

Catholic Youth Leaders from 13 Villages meet at St. Ignatius



Youth Leaders participate in a role-playing session at a seminar for Youth Leaders from the Rupununi and South Pakaraimas, St. Ignatius Church, Saturday February 17th. (photo: Fr. Edwin Anthony SJ)

From: Junisha Johnny, Tricia Albert and Steffi Albert

Having shown an interest in learning more about themselves and the roles they should play in their communities, 40 youth leaders from 13 Amerindian

communities across the Rupununi and South Pakaraimas gathered last weekend at St. Ignatius Village for a youth seminar.

After icebreakers and introductions, we began our first session with prayer and praise led by

Fr. Edwin Anthony SJ. We learnt a very beautiful and meaningful song called 'Will you come and follow me?' that will remain with us forever. We were then shown an inspirational video of Pope Francis ([please turn to page 6](#))

Diocese re-launches e-courses in faith formation, education

From Phelan Ramdatt

The evening of last Saturday February 17th saw a small gathering of persons at Bishop's House, for what can be considered the official re-launch of the VLCFF programme. Present were persons from St. Teresa, St. Joseph's Diamond, St. Pius X, and as far afield as New Amsterdam. Representatives of the Youth Office and the Religious Education Department were also present.

The Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation (VLCFF) programme is a programme offering online courses through the University of Dayton, Ohio, USA. Courses offered cover a wide range of areas that relate to Faith Formation, Ministry and Church life. The programme was started under Father Eddie Birmingham and saw persons trained as Catechists and in Youth Ministry. The programme became dormant for a while, after Fr. Eddie's departure. The Diocese

however, is of the strong opinion that the programme has much to contribute to Faith Formation and the development of the Church in Guyana and therefore moved to have it resuscitated.

Courses offered range from certificates in Catechetics, Youth Ministry, Social Justice, Leadership in Ministry and Dealing with Special Needs, such as persons with autism, which involve a battery of ([please turn to page 4](#))

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Bishop's Engagements

Sunday February 25th

08:00hrs Mass at Sacred Heart, Main Street.
13:00hrs Bible Quiz (Semi-Finals)

Wednesday February 28th

09:30hrs - Child Protection Meeting for Faith Organisations

Thursday March 1st

17:30hrs - Stewardship Meeting

Saturday March 3rd

15:00hrs - AEC Youth Assembly Meeting

Sunday March 4th

08:30hrs - Mass at Holy Spirit



✠ Francis Alleyne OSB



The real blessings of old age

As if to illustrate that, on page 10 the first thing that Chris and Noelma Lam's friend in Trinidad advises us seniors is: "1. It's time to use the money you've saved up. Use it and enjoy it. Don't just keep it for those who may have no notion of the sacrifices you made to get it. . . 2. Stop worrying about the financial situation of your children and grandchildren, and don't feel bad spending your money on yourself. . ."

While it is true, though sad, that a number of seniors do think like that, for most of us as Catholics it is sheer delight to think that even in old age we can contribute to the happiness and well-being of our families and even, as Archbishop Jason puts it, "work with, care for, and love the

poor." As older folk we no longer have the strength to achieve all that we did in the past, but that which we are, we are - weakened perhaps by time and age but still fully able to communicate joy and love and appreciation of those around us.

I can think of no more wonderful thing than the realisation that I can still even now bring some joy to younger people in their worries. And even money can be a blessing used in that way, to help others who may have no notion of the sacrifices you made to get it. I can thank God for my life but only now am I appreciating the real blessings of old age.

A Senior Senior

EDITORIAL

Zero Tolerance

BY MIKE JAMES

A massive and horrific scandal has been exposed in the actions of some staff of the highly respected Humanitarian agency OXFAM, that is spreading right across the spectrum of international agencies.

In the wake of the disastrous earthquake in 2010 in Haiti which resulted in more than 100,000 deaths and massive destruction, OXFAM covered up internal reports of the sexual exploitation by at least 7 of its senior male staff of Haitian survivors used as prostitutes in OXFAM installations. Suspicions that some of the sex workers were under-age "cannot be ruled out", one internal document noted. The young women were wearing OXFAM volunteer T-shirts at what one witness reported as an orgy at the OXFAM residence of the its Haiti Director.

A newly released internal report details four staff dismissals and three resignations in the wake of the allegations, which included using prostitutes on charity property, sexual exploitation of employees, fraud, negligence and nepotism. **It has also revealed three of the suspects physically threatened or intimidated a witness.**

The 2011 OXFAM investigation noted that several of those accused of abuse went on to take up posts in the aid sector. The report admitted that Haitian authorities were never informed of the crimes as it was thought that the authorities would not act and that the Agency felt it "needed to preserve its good public reputation and funding".

The ex-head of OXFAM Haiti was allowed to quietly resign and took up a senior role at Action Against Hunger in Bangladesh, which has claimed Oxfam made no mention of his alleged conduct in 2011. Another former staff member was employed by Oxfam as a consultant in Ethiopia months after being sacked, a move described as a "serious error" by the charity last week. Speaking to the BBC, Oxfam's regional director in Asia for the last two years, Lan Mercado, revealed she is aware of allegations of sexual abuse against staff in the Philippines, Bangladesh and Nepal from 2009-2013.

The main British Catholic Development Charity, CAFOD has said it has sacked a man it employed in 2014 who was implicated in the claims of sexual exploitation in Haiti. The agency said the man had received a positive recommendation from his former manager at OXFAM. CAFOD said it was "committed to a zero-tolerance

Dear Editor,

I was very interested in the messages we got from Trinidad for the first Sunday of Lent in last week's *Catholic Standard*. On page 11 Archbishop Jason Gordon finds that one of the great challenges facing the Church in our Region today is that "our countries are idolising money, and therefore idolising this way of living and lifestyle, and so God has been dethroned."

approach to misconduct" and the employee's failure to disclose the circumstances of his departure from Oxfam were in breach of its code of behaviour.

Outrage and dismay have been the international reaction the case, summed up by the statement of the current President of Haiti, Jovenel Moïse **"There is nothing more outrageous and dishonest than a sexual predator who uses his position as part of the humanitarian response to a natural disaster to exploit needy people in their moment of greatest vulnerability."**

Thousands of individual donors to OXFAM have suspended their contributions, donations by the British Government and the EU are under serious review, and high-profile OXFAM "ambassadors" have resigned. Sky News editorialized, "From now on, any charity that doesn't disclose details of sexual misconduct should have its funding suspended. Sacking those guilty of raping or abusing the vulnerable is nowhere near enough."

Reports of serious sexual abuse in many other international agencies have also been widely publicised and the abuse harshly condemned in recent days. Just a few examples:

While on a mission for a humanitarian organisation UNICEF in South Sudan, Megan Nobert was given a cocktail of drugs, she blacked out, waking up hours later, naked, alone and violently ill. She describes how her experience pushed her to stand up to sexual violence against humanitarian workers and break down the shame and silence surrounding the issue.

"On 7 February 2015, my life changed. It was that night that I was drugged and raped by a fellow humanitarian, a colleague who worked as a contractor for UNICEF, while working in a camp in Bentiu, South Sudan. It created a movement that began with the founding of my own NGO, Report the Abuse, which started conversations about sexual violence in the humanitarian community in absolutely every corner of our

world. From the top levels of the United Nations to the most remote field site, aid workers began reaching out, asking questions, and demanding change.

Last Saturday Oxfam admitted it knew about a Save the Children report from a decade ago which suggested "significant" abuse was being carried out by aid workers from unspecified charities overseas. The 2008 report resurfaced on Friday and detailed horrifying abuse including food in return for sex acts and a 15-year-old girl being offered the equivalent of £2 and some chocolate to perform a sex act on "a couple of humanitarian men".

