

# **Message from the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference**



## **Resurrection Hope**

We, the Roman Catholic Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference gathered for our 54th Annual Plenary Meeting in St George's, Grenada (April 17 – 24, 2010), greet you the faithful of the Church and all people of goodwill in the name of the Risen Lord. We invite you to reflect upon the joyful hope of the Resurrection of Jesus which occurred in the wake of a most cruel and horrific experience at Calvary. It is this confident hope founded on the Resurrection that sustains all God's people as they grapple with the socio-economic aspects of life and all other realities that put people's faith to the test. Because Christ has risen, his disciples can face and transcend all of life's difficulties. During this Conference, the bishops discussed some of the realities that challenge Christian faith and hope.

## **Sexual Abuse of Minors**

As Church leaders in the Caribbean Region in solidarity with the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI and the Church Universal, we, the bishops, view seriously and with sadness the various reports of clerical sexual abuse. We are ashamed of such regrettable incidents. We absolutely and unequivocally condemn the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and anyone else.

We identify with the Pope, who in a recent Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland said to the victims of abuse and their families: "You have suffered grievously and I am truly sorry. I know that nothing can undo the wrong you have endured. Your trust has been betrayed and your dignity has been violated... In the name (of the Church) I openly express the shame and remorse that we all feel ... I ask you not to lose hope."

In the same letter, addressing the priests and religious who have abused minors the Pope stated, "You have betrayed the trust that was placed in you by innocent young people and their parents, and must answer for it before Almighty God and before properly constituted tribunals. You have forfeited the esteem of the people... and brought shame and dishonour upon your confrères... together with the immense harm you have done to victims, great damage has been done to the Church and to the public perception of the priesthood and religious life... Openly acknowledge your guilt, submit yourselves to the demands of justice, but do not despair of God's mercy."

We also take note of the Pope's words to the Bishops, "It cannot be denied that some of you and your predecessors failed, at times grievously to apply the long-established norms of Canon Law to the crime

of child abuse. Serious mistakes were made in responding to allegations.... it must be admitted that grave errors of judgement were made and failures of leadership occurred. All this has seriously undermined your credibility and effectiveness. I appreciate the efforts you have made to remedy past mistakes and to guarantee that they do not happen again."

As your bishops, we have established policies for dealing with sexual abuse of minors. We concur with the directives of the Holy See to comply with civil law in reporting all cases of sexual abuse of minors. We are also committed to do all within our power to facilitate the process of healing, and the protection of children.

### **Solidarity with Haiti**

The Conference expresses its deepest appreciation and gratitude to the faithful of our region for the great generosity and fraternal concern shown toward their brothers and sisters of Haiti. In the wake of the devastating earthquake which took hundreds of thousands of lives you have donated over US\$1.1 million as a symbol of your solidarity with your suffering brothers and sisters in their need.

Haitians will continue to need not only our financial support but also our prayers as they move into the future and embark upon the task of reconstruction and rebuilding lives with the hope that is characteristic of our faith in the Resurrected Jesus.

### **Seminary Formation in the Region**

Due to the lack of vocations, the small number of seminarians, the difficulty in providing staff and mounting financial problems, the Regional Seminary Board took a decision in February this year to suspend seminary formation for a period of three years and to transfer its seminarians in philosophy to the Seminario of Santo Tomas in the Dominican Republic. Special provisions have been made for students completing their BA in Theology in Trinidad. Further to this, a decision was taken at this meeting in response to the recommendation of the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples, that the Regional Seminary Board transfer full authority, responsibility and accountability for the Regional Seminary to the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain.

### **Concern for Vocations in the Region**

Every diocese in the Region yearns for an increase in vocations in order to provide adequate pastoral care of all God's people and to carry on the work of evangelisation and mission. We, the bishops, have established an ad hoc committee to co-ordinate vocation work in the Antilles Episcopal Conference. The establishment of this committee is an indication of the priority which we continue to give to the ministry

of vocations, and is also a response to the present crisis in vocations in our respective dioceses. The committee will make its first report to the AEC Executive Committee in January 2011.

We call upon all Catholics in the region to continue to pray ceaselessly for vocations and create an ambience that celebrates the dignity of the call from God to serve His people and to ensure the resumption of seminary formation in Trinidad in three years.

### **Conclusion**

As we have been reflecting we are reminded of the words of St Paul to the Church in Corinth when he stated, “If one part of the body suffers, all the parts suffer with it. And if one part of the body is honoured, all the parts share its joy.” (I Cor 12:26). For all of us, now is the time for discernment and healing. May God show us the way and may our Blessed Mother, Mary, with St John Vianney intercede for the Church in our region.

**St George's Grenada, April 24, 2010**