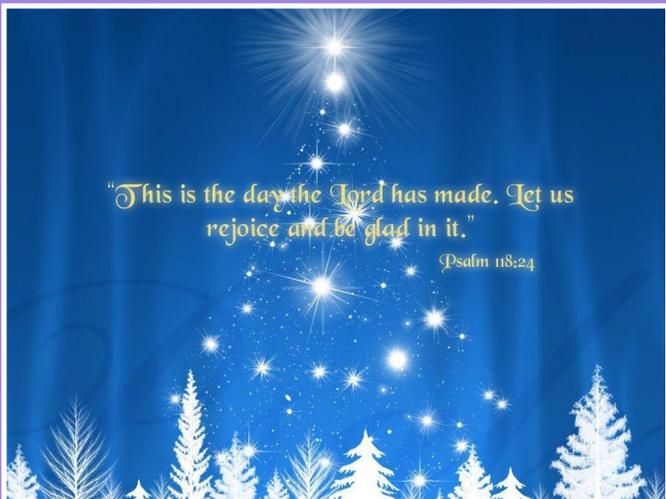






As we come to the end of 2020, we would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas, and a bright and prosperous New Year. May God's blessings be upon you and your family, at this sacred time. As the new year unfolds, may we be mindful of the life of St. Joseph, who was tender, loving, hardworking, selfless, patient and obedient. May we endeavour daily to be more like him.

Kendell and Latoya Celestine.
National Coordinators, Catholic Engaged Encounter Trinidad and Tobago



JESUS
BEST. GIFT. EVER.

From Tricia and Raymond Syms, Episcopal Delegates for the Archdiocesan Family Life Commission

No need to state the obvious, but 2020 has been a unique year for everyone: a 'once in a lifetime' year, a year of highs and lows requiring all of us to see, judge and act.

But God is God, and God will never change. He reminds us every year, especially at Christmas time, that He is the Light and the Way in all circumstances.

Our sincerest wishes to all for a blessed Christmas, a Christmas deeply rooted in the mystery of the incarnation – God is with us!



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Jesus' Words Can Help You Respond in Hope to the COVID-19 Crisis

What does Jesus have to say to us during the coronavirus outbreak? And how should Christians respond to the pandemic?

It's starting to feel old at this point. Social distance, wear a mask, stay six feet apart, meet outside, wash your hands, don't hug. Protect other people from getting sick. Protect yourself.

These circumstances have shaken us to our very foundations. Our economy, our work, our relationships have been disrupted. Our churches have closed and reopened looking far different than they had before.

What does God call followers of Jesus to in times like this? How should we respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic? What is the Christian response to seismic events like these?

Be at Peace

On the night before He suffered on the cross, Jesus encouraged His disciples with these words: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27, English Standard Version).

Jesus gives those who follow Him a promise of peace that is different from what the world experiences. If you have accepted Jesus' death for the forgiveness of your sins, the reality is that you can face any challenge, suffering or loss with hope and peace. As followers of Jesus, we know the One who says of Himself that He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, who holds all things together by His power.

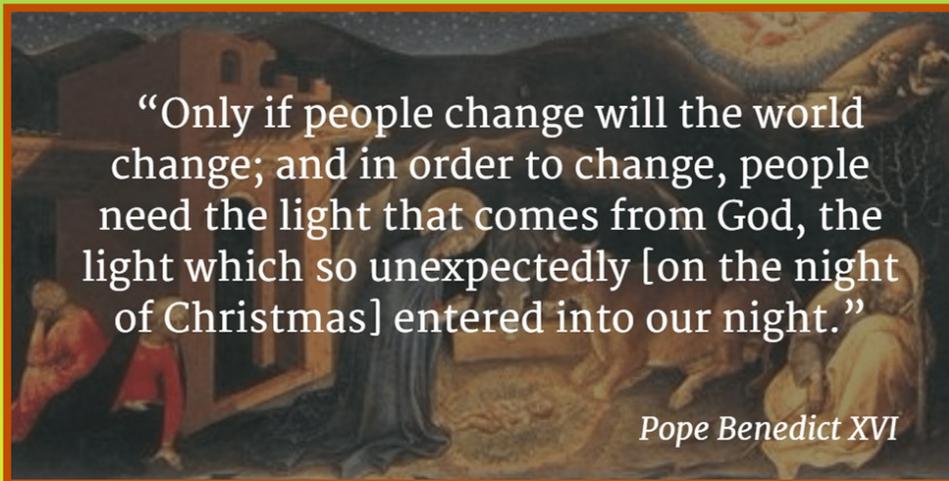
We can rest in a future that is secure, because we have a relationship with God, through faith in Jesus. Jesus promised His followers they didn't have to be afraid. And those promises apply to those of us who follow Him today. God has promised that nothing can separate us from the love of God — neither death nor life, height nor depth — nothing in all creation can take from us the love and security and peace of God (Romans 8:37-39). That includes sickness, loss and even death. It includes quarantines. It includes