The report - which uncovered "every kind of child sexual abuse and exploitation imaginable" - found that children were fearful of telling anyone about what was happening because they thought they might lose out on future aid.

In Mexico, Archbishop Carlos Aguiar, made a Cardinal by Pope Francis in 2015, and installed as Archbishop Primate of Mexico City, the world's largest Catholic Diocese of 8 million on 5 February last, already faces his first major sexual abuse crisis of the Church in the capital.

A 58-year-old Catholic priest was arrested in Mexico City after being accused of sexually abusing a child, the provincial prosecutor's office said Friday. The child had been left by her mother in a parish catechism class at 7 pm on 14 February, (Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day.)

Sometime during the class, the priest "took the victim to the offices of the compound where he sexually abused her. After the assault, the girl fled the place in search of her mother, "the attorney general's office said in a statement. "He is charged with the crime of aggravated sexual abuse against a person under 12 years of age, when the accused has contact with the victim for religious reasons and takes advantage of the trust placed in him," the authorities added.

The next day Cardinal Aguiar called a press conference in which his statement was read out in which he declared, "We strongly condemn the events denounced, if confirmed." He also said that "the archdiocese expresses its full commitment to collaborating with the authorities in the investigation of what happened."

He also announced that the alleged paedophile will "immediately cease exercising his priestly functions" until the case is resolved. Finally, he stressed that all these provisions of "zero tolerance" are in strict adherence to "the directives" imposed by Pope Francis on matters of priestly pederasty.

He reiterated, "My policy on sexual abuse committed by the priests of the archdiocese will be one of Zero Tolerance." ❖

South African Catholic bishops welcome president's resignation

(From Page 3)

"In this centenary year of Nelson Mandela's birth, we hope and pray for a return to the ideals of servant leadership with which South Africa was blessed in the first years of its democracy," he said.

Archbishop Brislin pledged prayerful support of the incoming administration and prayed that during the season of Lent, "just as we make our spiritual journey towards the renewal and hope of Easter, our country will begin its own political journey to a future of renewed hope and commitment to the ideals of our Constitution." ❖

Maduro no longer welcome in Peru as Venezuela's crisis deepens

(Bloomberg) -- Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski says his Venezuelan counterpart, Nicolas Maduro, is "not welcome" at this year's Summit of the Americas in Lima, amid growing international outcry over the decision to hold snap presidential elections amid a deepening economic and social crisis.

Kuczynski cited a rupture in the democratic order in Venezuela late last week Tuesday evening in his decision to rescind Maduro's invitation, adding that he counted on the support of a dozen regional leaders. Hours before, the so-called Lima group, which is comprised of nations such as Argentina, Peru, Brazil and Canada, issued a rebuke of the upcoming April 22 vote, saying it "will lack all legitimacy and credibility" and demanded the date be changed.

Venezuela abruptly set elections recently following a breakdown in official talks with opposition leaders to diffuse the country's bitter political fight, which led to bloody street protests last year. While Maduro's opponents had been petitioning for a date that would provide ample time to elect new electoral authorities and invite international observers, the ruling socialists did exactly the opposite and accelerated elections under current conditions.

The opposition now accuses Maduro of trying to rig a vote he cannot win as the country suffers the worst economic crisis in living memory, marked by quadruple-digit inflation and chronic food shortages.

Tens of thousands of Venezuelans are pouring over the country's borders to

neighboring Colombia, Brazil and even Caribbean islands to escape the economic meltdown.

"Maduro knows that in competitive and free elections the people would vote against an administration that brought hyperinflation, hunger, reoccurring deaths due to the lack of medicines," congressman Julio Borges, said in a statement posted on Twitter Wednesday.

A number of countries including the U.S. and Colombia have already stated they will not recognize the results of April's presidential election. The opposition has yet to announce a unified strategy on whether the various parties will take part by holding a primary to select a single candidate or opt to abstain. ❖

Upcoming Events

Sunday February 25th

Bible Quiz Semi-Finals

All are invited to the Bible Quiz Semi-Finals on Sunday February 25th, from 1:00 pm at the Marian Academy Auditorium.

Saturday March 3rd

Echoes Plus Programme for Catechists

The Echoes Plus Programme will be done at Our Lady of the Mount, Meadow Bank, starting March 3rd, between 13:00 and 16:00 hrs.

All catechists are welcome, especially those in the Southern Georgetown Cluster.

Saturday May 5th

Camp Kayuka Fun Day

The Diocese will be holding a Family Fun Day at Camp Kayuka, on Saturday May 5th, a public holiday.

More details will be provided later.



Please let us know of upcoming events by emailing us at: catholicstandardgy@gmail.com under the heading "Upcoming Events" or call 226-2192

South African Catholic bishops welcome president's resignation

(CNA/EWTN News) Catholic leaders in South Africa applauded news of President Jacob Zuma's resignation, stressing the need to root out corruption at all levels of government.

A Feb. 14 statement from the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference welcomed news of the resignation, calling it "long overdue."

"While for some it may be a painful event, we call on all to accept his decision as part of our democratic process," said the statement, signed

by Archbishop Stephen Brislin, president of the bishops' conference.

Following pressure from his party, Zuma announced his resignation Feb. 14. Zuma, age 75, had been president since 2009, and his term of office was not due to end until 2019. His presidency had been marked by numerous corruption allegations.

"The fact that Mr. Zuma has been allowed to hold on to the highest position in the land despite long-standing and overwhelming evidence

of his unfitness for office, has done immense harm to our country's international reputation, to its economy and, especially, to its poorest and most vulnerable citizens," Brislin said.

He noted the general perception that Zuma's presidency had been marked by corruption and fostered a decline in morality in public life, calling on the government to examine the ways in which this was allowed to happen, and how it can be prevented in the future. ([please turn to page 2](#))

Pope's Intentions

February Monthly Intention:

Say "No" to Corruption

That those who have material, political or spiritual power may resist any lure of corruption. ❖

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A Christian Perspective on Social Issues



Profanity on Ash Wednesday

By GHK Lall

The Ash Wednesday symbolism was unforgettable: it was of a woman, most likely a mother, with the faintest, but unmistakable, outline of a Cross traced in ashes on her pale forehead. This unidentified woman in the online picture and accompanying news coverage had anxiety, distress, even fear written through the intensity of expressions on her troubled face. She was standing in the middle of a similarly agitated and unhappy crowd. It was also St Valentine's Day. The place in question was the fire zone, the all-too-familiar killing field of a High School, this time at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland, Florida.

Thus, it was that this unknown woman, every inch a parent, was compelled to forget for harrowing hours the serenity of the sanctuary she must have left earlier on this Ash Wednesday and come to grips with the unimaginable reality and terror of the rapid-fire rattle of automatic weaponry and the telltale rattle of those in death throes. The contrast cannot be greater or starker: here was the very beginning of a solemn season of deep internal self-examination and humble bowing in penitence before God marred and savaged by the murderous reality of a young man of school age driven to madness; of a society gone mad over guns; and, perhaps, of a world also insanely intrigued and sometimes repelled by uncontrolled violence. This was the quiet of early Lent shattered by lethal explosions of anger and barbarity from a civilization run amok, and which has lost its anchors. Godliness replaced by devilishness, through the religion and fundamentalism of the gun. Those dead young children are part of the accepted human sacrifice in a modern world; part of the involuntary manmade mountain of flesh laid before an altar dripping with blood and dedicated to the gods of war and death.

