



# Community Outreach

WITNESSES OF HOPE  
AND JUSTICE



World Day  
*of the* Poor

# WELCOME: SEGMENT TWO OUTREACH

Welcome to the second segment of World Day of the Poor 2021 on the CCSJ Trinidad and Tobago Facebook page. And as before, we'll introduce the clerics of all faiths alphabetically. But first, we will start this with his Grace, Archbishop Charles Jason Gordon. Since this event is organized by the Catholic Commission for Social Justice.

*Jra Mathur - Moderator*

Speaker

---

HIS GRACE, CHARLES JASON GORDON

Thanks again. It was beautiful to hear the different perspectives of the faith traditions and how the sacred scriptures of each tradition speaks to the care for the poor. It's one of the pieces of our humanity, and one of the pieces of the faith that really unites us.

In the Catholic tradition, here in Trinidad and Tobago, the first school for the poor in Port-of-Spain was started by a cleric. His name was Francis Derrida. Derrida started a school with great opposition from the government of the day, from his own Bishop, from everybody. He was a free coloured who became a priest and really pushed the boundaries of inclusion at a time when that was not possible in Trinidad and Tobago.



# Roman Catholic OUTREACH

So I want to start with that story because from the very beginning, the Church has had this relationship with those on the fringes of our society. Today, the Church has several parts of its organization doing tremendous work with the poor. I think of St. Vincent de Paul, who is so well-known and the work they do with the people who are living on the streets, the home that they have for children with HIV/AIDS and many homes they have all over Trinidad and Tobago for the elderly who are on the fringe.



In most of our 61 parishes, [St Vincent de Paul] feed families on a monthly basis. They engage in visits to the elderly who are shut in and [give] tangible help. [The] Living Water Community, is also well known. Most people today know Living Water Community for [their] migrants and refugee Ministry because that's one of the issues to the fore of the society, and they've been in that Ministry for 30 years long before Venezuelans started to come to Trinidad and Tobago. But they also have a home for children who have been abandoned and for women who have been abused.

They have another home for teenage boys who are living on the streets or would be living on the streets. Except for this home, these are teenage boys in deep social trouble and it's a second chance family for socially displaced young men. Living Water also has a drug rehabilitation centre on Mount St. Benedict, a hospice for those dying with cancer, and a second hospice for those dying with HIV/AIDS.

Every day they feed those who live on the streets in Port-of-Spain. During the pandemic, they were [giving] 3000-4000 hampers a month for those who are on the fringe of society. Every day they send sandwiches downtown to those in different communities in the town of Port-of-Spain who were in trouble because they did not have the wherewithal to buy food for themselves. Eternal Light Community is another one of our shining lights. They have two homes for unwed mothers. Then they have homes for young girls who are socially displaced and the young boys who are socially displaced. They have lots of different things happening for teens and for those who are on the fringe. They run a couple of farms and the food from the farms helps to [maintain] the ministries that they do.

[The Eternal Light Community] have one trade school in Tunapuna, which caters for those who have dropped out of the educational system and are about to open another trade school in Sea Lots. They've been “walking” Sea Lots for the last five years now, and are now starting a trade school in Sea Lots. Why? Because it's one of the most neglected communities in the East Port of Spain area. The Sea Lots project is not just going to be a school, it's going to reach out to the parents for development. It's going to reach out to the community for development and seek to be a presence in the midst of that community to offer a pathway to development for that community.

[There is also] the Zion Community in South[ern] Trinidad, and they do such great work accompanying families, especially poor families who are on the edge of poverty and struggling to make things happen. They do a lot of work within schools, within our parishes to help families, to help those who are single moms and those who are different to really find a way to make it every single day of their life. [T]heir work is really with people who are so much on the fringe of society.

During the pandemic, last year, the Church really “stepped up to the plate” to do a Ministry for those who are on the fringe, and together with the work of the communities that I spoke about and the parishes, we would have fed about 70,000 people in these three critical months of the lockdown when people had lost their salaries and did not have anywhere to turn. And whereas, the government gave out three tranches of money to help the poor, what we spent was nearly double what they gave. This year again, in the four critical months this year from June, based on what we spent in giving out hampers, we would have given out about 40,000 hampers.



# Roman Catholic OUTREACH

As a Church, we run 118 primary schools. Many of those schools are in areas of poverty, and so a lot of the children in our schools are finding it difficult [with regards to] education, and we now have a program, especially for East Port-of-Spain. We're really trying to find a way to help the poor child succeed in school because that's the only way out of [poverty]. [We have] 21 secondary schools throughout the country. St. Dominic's Home [a well-established] has been the orphanage of the country [Trinidad and Tobago], together with the other orphanages, for 150 years or more.