layoffs and economic crises. As Christians, we have a basis for hope that is real and lasting.

And that hope frees us as believers to love others well.

Love and Serve Others

Jesus also gave His followers a command to love others sacrificially. When asked about the greatest commandment, He answered that we are commanded to love God with all our heart, soul and mind and to love others as ourselves (Matthew 22:38-40). Jesus went so far as to say that the whole of the Old Testament depends on these two commands.



As followers of Jesus in the midst of a season of fear and anxiety, we have a unique opportunity to serve the world around us and love others well. We can love others well by following best practices and taking steps to stop the virus

from spreading. But we can also love others well by continuing to be people of relationships, by not being afraid, by seeking opportunities to serve rather than trying simply to protect ourselves. As hard as it is to believe, historically, the church has grown more in seasons of hardship and persecution than in seasons of plenty.

In part, this is tied to the security we have as followers of Jesus. If we are experiencing God's peace in the midst of fear and anxiety, it frees us up to see the needs of others and respond to them. In an environment of fear and uncertainty, being able to come alongside others — even if it has to be six feet away, over the phone, or on a Zoom call — and meet their needs with peace and calmness, communicates a love that is based on something far greater than our current circumstances. It communicates hope.

Share Hope Boldly

In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus tells His followers, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a

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basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (ESV).

Light is intended to be seen by others. As followers of Jesus, in the midst of a pandemic, we have a unique opportunity to demonstrate that the gospel is not just words, but that the love of Jesus makes a difference in how we treat people and how we face hardships.

As the coronavirus spreads, so will fear and uncertainty — and the world in which we live will cry out for reassurance and peace. We have the opportunity

to live unafraid, to show others a hope that isn't just based on wearing a mask, or the development of a vaccine but that rests in a relationship with the God of the universe. We can be people of peace and love because Jesus has forgiven us our sins and transformed our lives. And as transformed people, we have a message of hope to offer.

In the midst of this uncertainty, reject the temptation to live out of fear. Be at peace. Love others well. Help keep others safe. And share the reason for the hope that you have.

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/life-and-relationships/hardships/jesus-words-can-help-you-respond-in-hope-to-covid-19.html>



Are we ready to receive Him? Before the birth of Jesus, his parents asked for a simple dwelling place, but there was none. **If Mary and Joseph were looking for a home for Jesus, would they choose ... your heart, and all it holds?** Let us pray that we shall be *Mother Teresa of Calcutta* able to welcome Jesus at Christmas, not in the cold manger of a selfish heart, but in a heart full of love, compassion, joy and peace, a heart warm with love for one another.



A Recipe for Readiness

Luke 21:34-36 “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”

In order for us to celebrate on that day when the Lord shall come, there are prerequisites that must be met. That leads us to the next stage of this passage.

DIRECTIVE – The Lord goes on to instruct us in how to be ready for the great and terrible day of the Lord:

Notice that the Lord announces the effect (drowsiness) and then the causes (carousing, drunkenness, and anxieties of daily life). This is typical of ancient practice. In modern times, however, it is more common to speak of the causes and then describe the effects. Hence, we will proceed with our study in a slightly different order than that in which it was presented.

Cause 1: DEBAUCHERY – The Lord warns of the problem of “carousing.” The Greek word used is *κραিপάλη* (*kraipale*), meaning most literally the giddiness and headache caused by drinking wine to excess. More generally it means the excessive indulgence of our passions or living life to excess. Other translators render the Greek word as “dissipation,” referring to the general squandering and loss of resources resulting from excessive indulgence.