It was also St Valentine's Day. Almost a hundred years ago, there was another St Valentine's Day Massacre. That one still has elements of the mysterious surrounding it. The one from last week in Florida is as basic and straightforward as matters can get: seventeen dead, fourteen injured, countless scarred, one shooter. St Valentine's Day, a special day dedicated to love of family, love of friend, love of that particular someone, stands profaned by the irrational, the illogical, maybe even the irredeemable. It is a great and tragic irony. It is even more inexplicable,

Diocese re-launches e-courses in faith formation (From Page 1)

courses. Individual courses are also offered in Catholic Doctrine, Church History, Various Scripture courses, Liturgy, Prayer, Sacraments, Ecclesiology, Catholic Morality, Papal documents such as Laudato Si and Evangelii Gaudium and even the Spirituality of Parenting.

The courses are open to anyone who wishes to pursue them for their own edification, but are especially recommended for persons serving in various ministries and groups within their respective parishes. For example, persons in Lectors groups would be encouraged to do a course or two in Scripture. Persons in various parish groups can choose to do courses together or individually for their own benefit.

Why do these courses, you may ask?

Well, there are no in-class sessions to attend. All that is needed to do a course is a computer or Tablet and an internet connection. Which means they can be accessed from anywhere in the world. No need to leave the comfort of your own home. Each course is very short, only 5 weeks duration. You will be interacting with persons from all over the Catholic world who bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to each course. At the end of each course, you will receive a certificate from Dayton University co-validated by the Bishop,

that the senseless unfathomable violence is not about revenge, or the flaring uncontrolled heat of passion bursting all boundaries. Rather, there is this almost routine occurrence that embodies the coldly premeditated, the carefully calculated readiness to inflict maximum carnage now; and to pummel through lifelong emotional and psychological pain and trauma.

Respect for life, regard for those in the contexts of a challenging environment, and love of neighbor, that golden Christian exhortation-nay, ideal and commandment-are all shredded into a thousand pieces of flesh, and showering all near and distant with ten thousand drops of spilled blood. There are countless tears, and so much unnecessary pain for the survivors of what just should not be. It is against conscience, whatever commonsense remains, and God too.

It comes about and gains traction when moderate voices are ignored, scorned, and overpowered into submission and resigned silence. That is, until the next round of shooting. And then once again, the sympathy, the sorrows, and the prayers-empty meaningless sentiments and words, when some of the sources are considered-will usher forth to soothe that which cannot be comforted, that which will resist mending for an eternity to come. The only question left is this: how many more innocents have to die?

recognising you did the course. You will learn a great deal. And most importantly, you will be answering a call from God to increase your own knowledge of your faith, to better serve Him and his Church.

It is important to note that most courses of this type cost around US\$100-150 or more, but are available to us for as low as US\$50. This is a great opportunity that shouldn't be passed up. Scholarships and various payment plans are also available from the diocese.

A pilot course on Catholic Beliefs is scheduled to begin on April 8th 2018. The diocese has made available 15 scholarships for persons wishing to have a sample of the programme. Spaces are limited and registration closes March 25th. This is a great opportunity that should not be missed.

Interested persons may contact the Religious Education Department on 226-4893. Mr. Phelan Ramdatt, who has much experience of the VLCFF programme, has been earmarked by Bishop Francis to oversee the programme, under the auspices of the Religious Education Department and may be contacted via email at: phelanramdatt8@gmail.com.

Persons may also visit the VLCFF website <https://vlcff.udayton.edu/>.

To view the list of courses in the course catalogue. Browse a sample

course or look at short videos giving an overview of the VLCFF programme. ❖

Sympathy

The Catholic community extends its deepest condolences to our Diocesan Director of Youth, Ms. Roxanne Douglas, on the sudden passing of her elder brother Mr. John Douglas last Sunday February 18th. May the love of family and friends and the assurance of our prayers, give you comfort and peace especially during these difficult days.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." - 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

The funeral of John Douglas will take place on Sat. February 24th in Berbice.

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May his soul rest in peace.

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Sunday Scripture

February 25th - Second Sunday of Lent, Year B



First Reading Genesis 22:1-2.9-13.15-18

The sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith.

God put Abraham to the test. "Abraham, Abraham" he called. "Here I am" he replied. "Take your son," God said "your only child Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a burnt offering, on a mountain I will point out to you."

When they arrived at the place God had pointed out to him, Abraham stretched out his hand and seized the knife to kill his son.

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven. "Abraham, Abraham" he said. "I am here" he replied. "Do not raise your hand against the boy" the angel said. "Do not harm him, for now I know you fear God. You have not refused me your son, your only son." Then looking up, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. Abraham took the ram and offered it as a burnt-offering in place of his son.

The angel of the Lord called Abraham a second time from heaven. "I swear by my own self – it is the Lord who speaks - because you have done this, because you have not refused me your son, your only son, I will shower blessings on you, I will make your descendants as many as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore. Your

descendants shall gain possession of the gates of their enemies. All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, as a reward for your obedience."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 115

Response: I will walk in the presence of the Lord in the land of the living.

1. I trusted, even when I said:
"I am sorely afflicted."
O precious in the eyes of the Lord
is the death of his faithful. *Response*
2. Your servant, Lord, your servant am I;
you have loosened my bonds.
A Thanksgiving sacrifice I make:
I will call on the Lord's name. *Response*
3. My vows to the Lord I will fulfil
before all his people,
in the courts of the house of the Lord,
in your midst, O Jerusalem. *Response*

SECOND READING

Romans 8: 31-34

God did not spare his own Son.

With God on our side who can be against us? Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give. Could anyone accuse those that God has chosen? When God acquits, could anyone condemn? Could Christ Jesus? No! He not only died for us - he rose from the dead, and there at God's right hand he stands and pleads for us.

GOSPEL

Mark 9:2-10

This is my Son, the Beloved.

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became



dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. "Rabbi", he said "it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud, "This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him." Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus.

As they came down the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what "rising from the dead" could mean.✠



By: The Diocesan Stewardship
Council of Guyana

The absolute first verse of our First Reading from the Book of Genesis is, "God put Abraham to the test." Is that not what Lent is all about for each of us? We are being "put to the test." Although we are less than two weeks into our Lenten journey, how are we doing? Have we even made an effort to let the Lord know that we are being tested? Have we set goals? What have we done to change the way we live?

One of the great gifts we have received, and it is also a challenge, is that God has granted us "free will." That means we choose the direction we are going to go; this is a time when we should

reflect on what we have and what we need to change. Someone once said, "Lent is a time for spiritual 'spring cleaning'." What are the habits we need to eliminate from our lives? What are the behavioural patterns that make us less than what a Christian should do? That is what we need to address.

The Gospel recounts the Transfiguration, that moment when the Lord revealed to us just a glimpse of what Heaven is all about. Of course, we cannot even completely conceive of that (nor could Peter, James, and John). Nevertheless, that is what is very much at the basis of what our efforts and

concentration should be during this Lenten season. We must take care not to think of the transfiguration as being a bright light on Jesus. This is not a light coming to Jesus from the outside; it involves a change from the inside. The change, although it may appear to be on the outside, really comes from the inside.

