

A Pastoral Letter by Most Reverend Edward J. Gilbert, C.Ss.R

Archbishop of Port of Spain

Lifelines: Together Against Crime

March 10, 2008

My Sisters and Brothers in the Lord,

I am writing to the people of the Archdiocese about the significant level of violence in the Nation. We all know that many people throughout the Nation have suffered terribly as a result of violence.

They will struggle with their memories and emotions for the rest of their lives. We must continue to pray for them and minister to them pastorally to help them heal.

It is also time for us to intensify our involvement as a Catholic community in proclaiming and witnessing to the teaching of the Church regarding Respect for Life. The Catholic tradition is absolutely clear: life must be respected from the first moment of conception to natural death.

Any inconsistency in living and witnessing to the teaching about life is not only objectively sinful, it also creates an atmosphere in which the various forms of violence are seen as inevitable e.g. violence resulting from crime.

As a result, a sense of numbness sets in. Violence becomes accepted as a part of life. That attitude leads to passivity and hopelessness. It does not represent the Social Justice tradition of the Catholic Church which demands that life be respected, that steps be taken to defend life and protect people and that formation in life values be made available in society.

Respect for Life is an absolute truth and must be proclaimed as such. The purpose of this letter is not to review the teaching of the Church on Respect for Life.

The teaching of the Catholic Church can be found easily by reading again the Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*, and on the websites of the Vatican or Catholic theologians at Catholic universities.

The purpose of this letter is quite specific. It is requesting the collaboration of the people of the Archdiocese in a five step programme of spiritual intercession and ongoing education for life.

We must respond to the violence and disrespect for life present in national society according to our nature as the Catholic Church and in no other way.

The Pastoral programme

As we know, every Friday is a special day for the Church because it was on a Friday that Jesus was crucified for our sins. Therefore, beginning on the first Friday of April, I ask that, exclusive of Good Friday, on **each Friday of the year**:

- 1) At parish Masses throughout the Archdiocese, in addition to the specific intention of the Mass, the intention of Respect for Life be included explicitly;
- 2) In every parish and its chapel communities that have the capacity, there shall be at least three hours of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for the specific purpose of making reparation to God for the sins of those who have disrespected life and who have not yet repented;
- 3) Every family in the Archdiocese, that does not already follow the practice, begin the practice of family recitation of the rosary for the intention of Respect for Life;
- 4) Every Catholic school review its values and virtues curriculum to ensure it contains a Respect for Life component and on each Friday have a brief Respect for Life prayer service.
- 5) Every three months, on the First Friday, each Vicariate shall celebrate a Mass for all those in the Vicariate who have been victims of violence.

An important reminder

Finally, a reminder! Due to the widespread disrespect for life in the nation I remind the Archdiocese that Church Law has penalties for offenses against life.

I want to state in this public manner that if any member of the Catholic Church orders, pays for, cooperates with the plan to murder or actually commits the murder of another person, I will invoke the penalties of the Catholic Church to repair the damage to the common good, the harm to individuals and to help bring about the repentance of the perpetrator(s).

May the God who created us and who sustains us in life bless our efforts to re-establish in the hearts of all people a deep Respect for Life.