We, of course, live in times that make it easy to (over)satisfy our every need. At the market there is not merely bread, there are fifty different types of bread. Our oversupply and overindulgence are literally reflected in our bodies: obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, and heart disease plague us.

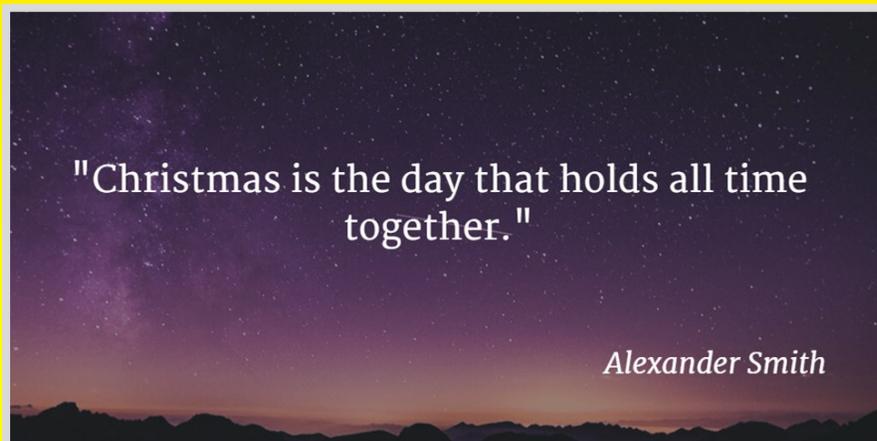
It is not just food that is excessive; it is everything. We are excessively busy with the non-essentials of life. There are innumerable ways to occupy our minds. Our minds are so overstimulated that we cannot hear that “still, small voice.” Most people have a very short attention span due to this overstimulation. All day long the noise from the radio, mp3 play-



er, TV, DVD player, CD player, PC, iPad, and cell phone compete for our attention. It jams our mind and breaks our union with Christ and even with our very self. Then there are the 24-hour news channels generating hype about even ordinary events: “Breaking news!” Our e-mail is flooded with junk mail and spam, offering false hopes and products and services we don’t really need. There are endless money-making schemes, lotteries, and sweepstakes. And oh, the sales: Black Friday, Cyber Monday, pre-holiday, post-holiday! It makes me think of the carnival huck-

sters calling, “Step right up!” It is worse than that, though, because it seems we cannot get away from it. We spend, spend, spend and then borrow, borrow, borrow to support our spending. We need two incomes and 60-hour work weeks so that we can afford our lifestyle. Once we have acquired “the goods,” we’re never there to enjoy them. We sacrifice family on the altar of pleasure. We have an excess of everything except children, because they cost money and thus impede our ability to consume.

Even our recreation is excessive. Our weekends and vacations often leave us exhausted, disquieted, and unprepared for the coming week. A simple, quiet weekend, spent reflecting on God’s wonders or spending time at home with family? No way! It’s off to watch the myriad activities of our overscheduled children. The weekends meant for rest, instead feature distinctly unrestful activities such as shopping, dancing in loud bars, watching football games, and drinking.



Yes, it’s all excess. It weighs us down, wears us, costs a lot of time and money, and isn’t really all that satisfying anyway. It is dissipation. In the end, we are left with something like that headache and hung-over feeling of which the

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Greek word *kraipale* speaks. Up goes the cry anyway: "One more round!" Excess, dissipation, carousing; more, more, more!

Cause 2: DIVISIONS – The Lord warns of the "anxieties" of daily life. The Greek word used is *μερίμνας* (*merimnais*), meaning more literally "a part separated from the whole," "that which divides and fractures a person into parts." The human person, overwhelmed with excess, becomes incapable of distinguishing the urgent from the important, the merely pleasurable from the productive. On account of our overstimulation, our excess, we are pulled in many different directions. We can't decide; our loyalties are divided and conflicting. We are endlessly distracted by a thousand contrary drives and concerns.

Anxiety is the condition of being overwhelmed and divided by many and contrary drives, demands, and priorities. Anxiety freezes and perplexes us. There is too much at stake, and no central governing principle to direct our decisions. All of this overwhelms us and clouds our mind and heart. We are anxious about many things and cannot determine the "one thing necessary" that will order all of the details (cf Luke 10:42). The Lord lists anxiety as among those things that destroy our readiness to stand before Him with joy.