That is what we need to be striving for in our faith lives, and particularly during this Lent. We need to strive to change from within. That is what really allows us to be the disciples we need to be, and to experience the conversion (change) we need to undergo.✠

[<http://www.catholicsteward.com/blog/>]

Gospel Reflection



By Fr. Michael Barrow SJ

This is my daughter. This is my son. No need for you to add how much they mean to you – it's obvious from your voice. Can you imagine the tone of voice of God the Father when he said, "This is my Son", though he couldn't help adding "the beloved." In this Sunday's gospel of the Transfiguration when God named Jesus as his Son, it was not only in words but in a vivid experience of God's presence. The three apostles had already got to know Jesus as a human being with all his particular characteristics, the way he walked and laughed and blew his nose, even his wonderful personality. Suddenly they were shown that he was much more, way beyond anything they had ever experienced. It is all summed up in the words "This is my Son." This took place on the way to Jerusalem, where Jesus was to be crucified, and then the memory of it would help them not to lose trust.

Think of some times when you have really felt the presence of God and have experienced God's blessing, perhaps through your children or in some other way. Then when everything seems to go wrong, as if God has lost the plot, recall those moments to help you trust in God's presence and guidance. One of our parishioners said to me recently, "God so loved the world that he sent his only Son. I couldn't send our boy, not to be crucified." That sounds very human, but it is the only way we can understand what the gospel means when it says that God so loved us that he sent his only Son. If you suppose that because he's God it didn't cost him anything, there is no point in saying it. God's Son meant everything to him and it must have broken his heart to send him to us. ❖

Catholic Youth Leaders meet at St. Ignatius (From Page 1)



giving advice to young people at World Youth Day, telling them to get involved and to train to follow Jesus through prayer, the sacraments and helping others.

The main presentation of the seminar was on 'What is a youth group and why is it important?' It was a wonderful topic because we learnt a lot about the difference that a youth group can make to a community and to a person's life. The sessions helped us to understand how we can help each other to achieve personal and spiritual growth and how to inspire young people to follow Jesus.

The talk given by Br. Joel Thompson SJ really helped us to realize that our youth groups needed some work and

it was good, because he explained to us how we can balance our youth activities by including four elements: the spiritual, intellectual, outreach and recreational.

Saturday afternoon was spent discussing the issues and challenges facing youths in our villages and our responses to these. A highlight was the group role-plays showcasing the challenges young people face every day like peer pressure, discouragement, and abuse. We all learnt something new, whether it was a bible verse, song, icebreaker, game or skill such as speaking confidently.

The spiritual activities helped us to experience the presence of God, and that feeling is like no other since it brings peace and joy. To have that

feeling is what every youth should strive for.

We are thankful to our church teams, parents and to Fr. Ronnie, Fr. Edwin, Br. Joel and Sr. Nishi for the experience.

At the end of the seminar, everyone had the aim of returning to their villages to help form and strengthen youth groups. Some even said that it was able to bring back the faith which they were losing in Church.

What we learnt can never be fully explained on paper. We are left inspired by the words of Pope Francis 'Don't spend your life on the sidelines, Get involved! Jesus never lived his life on the sidelines.' ❖

La Valette making strides in face of challenges

From La Valette Farmers Association

A historic agreement has been verbally agreed on between several business interests and the La Valette Farmers Association and Cassava Hut Association. This union, soon to be inked, is to provide expert financial and especially technical assistance to these forgotten farmers along the Linden Highway in Region 4.

This is indeed great news. Already some charitable organisations have given help. Food For The Poor set the marker with some farm tools, and games. No sooner was this realised than the number of farm groups sprang from five to a staggering sixteen and counting. This put to shame the general idea that poor people are lazy! Unlike the other parts of the coastlands there are loans of one order or another to help.

Here even the lands that they farm are not properly legally leased. We abhor the name 'Squatters!'

Constant visits to Lands and Surveys result in long forgotten promises with resulting squatting.

The said business interests are experiencing the same delays in the processing of land applications. There is need for an office to advise, (or a hired expensive land lawyer!) for guidance on how to run the intricate gauntlet of the Lands and Surveys maze. This is comparable only to the Hampton Court Maze, commissioned in 1690 in the UK for William 111, the most famous Maze in the world designed by George London and Henry Wise! This is no match for our own Lands and Survey office procedures!

Vehicular traffic passes this area at speeds way over the official limit and La Valette is a blur to all but to the weary observant eye!

Hopefully, this will not be for long before all the proposed plans come to fruition. These projects include the Cassava Hut which will process high-quality, supermarket-class cassava products and the covered gardens of the La Valette Farmers Association. The Tourist Club also has plans for the Silver Creek and camping facilities along with a Nature Walk.

Yes! Still something of a dream because of the delays in the Land and Surveys' processing, the application in at Guyana Water Inc. for a well to be drilled and the application for electricity to Guyana Power and Light. The future however, is beginning to look a little more assured with the help of international organisations, and our business partners.

Help! Please Lands and Surveys, GWI, and GPL! Please process the Silver Hill, La Valette applications with some haste! ❖

Marriage Encounter Movement (Guyana) holds Day of Prayer



In spite of showers of blessing, several couples arrived at the Ursuline Convent Chapel on Sunday, February 11th for the annual Marriage Encounter Day of Prayer, when prayers are offered for the Movement and for married couples, at the start of the New Year.

The theme for the day was, 'Love in Marriage,' taken from the book, 'The Joy of Love,' by Pope Francis and the programme included periods of prayer, hymn singing, silent reflection and couple sharing.

Presentations based on 1Corinthians 13, as discussed by Pope Francis, were also made by Charles and Yvonne Quintin; Paul and Ann Marie Braam; and Joel and Shelly Freeman.

The day ended with the celebration of the Eucharist at which the celebrant was Fr. Paul Martin S.J. Indeed, for many of the couples, it was a blessed day, well spent. ❖

Schedule of Lenten Reconciliation Services for the Georgetown Cluster

Reconciliation Services

Wednesday February 28th— **Brickdam** @ 5:00pm

Wednesday March 7th—**Holy Rosary** @5:30pm

Wednesday March 14th—**Meadowbank** @5:00pm

Wednesday March 21st— **St Teresa, Campbellville** @5:30pm

Stations of the Cross and Mass on Holidays:

Brickdam Cathedral: Friday 2nd March: Stations of the Cross and Mass at 8:00 a.m.

Chrism Mass: March 27th at 5:00 pm at the Cathedral

Southern Cluster: Friday 2nd March: Stations of the Cross at 7:30 am at St Pius X, Holy Spirit and Meadowbank . ❖

Guardian Angels SVP says thanks

The Vincentians of the Guardian Angels Saint Vincent DePaul conference would like to extend their sincere gratitude to Miss Lily Isaacs of New Amsterdam for her kind and generous financial donation towards purchasing of hampers for the poor and needy in our community.

Thank you! May God continue to bless you!

Journeying with the Word of God



MAKING THE WORD OF GOD YOUR OWN

Step 1: Look at today's Readings prayerfully.

1st Reading: God tests Abraham's obedience in faith by calling him to offer his first born in sacrifice. Abraham shows his willingness to give all for God.

2nd Reading: Paul is so confident of the love of God that he is moved to say that since God is on our side, we can face anything.

Gospel: On Mount Tabor the three apostles get a glimpse of the glory of Jesus, the Son of God, in the moment of the Transfiguration

Step 2: Applying the values of the Readings to your daily life.

1. St Paul says that with God on our side no one can be against us. In what ways and when do you see God as being on your side?
2. What has been for you a mountain top experience, one that you did not want to end? Do you see God's presence at such moments?
3. What, in your opinion, is this "faith" that enabled Abraham to say 'yes' to the test of being asked to sacrifice his only son?
4. Have you ever noticed that sometimes our deepest moments of joy come with a touch of sadness? Why do you think this is so?

Step 3: Accepting the message of God's Word in your life of faith.

