archdiocese with priests and religious impossible;

2) A new tradition must be built in which skilled, certified and experienced laypersons will be invited to choose the Church for their primary or at least their second careers. While this new tradition will have substantial financial implications for the Archdiocese in terms of fund raising, it will allow some of the demanding administrative positions of the Archdiocese presently staffed by priests and religious to be staffed on a full-time basis by laypersons. This adjustment will free the ordained and professed for pastoral presence among the people and pastoral ministry to the people.

3) The challenging information must be addressed by all categories of God's People in the Archdiocese. Consequently, all Catholic people are hereby invited to and, hopefully, will agree **to collaborate in solidarity** for the purpose of moving the Archdiocese into a proactive stance for strategic planning, informed and aggressive decision making and sustained implementation.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. What do you understand by the phrase "the spirit of solidarity"?
2. What examples of solidarity have you noticed recently – at the Archdiocesan and national levels?
3. What are some of the "extraordinary challenges" that the Archdiocese faces today?
4. What does the Word of God say to you regarding the Church's ability to adapt herself to special circumstances that arise at a particular time and place?

So the Twelve called a full meeting of the disciples and addressed them, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food; you, brothers, must select from among yourselves seven men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom; we will hand over this duty to them, and continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service

of the word'. The whole assembly approved of this proposal and elected Stephen a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them.

The word of the Lord continued to spread: the number of disciples in Jerusalem was greatly increased, and a large group of priests made their submission to the faith (Acts 6: 2-7).

5. What effect is secularization, secularism and neo-paganism (see Glossary, p) having on Caribbean culture?

2 The Theology of Solidarity

It is important to understand clearly the meaning of the concept of solidarity and the process of its theological development as we try to build the future of the Archdiocese. Allow me to offer a brief summary:

In June of 2002, the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger – now Pope Benedict XVI – gave an address to a Bishops’ Conference in Italy as part of a Eucharistic Congress. The title of his address was “Eucharist, Communion and Solidarity.”

In his address, Cardinal Ratzinger spoke to three points:

- 1) The concept of Eucharist is clear to the Catholic Community from Scripture, Tradition and pastoral practice;
- 2) The Church understood as Communion refers to the union of persons with the Triune God – the vertical dimension of the Church – and the union of members among themselves – the horizontal dimension of the Church. The ministry of the Church brings people together from above and from within and forms them into one people and one body;
- 3) The concept of Solidarity needs more attention and explanation because it originally came out of a context of social analysis and as a response to regional and global social challenges. The concept has been slowly ‘Christianized’ through papal teaching. The Cardinal concluded that the concept of Solidarity is now sufficiently clear so that it can be placed next to the classic Christian concepts of Eucharist and Communion.

A Descriptive Definition

With typical clarity, Cardinal Ratzinger offered a descriptive definition of solidarity. He said, “Solidarity means people care about and feel responsible for each other. It means they have a sense of individual awareness and reciprocal responsibility. It means people are conscious of the fact that when they give they receive, that they can only give what has been given to them and that what they have been given never belongs to them for themselves alone.”

Papal Teaching

The papal teaching on solidarity that Cardinal Ratzinger referred to was principally but not exclusively that of Pope John Paul II who had been making serious efforts to raise consciousness about the need for greater solidarity throughout the Church.

Pope John Paul II reminded the Church of the interrelationship of three theological concepts:

- 1) Living an authentic Eucharistic life of love requires initial and ongoing conversion;
- 2) The Eucharist requires us to surrender our selfishness and individualism to the Lord and to follow the path to Communion with our Triune God and with each other;
- 3) Solidarity cannot live in isolation. It is the fruit of Communion that is sustained by the Eucharist.

The Holy Father then shared his teaching on solidarity with the bishops of the Americas i.e. Latin America and the Caribbean, South America and North America at a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

In his Apostolic Exhortation that followed the Special Assembly, *The Church in America*, the Holy Father asked that the bishops go beyond the traditional sharing of personnel and resources that flows from episcopal communion. He called for gatherings of Bishops that transcended individual dioceses and individual Conferences of Bishops. He encouraged interaction among the bishops that was personal which would then become a model of solidarity on a practical level for the entire Church. He was convinced that the witness of the bishops would teach the entire Church the importance of personal involvement in the process of building solidarity through dialogue, Communion and decision making for the common good.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. What makes a Christian view of solidarity unique?
2. What do you understand by the term “Communion” as used in this Pastoral Letter?
3. How is solidarity with the powerless connected with your unity with God?
4. What does the Word of God say to you regarding assistance to the “least ones”?

Then the King will say to those on his right hand, “Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. 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.” Then the virtuous will say to him in reply, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and

clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?” And the King will answer, “I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me” (Matthew 25: 34-40).