Cause 3: DRUNKENNESS – Here the Greek word used is straightforward: *μέθη* (*methe*), meaning drunk on wine. Why do we drink? We drink to medicate our anxiety. Overwhelmed by the excess that leads to anxiety (inner division and conflict) we drink to medicate our sense of being overwhelmed. Something has to soothe us. Instead of slowing down and seeking God, we drink. We anesthetize our mind. Alcohol is not the only thing we use. We use things, people, power, sex, entertainment, diversions, and distractions; all to soothe our tense, anxious mind.



This, of course, only deepens the central problem. All these things only add to the very problem that has disturbed us in the first place: the *kraipale* that is excess and dissipation. The solution is to get clear about our priorities, to seek God and allow Him to order our life. Instead of seeking a clear mind, however, we do the opposite and tune out. A little wine is a gift from God (cf Psalm 104:15) to cheer our hearts, but with excess, we go beyond cheer to dull our mind.

To be sober is to have a clear mind, one that knows and is in touch with reality and final ends. To be sober is to be alert, honest, and reasonable; to act in a way that bespeaks thoughtful and deliberate movement toward a rational and worthy goal. The sober person acts consciously and with purpose toward a unifying goal: being with God. St. Paul says, But this one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:13-14).

Lacking the one unifying thing, torn apart within, and anxious on account of our excesses, we dull our mind with alcohol. The Lord calls us to clarity, but we retreat into insobriety. We are, in effect, "hung over" from indulging in the excesses of this world and then "medicating" the resulting inner divisions. Our minds go dull and we tune out.

The Effect: DROWSINESS – The Lord says, Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy. The Greek word used here is *βαρηθῶσιν* (*barethosin*), meaning "burdened, heavily laden, overcome, or weighted down." Thus, we see that the effect that all the above things have is to weigh us down, to burden our heart. Laden with excess, divided by contrary demands, and medicating the stress with insobriety, our heart becomes tired and burdened. Our heart is no longer inflamed and animated with love. It has become weary, distracted, bored, and tired of holy

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"Christmas isn't just a temporal celebration or the memory of a beautiful (event); Christmas is more ... Christmas is an encounter!"
– Pope Francis

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things and of the Lord. Instead of being watchful in prayer, our heart sleeps on, weighed down in sin, excess, division, and insobriety. It no longer keeps watch for the Lord, whom it is called to love.

Yes, the world, and our sinful preoccupation with it weighs our hearts down. It captures our love and attention and we become drowsy toward spiritual things.

In the garden, the Lord asked the apostles to pray, but they had spent their energy that evening arguing with Jesus, and debating among themselves about who was greatest. Divided within, they wanted Jesus, but they also wanted the world and its fame and power. Struck by the conflict and tension that Jesus' words about suffering and dying brought, they were divided and anxious. So, they medicated themselves and tuned out. They likely had more than a few drinks of wine that night. Weighed down and exhausted by worldly preoccupations and priorities, their burdened hearts were too drowsy to pray; and so they slept. (Satan, however, did not sleep that night.)

Consider the words of Jesus to the Church at Ephesus: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place (Rev 2:5-6). Jesus also warns, Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold (Mat 24:12). Yes, sinful indulgence divides and stresses us. Because it is too much, we tune out and dull our mind; thus, our heart grows cold, burdened, and heavy with sin. Heavy and weary, our heart goes to sleep, and we lose our first love. Jesus described the pattern: Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you

by surprise like a trap. This is the cycle.

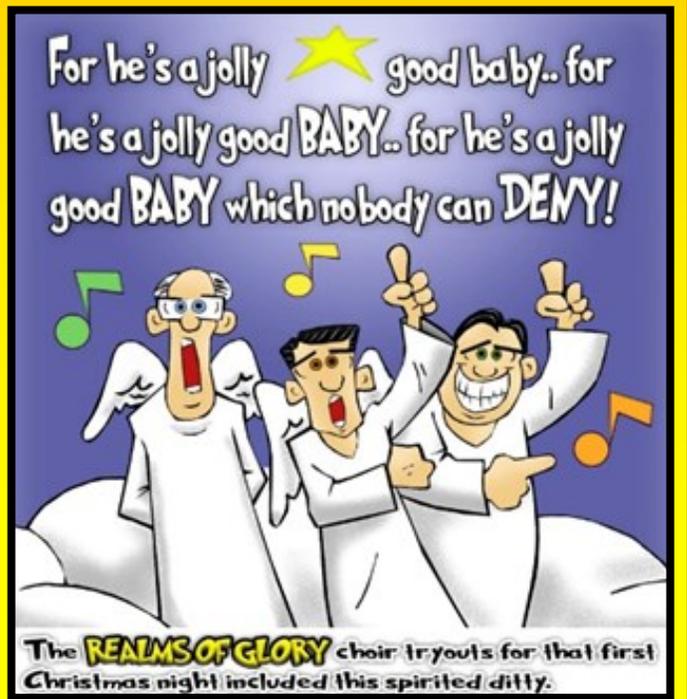
What to do about this awful cycle?