The story of Abraham and his son condemns the idea of honouring God by taking a life. Jesus introduced something that is a lot more challenging; the idea of honouring God by giving our lives in the service of God and of others. Jesus set the example himself. He gave up his life freely in the service of his sisters and brothers. For us today, giving up our lives for others doesn't necessarily mean dying. It can mean living our lives for others.

Step 4: Something to think & pray about

1. Reflect on the ways you can participate more fully in the life of service called for by the Christian life.
2. Pray that the happy moments of your life will make you willing to be a loving, sharing and caring person.
3. Think about this season of Lent and the direction in which your life is going. Is there anything you would like to change? ❖

[From: *Journeying with the Word of God*, The Religious Education Department, Diocese of Georgetown, Guyana]

Let Laity lead Parishes, Priests' resolution urges US Bishops

Priests are greying, fewer in number, with little relief in sight.

That reality was the impetus for a resolution endorsed by the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests, calling upon Catholic bishops in the United States to enlist the aid of lay pastoral workers to administer parishes.

Passed by the association at its convention in Atlanta last June, the resolution calls upon the church to allow "well prepared pastoral ministers who, working collaboratively with canonical pastors, can know, guide and accompany the faithful on their journey of faith via parish communities."

The resolution urged that

bishops employ lay workers, deacons and religious who are currently in pastoral ministry to lead parishes under the direction of ordained pastors, a framework allowed in canon law.

These lay leaders and deacons should have "the flexibility to make ordinary decisions and actually lead the parish according to its gifts and needs."

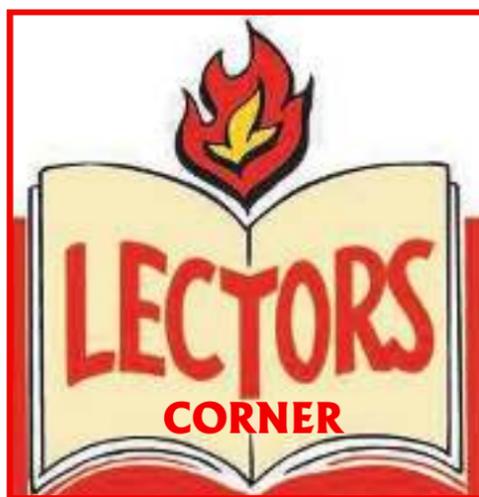
The document envisions clusters of parishes, led by laypeople and deacons, who would make day-to-day decisions about their churches while reporting to an ordained pastor.

The priests' association urged bishops to provide more training for such lay leaders of priestless

parishes. Such local leaders would enable parishes to minister to those who need pastoral care, including the sick and the bereaved, in a way that priest pastors, who are sometimes asked to oversee as many as three parishes at a time in some dioceses, are unable. The resolution stated that lay pastoral administrators should be paid a living wage, and be provided benefits and job security.

Lay leaders of priestless parishes, including women, can lead worship services and perform the duties of pastors, with the exception of sacramental tasks reserved for the ordained, the resolution said.

(please turn to page 8)



Proclaiming the Word of God

Speak, Lord, your servant is listening: you have the message of eternal life
-1Sam 3:9; Jn 6:68

February 25th: Second Sunday of Lent (B)



"This is my Son, the Beloved."

The Word This Week

We spool forward a few centuries in the story of the Old Testament, to arrive at Abraham, "our Father in faith". Today we hear of another Covenant (like last week) - even though the word is not used. God promises Abraham descendants like "the stars of heaven", and the showering of blessings. This shows how

much God loves Abraham, and all his children. This love is proved for us in Jesus: God loves us so much he sacrificed his only Son (just as Abraham was willing to do); but this is not all: Jesus also rose from the dead, to stand at God's right hand and plead for us. All this is revealed in the story of the Transfiguration, where Jesus is seen in the glory that is rightfully his as the only Son of God. Not until after the Resurrection will the disciples see this fully again.

Notes for Readers

First Reading: Genesis 22:1-2;9-13;15-18

This is a fairly straightforward reading, as it is telling a story (even though significant bits of the story are omitted). Don't be afraid of expression in your voice - especially when God asks and Abraham prepares to kill Isaac - there should be a tension, even a horror about it. This allows the resolution and relief to be more effective, when the angel stops Abraham. (That said, be careful not to go over the top - allow people to paint their own pictures as you read.) The final paragraph is very significant: the establishing of a new agreement or covenant: compare it with the language of the Covenant with Noah last week, and see the formal and impressive style God uses to proclaim the Covenant. Be aware of the tone of the reading: it starts darkly, gradually brightens, and ends triumphantly.

Second Reading: Romans 8:31-34.

The key phrase, which links this reading to the First Reading and the Gospel, is "God did not spare his only Son." The Gospel reveals Jesus as the only Son of God: unlike Abraham, God does have to sacrifice his only Son - there is no angel halting the sacrifice on the cross. This is, as Paul says elsewhere, proof that God loves us. This is a good example of Paul being to the point - this is almost like a transcribed speech: you can see the pauses where Paul wants his listeners to think. As the reader, be aware of this, and allow Paul to speak to your congregation today. Paul uses rhetorical questions: every time to see a question mark, pause, for a while, so that people can consider the

answer. So the first sentence, "With God on our side who can be against us?" is a real question for people to think about: what does it mean that "God is on our side"? Do we feel that people are "against us"? Give the congregation time to think. But when Paul is affirming something, do it emphatically: especially the "No!" - we don't often see exclamation marks in Scripture: use it!



March 4th: Third Sunday of Lent (B)



"Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up."

The Word This Week

This week, in our journey through the Old Testament, we reach Covenant Number Three: and this is the big one - the Covenant with Moses at Sinai. The Ten Commandments are (or should be) familiar to us all: they form our side of the agreement with God - if we stick to these rules and commands, then we are truly God's people, and he is truly our God. If we ignore them, or break them, then we break the Covenant or relationship. The Temple was, for the people of Israel, the place that guaranteed the permanence of this Covenant - God dwelling with man. Jesus alerts us to the new Temple - himself - since he is the core of the New Covenant, God and Man in perfect unity. Only by the destruction of this new Temple, in his death, will he rise again as an eternal Temple, and the eternal

guarantee of the New Covenant which we enjoy.

Notes for Readers

First Reading: Exodus 20:1-17.

When reading a list, it is important to pause between individual items so that your listeners can assimilate them one by one. The list of commandments (whether you use the long or the short form - check with your priest) is no less the case: you should not just read this list, but solemnly proclaim it. These rules and laws, which governed the People of Israel, govern us still today, and it is important that the congregation have an opportunity to reflect on the Law of God. So speak solemnly, and slowly. Pause after each commandment, almost making sure that your listeners have 'got it' before moving on to the next. Be especially careful with the 'short ones': "You shall not kill" and so on. These must be read, if anything, more carefully than the others.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 22-25.

There is a sense of "topsy-turvy" in this reading - Paul is not preaching to please people, or telling them what they want to hear, but almost exaggerating the "foolishness" of his preaching to emphasise that it does not come from him, but from God. For this reason, you must emphasise the word "crucified" - and realise that this is the "obstacle" or the "madness": just preaching Christ would be fine, but a crucified Christ? This is a nice balanced reading, which you should be able to read powerfully without too much effort. It's only two sentences (though the first is a bit long, so would merit some "out loud" practice). The reading can be neatly chopped up into the shorter phrases - just make sure you keep a sense of connection between them. Same something for the lovely paradox of the last sentence - it's a remarkable statement: imagine for yourself examples of "human wisdom" and "human strength", and think of what "God's foolishness" must be like! ❖

[From: Office for Liturgy of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford <http://www.salfordliturgy.org.uk/>]

Let Laity lead Parishes, Priests' resolution urges US Bishops (From Page 7)

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University notes that the number of priests in the U.S. is now about 37,000, a decline from 58,632 in 1965. The Catholic population has increased from 48.5 million to 74.2 million in that time.