5. Comment on the following:

*[Solidarity] is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all (Pope John Paul II, *On Social Concern*, no. 38).*

3 The Spirituality of Solidarity

Pope John Paul II taught us that Solidarity cannot exist in isolation. As with other spiritualities, the spirituality of solidarity cannot stand alone. It rests on the theology of Conversion, flows from the theology of Eucharist and is strengthened by the theology of Communion. Solidarity without Conversion, Eucharist and Communion quickly reverts to its original meaning of social analysis. If that is allowed to happen, it will not help the Archdiocese face its challenges.

A profound attitude of collaborating in solidarity is not developed easily or quickly. It is certainly not developed through an exclusive dependence on conceptual understanding. As noted in the introduction to this Pastoral Letter, the spirit of solidarity is already present in the Archdiocese. While that observation is true, due to the present challenges facing the Archdiocese, the attitude of solidarity must be deepened. To attain that goal, the attitude of solidarity must be rooted in a spirituality that reflects the self-emptying of Christ and that sustains those people who are sincerely trying to build the future by collaborating in solidarity.

Let us return to the teaching of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to examine the spirituality of solidarity.

Pope John Paul II

Pope John Paul II spoke of new energies that are needed in the Church. He taught that those new energies must be found through a careful contemplation of the face of Christ. We must learn how to move forward by contemplating the face of Christ in its historical features and as the light of life's journey. The Scriptures help us to know the Christ of the cross and the Christ of glory. The Scriptures teach us how to climb the mountain of the Transfiguration and how to come down from the mountain of the Transfiguration to engage in the struggle of facing the challenges of our time.

As we reflect on the biblical image of the face of Christ, we learn that the way to move into the future is to trust in the words of the Lord: 'put out into the deep' (Luke 5, 4). The biblical reference means that we must take some risks for the Lord. Pope John Paul II stressed there is no time for complacency and no time for looking back. We must move forward deeply rooted in Christ. There is no solidarity without union with Christ.

Through union with Christ our Archdiocese stands in continuity with the mission of Christ. In the Eucharist, the Church finds the spiritual power to carry out her mission. The love of Christ celebrated in the Eucharist breaks down the selfishness inherent in every individual and every community and makes possible the community, the unity and the collaboration of the Church. In his Encyclical Letter *On the Eucharist in its*

Relationship to the Church, John Paul II taught that solidarity is the fruit of communion which itself is caused by Eucharist.

Benedict XVI

Benedict XVI emphasises that the caring of people for each other, implied by the definition of solidarity, is made possible by the love of God continually made present to us in the Eucharist. In his Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI, similar to his predecessor, offered an image for our reflection. His choice of image for contemplation was that of the pierced side of Christ. After contemplating the image, the Holy Father concluded that “It is here that our definition of love begins.”

In his Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict reminds us that the love we celebrate in the Eucharist is not something we can keep to ourselves. It demands to be shared with others. Love becomes the foundation of the ministry of **collaborating in solidarity**. It requires a commitment from us for both mission and witness of life.

In *Deus Caritas Est*, the Holy Father highlighted the importance of prayer for proper motivation for the ministry of charity and as the means to draw strength from Christ to persevere in ministry. Prayer gives us perspective to confront the dangers of activism as we care for people. To stress the importance of prayer for people who are active in ministry, Pope Benedict XVI appealed to the teaching of Mother Teresa. He tells us that Mother Teresa considered the question of how we can obtain a deep connection with God in our daily life of ministry and charitable service. He stated that her answer to the question was: Only by prayer!

The spirituality of solidarity is rooted in Christ and made available to us by the contemplation of the images of Scripture, by the communion caused by Eucharist and by the chosen interdependence of people who have risen above selfishness and individualism with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Catholic Vision

The spirituality of solidarity requires a Catholic vision. Let us return for a moment to the first part of the descriptive definition of solidarity given by the then Cardinal Ratzinger. “Solidarity, he said, means that people care about and feel responsible for each other.” While the definition of solidarity can and should be applied to family and parish, the definition must be extended to the entire Archdiocese, to the Church in the Region and to the Church Universal. The reason for extending the application of the definition is our identity and our vision as a Catholic community.

It is common and, in a sense understandable, for people to view solidarity in light of their own needs and in terms of their family and parish. As a result, they *unintentionally* limit their understanding of solidarity and they restrict the potential for their personal

involvement in the implementation of solidarity policies. Solidarity must be understood in an unselfish manner and through the filter of Catholic identity and vision.

Sacrifice

The spirituality of solidarity involves sacrifice. Solidarity not only means sharing resources, personnel and skills, it also means sharing sacrifices for the common good. For example, this Pastoral Letter will be followed by Phase I of a Solidarity Policy for the Archdiocese which will facilitate the pastoral and liturgical care of every Parish and Parish Chapel in the Archdiocese. It will also require adjustments by every Parish and by every Parish Chapel Community in the Archdiocese. As the scope of the dialogue and consultation in the Archdiocese broadens, the Solidarity Policy will expand proportionately to include more and more areas of Church life.

For Reflection and Discussion

1. How would you go about connecting the Eucharist with the practice of solidarity?
2. Why is *conversion* – the movement of return to God – vital to the practice of solidarity?
3. Why is it important to extend our understanding of solidarity beyond family and parish?
4. What does the Word of God say to you about the self-emptying of Christ and solidarity?

So Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that among the pagans their so-called rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not happen among you. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of Man himself did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10: 42-45).

5. Comment on the following passages:

Love of neighbour ...consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend...Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward

necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave (Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, 'God is Love', no. 18).

I distribute the virtues quite diversely; I do not give all of them to each person, but some to one, some to others ...I shall give principally charity to one; justice to another; humility to this one, a living faith to that one ...And so I have given many gifts and graces, both spiritual and temporal, with such diversity that I have not given everything to one single person, so that you may be constrained to practise charity towards one another ...I have willed that one should need another and that all should be my ministers in distributing the graces and gifts they have received from me (St Catherine of Siena, Dial. I, no. 7).

4 Building the Future in a Spirit of Solidarity

The only way to build the future of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain is for the Archdiocese to choose freely to live a spirituality of solidarity that is rooted in conversion, flows from Communion and is sustained by Eucharist. While there are business dimensions to the life of the Church, the Church is not a business. It is the continuation of Christ through history. Each generation of believers has the responsibility to confront the challenges of its times and in so doing to communicate the teaching of the Lord and to make the Church visible to the Nation.

5 Synod 2008

We are approaching Synod 2008, a time when the role of Parish Priests/Administrators, the Archdiocesan Councils, Commissions, Secretariats, the Parish and Vicariate Councils, the Superiors of Religious Communities, the leadership of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the leadership of the Public Associations of Christ's Faithful and Ecclesial Communities and the Principals of our Catholic schools will take on a special importance.

These leaders and their collaborators are the ordinary means of pastoral contact with the people and a valued means of communication with the people. I ask each leader and the membership of each Archdiocesan department to fulfill their responsibilities with energy and generosity and to facilitate **collaboration in solidarity** during the pre Synod and post Synod processes.

6 Four Requests

As I close this Pastoral Letter, I ask the people of the Archdiocese to consider four important requests:

1) I invite the people of the Archdiocese to read this Pastoral Letter carefully, to reflect on it prayerfully and to discuss it with a humble honesty. In addition to its written form, the Archdiocesan Communications Commission will make the Pastoral Letter available in other forms of modern communication.

2) I invite all leadership levels in the Archdiocese to facilitate formal discussion of the Pastoral Letter after it has been read and reflected upon prayerfully;

3) I request with a profound respect for those who may struggle with the concept of solidarity that they try through prayer and dialogue to rise above a limited view of solidarity which will limit their participation in Phase I of the Solidarity Plan;

4) Finally, I request sustained prayer by everyone for the Archdiocese, prayer that is presented in the Holy Spirit and through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother. I ask specifically that we pray that all members of the Archdiocese will **collaborate in Solidarity** with the patience and confidence that only the Faith can give as we intensify our efforts to build the future of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain.

7 Conclusion

As we remain faithful to the Catholic Tradition, we must **collaborate in solidarity** to deepen the commitment of the entire Archdiocese to be a Church alive for our times. I am convinced that a proactive philosophy and a firm commitment to the spirituality of solidarity will build confidence within the Archdiocese. As that confidence builds in intensity, it will facilitate recruitment for all the vocations in the Christian life and bring new energy to the many ministries of the Archdiocese.

I truly believe that **collaborating in solidarity** will, within a generation, lead the Archdiocese into what Pope John Paul II prayed and hoped for: **A New Springtime in the Church.**

Most Reverend Edward J. Gilbert C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Port of Spain

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity
June 3, 2007

For Reflection and Discussion

1. Why do you think this Pastoral Letter was written?
2. What is your feeling about the Four Requests that the Archbishop made in the Letter?
3. If you had the best means possible – and, of course, the help of God’s grace – how would you go about making the Church more visible to the nation?
4. What does the Word of God say to you about confidence and trust?

When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch'. 'Master,' Simon replied 'we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.' And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signaled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when these came, they filled the two boats to sinking point (Luke 5: 4-7).

5. Comment on the following passage:

*While the individual Catholic follows the Magisterium, he can and should engage in free research so that he may better understand revealed truths or explain them to a society subject to incessant change. This free dialogue within the Church does no injury to her unity and solidarity. It nurtures concord and the meeting of minds by permitting the free play of the variations of public opinion. But in order that this dialogue may go in the right direction it is essential that charity is in command even when there are differing views. Everyone in this dialogue should be animated by the desire to serve and to consolidate unity and cooperation. There should be a desire to build not to destroy. There should be a deep love for the Church and a compelling desire for its unity (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Communio et Progressio*, no. 117, 118).*

Glossary

Secularization: An historical process of social, cultural and political emancipation by which organised society is freed from the control/dominance of religious institutions and symbols.

Secularism: An excessively autonomous view of humanity and the world which is entirely self-explanatory without any reference to God.

Neo-paganism: The return to an ideology which rejects belief in God and living according to ethical standards based on the existence of God and Divine Revelation.