The Directive: DUE DILIGENCE – The Lord says, Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent, and to stand before the Son of Man. The Lord does not describe this terrible cycle of debauchery (excess), division (anxiety), drunkenness (self-medication), and drowsiness (heavy hearts) merely to define the problem. Having diagnosed our condition, He prescribes the remedy of prayerful vigilance.

To be vigilantly prayerful is to be in living, conscious contact with God. It is to have our heart and mind focused on the one thing necessary (cf Luke 10:42), and thus to have our life ordered. With this order properly established, our excesses fall away, and the many associated anxieties and divisions depart. Once they are gone, we no longer need to medicate and soothe our anxious mind. This lightens our heart; its heaviness goes away. It is free to love and desire with well-ordered love.

Once we have set our sights on God through vigilant prayer, everything else in our life becomes ordered. Then, when Christ comes, He will not disrupt our world but confirm what we are already used to: Jesus Christ as the center and meaning of our life. Through prayerful vigilance we can stand erect and raise [our] head because [our] redemption is at hand. Why? Because we are used to seeing Him and experiencing His authority. He thus comes not to destroy and usurp our disordered life, but to confirm and fulfill what has always been true for us: that Jesus is the center of our life.

Adapted from: <https://cathstan.org/posts/a-recipe-for-readiness-a-homily-for-the-first-sunday-of-advent>



A Christmas Memory

by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson

Though money didn't flow as freely as the rain that winter, my parents worked with joyful anticipation to give my brother and me a Christmas present we would never forget. They scrimped for months and then spent more than they could probably afford for a Marx electric train.

Then the day before Christmas, a cousin stationed at a nearby military base pulled into the driveway. Opening the trunk of his car he lifted out a large heavy box. My brother and I could hardly wait to see what it was. On Christmas morning we opened it first. Eagerly we unwrapped an expensive new electric train set. Wow! You had to pull us down off the ceiling. A Lionel train, too! Then we opened the presents from our parents--another electric train. Ho hum. And not nearly as extravagant as the one from our cousin. Guess whose we played with most?

Mom and Dad were hurt. The outlay for an unmarried Air Force lieutenant was nothing compared to the sacrifice my parents had made. But all we saw was the glamour of an expensive train. We counted our parents' gift as merely a nice accessory. Our heavenly Father spends many a disappointing Christmas. Amidst the glittering ornaments and flashing Christmas lights, the hurry and hustle of shopping and wrapping and family get-togethers, parties and presents, trees and turkeys--who really cares about His gift? What gets more attention from us: our Father's gift of life in Jesus Christ or the quickly-wrapped department store gifts from our cousins?

Thank you, Father, for Jesus. Thank you for the abundant life that we, His disciples, can enjoy now. Thank you for sending us a most expensive gift--your own life. Thank you!

<http://www.joyfulheart.com/christmas/train.htm>

Joy in our Winter

On this day Christ is born to us - we pray in liturgy today - On this day has appeared to us a Saviour. On this day angels sing for us, archangels rejoice for us. On this day the righteous exult, saying, Glory to God in the highest.

Christmas is special because it enables us again and again to be happy that Christ was born in time, *on that day*. And his birth, as the Latin fathers say, has destroyed the vicious circle of godless life.

Godless life is not simply life without a god or without morals and principles. Godless life is a life without the God who has revealed himself to Abraham and his offspring, and who eventually came to us in the form of a servant: a defenseless baby. Moreover, he came to restore us to himself, because the salvation that he offers is this: to share in the Divine life - with all its richness and depths unfathomed by human mind and heart - in a glorified body. And this is all possible because *on that day* Christ assumed the human body.