Out of 17,156 parishes in the U.S., more than 3,500 have no resident pastor. Laypeople and deacons administer 347 parishes, according to CARA.

Authors of the resolution from the priests' association said that the decline in clergy numbers and Catholic practice are related.

Fr. John Hynes, pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Church in Wilmington, Delaware, was co-chair of the

committee that wrote the resolution.

He said the document is a response to the impact of an aging, declining-in-numbers priesthood in the United States, and the continued consolidation of parishes due in part to the lack of potential leaders.

In 1965, there was one priest for every 1,000 Catholics, said Hynes. Today, there is one priest for every 2,500 Catholics. A third of diocesan priests are retired. At 78, Hynes said he is continuing in pastoral work, as the need is dire.

But continuing the status quo is not a long-term solution. "It's like we are cheating the people," said Hynes. "We need lay leaders in parishes to ensure that the range of Catholic life is fulfilled."

Already, a number of dioceses are employing lay pastoral leaders. But the effort is not consistent. Sometimes lay administrators are dismissed when a new bishop is brought to a diocese. That is why there is a need for the body of bishops to explicitly endorse the concept and provide consistency, said Hynes.

Msgr. Raymond Cole, a retired priest of the Diocese of Metuchen, New Jersey, and co-chair of the document committee, said it borrows from "Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord," a 2005 U.S. bishops' statement that encouraged lay pastoral workers.

In informal responses, bishops have responded favorably to the resolution, according to Cole. And some dioceses, such as Youngstown,

Ohio, and San Bernardino, California, already use laypeople as leaders of parishes, consistent with canon law.

The resolution argues that inaction is dangerous. "If USA Church leadership postpones dealing with this issue, the window of opportunity will slowly close. Then we will experience a greater collapse of parishes than we are currently experiencing, a loss of morale and health among priests, and further decline of the morale and trust of people who depend upon us to meet their spiritual needs. As our Catholic presence diminishes, so will our presence in society in all of its aspects," it says. ❖

Reprinted from ncronline.org



Children's Page

Dear Girls and Boys,

One day Jesus took Peter, James and John high up into the mountains so that they could be alone. While on the mountain top, Jesus' appearance changed. His clothes became a dazzling white, whiter than any bleach could get them. Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking to Jesus. Peter exclaimed, "Teacher, it is wonderful for us to be here! Let's build three shelters - one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Then a cloud passed over and covered them. From the cloud came a voice saying, "This is my Son, and I love him. Listen to what he says!" Then when they looked again, they saw only Jesus.

Peter, James, and John would have been happy to stay up there on the mountain top, but did they? No, Jesus knew that the purpose of their experience on the mountain top was to renew their strength for the difficult days that were ahead of them, so he led the disciples back down from the mountains into the valley.

We also need mountain top experiences in our daily walk with Jesus. We need those experiences to renew our strength for the difficult tasks that we face as we follow Jesus each day.

Dear Father, we are thankful for the wonderful mountain top experiences you give us to renew our strength for our daily walk with you. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. ✨

Y	E	L	I	H	A	J	I	L	E
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- MOUNTAIN
- PRESENCE
- BLEACHER
- WHITE
- ELIJAH
- MOSES
- RABBI
- THREE
- TENTS
- SHADOW
- BELOVED
- VOICE

Lenten Calendar for Children

Cut out this calendar, and each day do the activity for the day. Besides what you see in the calendar, it is also a good idea to do one or two things through all of Lent. So, for example, you can give up sweets or looking at TV, or give your pocket money to help those in need. It is also good idea to say an extra prayer everyday.

Second Week

Monday
Jesus submitted to His arrest even though He was innocent.
 • Pray for people who are in jail- those who are guilty as well as the innocent. 11

Wednesday
Peter denied knowing Jesus three times before the cock crowed.
 • Pray:
O my Jesus, I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love Thee. I ask pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope, and do not love Thee. 13

Friday
Early the next morning He was brought to trial.
 • When you wake up pray: Everything today I offer to You, O Lord! 15

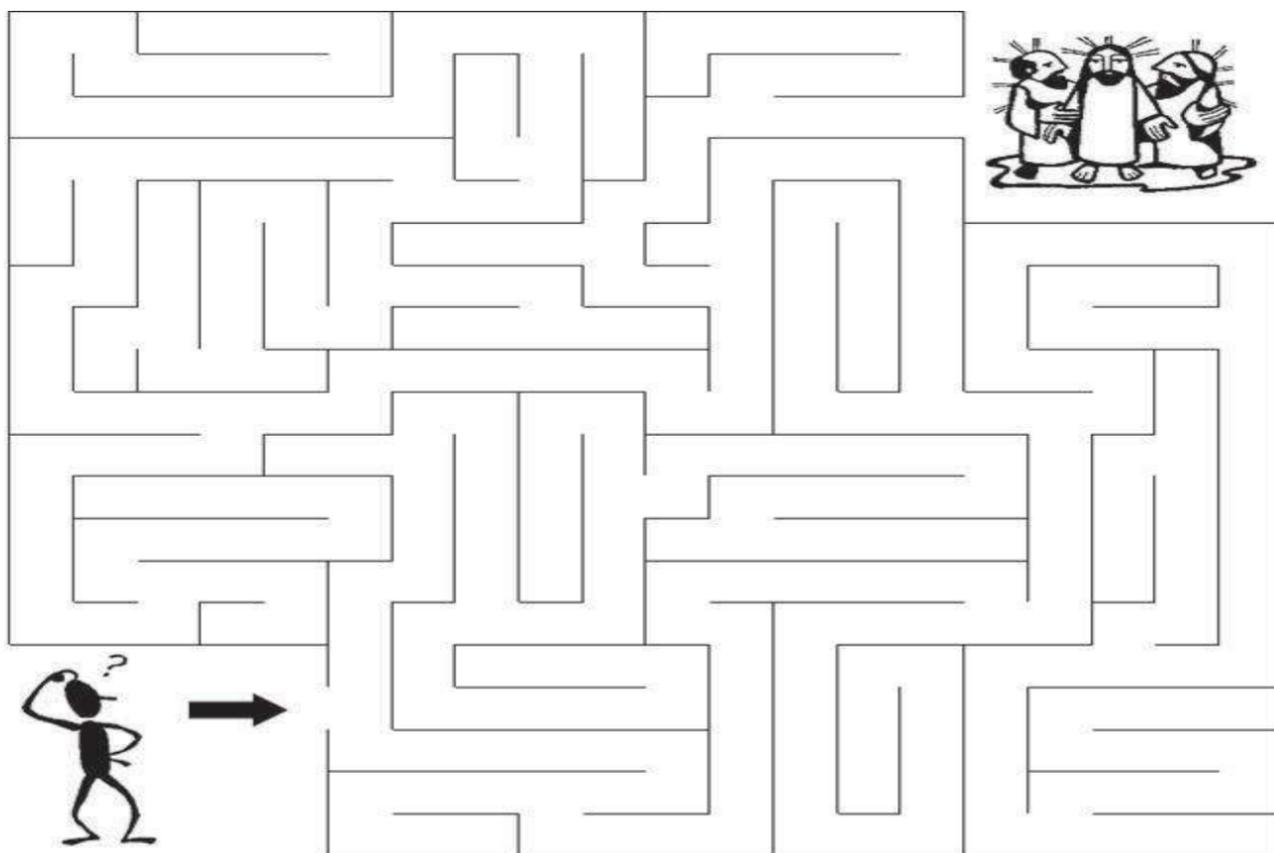
Sunday
Jesus was transfigured in glory in front of Peter, James, and John.
 • Nice things in this life don't last forever. Thank God for something nice you have now.

Tuesday
The mob hit Jesus and spit on Him.
 • If you have money, give some to the poor. Otherwise say a prayer for them. 12

Thursday
Jesus spent the night in prison after he was arrested.
 • Say an 'Our Father' right before you go to sleep. 14

Saturday
Pray to Our Lady:
Turn, then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us, and after this, our exile, show unto us the Fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O pious, O sweet Virgin Mary! Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ! 16

Can you find the way to Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on the mountain?



We again received several e-mails from friends back in Guyana thanking us for sharing last week's article and assuring us that they are eagerly awaiting the second part. As promised here is the second (final) part.

12. Some people embrace their golden years, while others become bitter and surly. Life is too short to waste your days on the latter. Spend your time with positive, cheerful people, it'll rub off on you and your days will seem that much better. Spending your time with bitter people will make you older and harder to be around.

13. Do not surrender to the temptation of living with your children or grandchildren (if you have a financial choice, that is). Sure, being surrounded by family sounds great, but we all need our privacy. They need theirs and you need yours. If you've lost your partner (our deepest condolences), then find a person to move in with you and help out. Even then, do so only if you feel you really need the help or do not want to live alone.

14. Don't abandon your hobbies. If you don't have any, make new ones. You can travel, hike, cook, read, dance. You can adopt a cat or a dog, grow a garden, play cards, checkers, chess, dominoes, golf. You can paint, volunteer or just collect certain items. Find something you like and spend some real time having fun with it.

15. Even if you don't feel like it, try to accept invitations. Baptisms, graduations, birthdays, weddings, conferences. Try to go. Get out of the house, meet people you haven't seen in a while, experience something new (or something old). But don't get upset when you're not invited. Some events are limited by resources, and not

Life is too short to drink bad wine (2)



By Chris & Noelma Lam

everyone can be hosted. The important thing is to leave the house from time to time. Go to museums, go walk through a field. Get out there.

16. Be a conversationalist. Talk less and listen more. Some people go on and on about the past, not caring if their listeners are really interested. That's a great way of reducing their desire to speak with you. Listen first and answer questions, but don't go off into long stories unless asked to. Speak in courteous tones and try not to complain or criticize too much unless you really need to. Try to accept situations as they are. Everyone is going through the same things, and people have a low tolerance for hearing complaints. Always find some good things to say as well.

17. Pain and discomfort go hand in hand with getting older. Try not to dwell on them but accept them as a part of the cycle of life we're all going through. Try to minimize them in your mind. They are not who you are, they are something that life added to you. If

they become your entire focus, you lose sight of the person you used to be.

18. If you've been offended by someone - forgive them. If you've offended someone - apologize. Don't drag around resentment with you. It only serves to make you sad and bitter. It doesn't matter who was right. Someone once said: "Holding a grudge is like taking poison and expecting the other person to die." Don't take that poison. Forgive, forget and move on with your life.

19. If you have a strong belief, savour it. But don't waste your time trying to convince others. They will make their own choices no matter what you tell them, and it will only bring you frustration. Live your faith and set an example. Live true to your beliefs and let that memory sway them.

20. Laugh. Laugh A LOT. Laugh at everything. Remember, you are one of the lucky ones. You managed to have a life, a long one. Many never get to this age, never get to experience a full life. But you did. So what's not to laugh about? Find the humour in your situation.

21. Take no notice of what others say about you and even less notice of what they might be thinking. They'll do it anyway, and you should have pride in yourself and what you've achieved. Let them talk and don't worry. They have no idea about your history, your memories and the life you've lived so far. There's still much to be written, so get busy writing and don't waste time thinking about what others might think. Now is the time to be at rest, at peace and as happy as you can be!

AND REMEMBER: "Life is too short to drink bad wine." ❖

TitBits

-- This Week's Reflection:

Lent bursts into our lives each year to give us the opportunity to ask hard questions. And we ask them in the context of prayer, of time spent with God. And God will give us the grace and courage to ask, and answer, the challenging questions. In so many ways, different for each of us, the choice between life and death is still a choice we have to make. Perhaps this is what it means to take up our cross. If we're honest with ourselves, we probably know what that choice involves at this point in time. Let us make a commitment today to take that step toward life. God Bless You! Have a Great Week!

-- This Week's Bible Question:

Q. When is the 'accepted time - the day of salvation?'

-- This Week's Teaser:

Q: Why are robots never afraid?

-- Today's Bible Verse:

The measure you give will be the measure you get back. - Luke 6:38

-- Today's Marriage Tip:

Ever heard of limerence? Our dictionary says that it's a physical feeling of infatuation for another, (like a crush). Although limerence can lead couples to a committed love, it typically has a shelf life of 2 to 3 years. That's why we couples must aim to a more lasting love. We need to nurture our romance, but rely on enduring friendship, and the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

-- Humour:

A young man was visiting his sisters home for Valentine dinner. As he arrived at their house he found his young nephew, Little Johnny, helping to bake some cupcakes. After they were done, mom allowed Johnny to put the icing on. When Johnny had finished, he brought them to the table. The cupcakes looked delicious.

"Johnny," his uncle said as he took a bite. "These are so good." As he finished a cupcake and took another, he again complimented his little nephew. "The cupcakes look beautiful, Johnny," He said. "How did you get the icing so neat?"

Johnny replied, "It was easy. I just licked

them."

The uncle turned pale. He pointed to the plate of cupcakes. "You licked all of these?"

Johnny replied, "Well no. After a while my tongue got tired, and I got the dog to help."

-- Conflicting Proverbs

Actions speak louder than words.

The pen is mightier than the sword.

-- A Card Hallmark Would Never Print:

You're not a complete idiot - Some parts are just missing.

-- This Week's Truism:

Never test the depth of a river with both feet.

-- Actual Hilarious Signs:

On Plumber's truck:

"Don't sleep with a drip. Call your plumber."

-- Answer to Bible Question:

Now. - see 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

-- Answer to Teaser:

Because they have nerves of steel.. ❖



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Mind Puzzler Corner

Our Last Brain Teaser was:

I can't be seen, I can't be held,
I can't be dropped to the ground,
But I can be thrown across the room,
And I move at the speed of sound.

What am I?

The answer: A voice.

This Week's Brain Teaser:

I can sizzle like bacon,
I am made with an egg,
I have plenty of backbone, but lack a good leg,
I peel layers like onions, but still remain whole,
I can be long like a flagpole, yet fit in a hole.

What am I?

Look for the answer next week

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Religious leaders advocate love for thy LGBTQ Neighbour



Press Release from the Guyana Rainbow Foundation

On Saturday, February 17th 2018, the Guyana Rainbow Foundation (GuyBow)- a community based advocacy and empowerment organization serving lesbian, bisexual, queer, and questioning Guyanese women- hosted a public discussion at the National Library on the theme of "Loving Thy LGBTQ Neighbour/ Family Member". The panel consisted of Bishop Alleyne from the Roman Catholic diocese, Brother Wazir Baksh of the Guyana Islamic Trust, and Swami Aksharananda, founder and head of the Saraswati Vidya Niketan School.