On Christmas day God-is-with-us. On this day he is born in time and for eternity changes time. *On this day* he paints for us a vista, a new way and purpose: 'long for me' he says, 'so that I may be born in your heart'.

And if he is born in you, then you have no need to fear the night and death or suffering, for he is with you - and he has conquered them for you. *On this day*.

by Fr Benedict Jonak

<https://www.godzdogz.op.org/torch/joy-in-our-winter>



IN MEMORIAM

This year we said farewell to a great friend and partner in our ministry, Goldwyn Pollanais (1965-2020). He sadly passed from our grasp on Friday 9th October 2020.

Goldwyn, or "Goldy" was a constant help to our ministry, a dependable and trustworthy worker with the food preparation team, and anywhere else he was asked to assist. We have many fond memories of his jovial and open personality, the deep fatherly love he had for his daughter, and his commitment to ensuring that all who came to the ministry felt welcome. He was a true and trusted friend, a hard worker, fully committed, and one of the pillars of our support staff. He is/will be missed.

R.I.P dear brother, may the good Lord welcome you home.



HAPPY GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Carl and Pat Mendez celebrated a significant wedding anniversary on 6th June 2020..... fifty years! Pat and Carl were a Presenting couple for 26 years on our Catholic Engaged Encounter weekends, and only retired from presenting in October 2019. They have been and continue to be, an example and testament to those who desire a fulfilling marriage, and have



lent their time and skills in many other activities of our ministry over the years. They received a special papal citation for their service to marriage preparation in Trinidad and Tobago. We wish them many more happy, fulfilling and blessed years with each other and their family, and may God continue to watch over, guide and bring them closer to Him.

Congratulations Pat and Carl!



September 2020 Weekend

NEWS FROM DOMINICA

Meeting held with Bishop of Roseau

The National Coordinators of CEE Dominica (CEED) met with the Bishop of Roseau to look at current operations of the programme.

Bishop Malzaire was very commendable of the effort of the community to keep the programme alive, despite challenges of 2017 Hurricane Maria, and now COVID 19. Among issues raised in discussion with His Lordship were recruitment of priests, and couples to serve as weekend presenting teams, and a permanent venue for residential weekends. Since Hurricane Maria, the Holy Redeemer Retreat House, where weekends were conducted, has been out of commission. His Lordship has pledged his support to the CEE Ministry in these areas as well as in other ways to facilitate the growth of the programme in the Diocese of Roseau.

Thirty seven years of Service to Families

Catholic Engaged Encounter Dominica celebrated its 37th anniversary in May 2020, with a virtual Mass. Past and present core members as well as members of the Marriage Encounter Core participated in that activity. Participants used the opportunity to thank God for the achievements of the CEED over the past 37 years as well as to pray for protection of families from hurricanes, COVID 19 and other misfortunes.

Date Night

Encountered couples and members of the ME/ CEE coordinating teams participated in a virtual date night in December 2020, organized by the Marriage Encounter Community. The activity featured presentations from a couple and priest on "Love in Times of Crisis". There was also entertainment from couples. Over 40 couples participated in the activity.

NEWS FROM GRENADA

Meeting with Bishop Clyde Harvey



Ten (10) Couples took part in our weekend in November 2020. This was our only weekend for the year 2020 due to Covid 19. Even in the midst of the pandemic and social distancing the couples expressed their joy to be able to take part in this important Marriage preparation tool. In preparation for the weekend, the coordinating couple of CEEG met with Bishop Clyde Harvey to discuss the way forward for CEE, in the Diocese. The Bishop was very open and expressed his delight to chart the way forward with the team since CEE is the only marriage preparation program in the Diocese. His Lordship shared his sentiments with the participants in the closing mass of the retreat.

Impact of Covid-19 on Future CEE Weekends

Our CEE Team met virtually to review the weekend and discuss the way forward in the midst of the pandemic. Discussions were held about the format for weekends going forward and the possibilities of hosting online weekends for 2021. These discussions are continuing.

Grenada has since seen increased cases of COVID 19 and a curfew was recently imposed. There is also a restriction on the number of persons attending any activity. This will affect immediately all meetings, or other gatherings. Our usual end of year social activities has been postponed. We are using virtual means to keep connected, motivating each other onwards in these difficult times.