In her opening remarks, Colleen McEwan- one of the leaders of GuyBow, noted the recent Valentine's Day celebrations but lamented the fact that LGBTQ persons sometimes feel left out of such celebrations because they still experience stigma and discrimination- often from persons who use religion as a weapon. Hosting this public discussion, stated Ms. McEwan, was an attempt to encourage dialogue, reduce stigma and discrimination, and build appreciation and respect for human rights, diversity, and LGBTQ Guyanese. She acknowledged the important role religious leaders play in shaping of public opinion and urged their support in helping to instill more

loving values among Guyanese.

Brother Baksh, in his remarks, stated that while the religion of Islam frowns upon public displays of sexuality and the overt sexualization of the physical body, it acknowledges the shared humanity of all persons. The Quran, he noted, commands Muslims to love and be generous to their neighbours; Muslims should not pry and peep into their neighbours private bedroom affairs. Even if two people of the same gender are 'shacked up', he said, what they do in the privacy of their homes is their affair, as long as they- whether gay or straight- keep what is private private. He advised Muslim parents who might be confused, concerned, or ashamed of their LGBTQ children to understand that that is their choice as adults, and as Muslim parents they should only advise and counsel their children to be true to their conscience. It's wrong, said Brother Baksh, to go beyond that or to act violently to LGBTQ persons- even if they may be doing something you consider to be a sin. He noted that although homosexuality is considered "wrong" according to the Muslim religion, committing a sin does not remove one from Islam. He emphasized the fact that everyone has the freedom to choose how he or she wants to live and all are entitled to the rights enshrined in the Consti-

tution, no matter their individual choices.

Bishop Alleyne began his presentation by extending an apology to the LGBTI community. He acknowledged that the Church and tradition he represents has not always interfaced with LGBTQ persons in the best manner. He owned up to his own struggles and prejudices but highlighted the huge impact that occasions for dialogue and sharing have had in helping reduce fear and discrimination. He highlighted research data that has shown that while attitudes in Guyana towards LGBTQ persons are indeed discriminatory, it is also a fact that a high level of compassion exists when people are asked about those close to them, such as coworkers and family members. He reminded the audience that the starting point of the social teachings of the Church is that everybody is good, everybody belongs, and that all people are created in the image of God. He described the principle of association- that we are in connection with and responsible for each other- as well as the Christian notion of solidarity with and concern for minority and marginalized persons as key tools for shaping a better society. He lamented the degeneration of basic human respect in the Guyanese context and encouraged persons to embody the alternative- to be a pres-

ence of integrity, to each be a Valentine to Guyana. Instead of telling persons what to do or provide rules, Bishop Alleyne espoused instead the notion of helping others to develop their own understanding and awareness. He also emphasized the notion of rights and responsibility and urged persons to become actively involved with and contribute meaningfully to society.

In his presentation, Swami Aksharananda emphasized diversity and that there is no notion of God as a judge in Hinduism. In the Hindu tradition, explained Swami, each person is an embodiment of God, so there is nothing that any human being can do to violate God. He also noted the fact that Hinduism has gifted the Kama Sutra to humanity- a document that celebrates the human body from head to toe. He described a fundamental Sanskrit prayer that wishes happiness to all and explained that key to Hindu ethics is the concept of non-injury. There are three aspects to not hurting, said Swami- physical injury, verbal hurting, and mental injuries. One doesn't injure others, he explained, simply because they themselves do not want to be hurt. Sexual orientation, noted the Swami, takes nothing away from the individual's desire for moksha- liberation.

Over thirty persons attended this public dialogue, including a human rights delegation from the law school of Georgetown University in Washington, DC. There was a lively discussion from some audience members who disagreed with the statements of the panelists but a respectful atmosphere prevailed throughout and all agreed upon the need for more discourse. Notable also was the contribution made by several lesbian Guyanese who spoke of their own faith and their desire for acceptance and love by others.

For more information, GuyBow can be contacted at guybow99@gmail.com

In Blessed and Everlasting Memory of a Precious soul



Yohance Sudi Douglas

DOB - 7th July, 1984
DOD - 1st March, 2003

*A bud that the gardener gave us;
A fair and lovely child;
He gave him in our keeping;
To cherish undefiled;
But just as it was opening;
To the Glory of the day;
Down came the Heavenly gardener;
And took our flower away.
We cannot Lord, thy purpose see;
But all is well that's done by thee.*

Remembered by his parents, brothers, sister, nephews, nieces, great-nephew, uncles, aunts, cousins and all other relatives and dear friends.

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Family & Life Commission brings Valentine Joy to Homes for the Elderly

Saint of the Week

March 3rd

Saint Katharine Drexel

(November 26, 1858 - March 3, 1955)



If your father is an international banker and you ride in a private railroad car, you are not likely to be drawn into a life of voluntary poverty. But if your mother opens your home to the poor three days each week and your father spends half an hour each evening in prayer, it is not impossible that you will devote your life to the poor and give away millions of dollars. Katharine Drexel did that. She was born in Philadelphia, USA in 1858. She had an excellent education and traveled widely. As a rich girl, she had a grand debut into society. But when she nursed her stepmother through a three-year terminal illness, she saw that all the Drexel money could not buy safety from pain or death, and her life took a profound turn.

She had always been interested in the plight of the Native Americans. While on a European tour, she met Pope Leo XIII and asked him to send more missionaries to Wyoming. The pope replied, "Why don't you become a missionary?"

Back home, Katharine visited the Dakotas, met the Sioux leader Red Cloud and began her systematic aid to Native American missions.

She could easily have married. But after much discussion with Bishop O'Connor, she wrote in 1889, "The feast of St. Joseph brought me the grace to give the remainder of my life to the Indians and the Colored." Newspaper headlines screamed "Gives Up Seven Million!"

After three and a half years of training, she and her first band of nuns opened a boarding school in Santa Fe. A string of foundations followed. By 1942 she had a system of Black Catholic schools in 13 states, plus 40 mission centers and 23 rural schools. Segregationists harassed her work, even burning a school in Pennsylvania. In all, she established 50 missions for Native Americans.

Her crowning achievement was the founding of Xavier University in New Orleans, the first Catholic university in the United States for African Americans. At 77, she suffered a heart attack and was forced to retire. Apparently her life was over. But now came almost 20 years of quiet, intense prayer from a small room overlooking the sanctuary. Small notebooks and slips of paper record her various prayers, ceaseless aspirations and meditation. She died at 96 and was canonized in 2000. ❖ [www.franciscanmedia.org]



The Family and Life Commission brought Valentine joy to two Older Adult's homes, namely the New Nazareth Home and the Saint Thomas Moore Men's Homestead. This was their annual visit called 'The Love Mission', to these homes to spread Valentine joy.

They shared basic items in bright red bags and cards for residents, handcrafted by the youths from the catechism class of the Parish of St. Joseph, Husband of Mary, Diamond.

This annual visit really makes the residents feel cared for and the cards touch their hearts coming from the new generation of young, caring Catholics. This feeling is also increased when the residents see the loaded food bags, filled with tasty treats.

This caring annual practice highlights the need for all to show care and concern for those who have contributed to keeping our country alive and well and what they have done should never be forgotten. More homes are indeed needed for our older adults. Many need the care shown by these homes. Many seniors live on their

own and are neglected by their families who themselves are in need. It is the task of all citizens, especially religious groups and the Government to generously care for the elderly.

As a Cooperative Republic each should be able to share in the wealth of this beautiful country. This is not a burden but a privilege. A basic standard of what one can live on should be researched. The Seniors should be at the top of the list for this provision. Their experiences, and their hard work should be recognised in solid cash returns!

Keep up the good work members of the Family and Life Commission! ❖



On the Lighter Side