Our 60 parishes, on a regular monthly basis, do feeding for the poor. 20 of our parishes have direct ministries for the refugee and the migrants and are doing incredible work. Some of our parishes have started a school or a safe space for the children, and they [assist with] job opportunities, food hampers for the migrant and the refugee children and families as a whole.

[This] is just a little snapshot of some of the things that we do as the Church in Trinidad and Tobago. We work for the poor, and of course, the work of CCSJ and their advocacy for those on the margins and the stride and push for inclusion, as well as, ensuring that the voice of the poor is always heard within our society.



# WELCOME: SEGMENT TWO OUTREACH

It's my pleasure now to ask the Rt. Rev. Joy Abdul Mohan  
from the Presbyterian Church to speak next.

*Jra Mathur - Moderator*

# Speaker

---


## RIGHT REVEREND JOY MOHAN

I want to share with you how the Presbyterian Church through its Board of Social Responsibility and other stakeholders, assist in the reduction of poverty on a daily basis. One, a benevolent fund. Our Churches, all 108, have a Benevolent Fund. This is a love offering that is received at every Holy Communion service which is utilised to make provisions for the less fortunate in and beyond the communities in which the Churches are located. This fund is carefully monitored to ensure that it is used for the purpose it was received. Secondly, we have a food bank. The Board of Social Responsibility Relief Bank. This is organised with supermarkets to make up hamper packages that are paid for and distributed. The Presbyterian Church has developed a good relationship with a few supermarkets to get reasonable and discounted wholesale prices.



# Presbyterian OUTREACH

A third very important thing that we are engaged in, is migrant support. The Presbyterian Church reaches out to the migrant community and continues to provide assistance to the poorest of the poor but special effort was necessary by the Church to reach out to this very vulnerable sector. As you all know the Venezuelan issue became a very political one, but our Church's approach was one of a humanitarian nature. The PCTT partnered again with nongovernmental organizations, NGOs, to provide food support and school supplies, including computer devices to the migrant population. And two such organisations were the Living Water Community and the La Romaine Migrant Support Group (LARMS).



**THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO**  
EST. 1868  
NEC TAMEN CONSUMEBATUR

**The Board  
of Social  
Responsibility  
BOSR**

**HELP OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS  
BY DONATING TO OUR RELIEF BANK**

**CLEANING SUPPLIES**  
Bleach • Disinfectant • Brooms • Mops  
Gloves • Boots • Garbage Bags

**CLEAN CLOTHING  
& BEDDING ITEMS**  
Label & sort by item, gender and age

**SECONDARY SCHOOL  
ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

**USED TEXTBOOKS**  
To help us with this Education Initiative please provide the names of Children/Parent, address, pastoral region, and a brief outline of the assistance required to your BOSR Representative who will advise as to arrangements for collection and provide any further information.

**FLOOD RELIEF DRIVE  
CALL FOR DONATIONS**

**FINANCIAL DONATIONS**

**BOSR RELIEF BANK**  
Bank Name- RBC Royal Bank

**EMAIL DEPOSIT SLIP TO:**  
accounts@nett.org.tt

# Presbyterian OUTREACH

This joint initiative is a truly ecumenical partnership for compelling and necessary outreach to a very depressed community.

A fourth initiative, women and children, in collaboration with the Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Rapidfire Kidz Foundation, and the Trinidad Eye Hospital, the Presbyterian Church provides food, clothing, medical, and school supplies, eyeglasses, and wheelchairs for many of our children, and of course for women in particular.

A fifth initiative that we are still working on, an agricultural farming project for food security and sustainability. The Presbyterian Church is in the process of identifying several of its vacant lands and properties to start an agricultural farming project for food security and sustainability. With the scarcity of food, forex, and shipping challenges in recent times due to the global pandemic, the Presbyterian Church believes in going back to the land, Mother Earth, to provide food for the hungry. One suggestion we have is that there is no need to reinvent the wheel as it were to create new projects. What is needed in our country is more cohesive partnership and networking among all stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and FBOs. And those are some of the initiatives taken by the PCTT, and some initiatives that we hope to achieve and implement in the near future.

Thank you very much.



# WELCOME: SEGMENT TWO OUTREACH

I'd like to ask Brother Shafiudeen Ali from the Islamic faith  
to speak next.

*Jra Mathur - Moderator*

Speaker

---

## BROTHER SHAFIUDEEN ALI

In recent times, we have witnessed an increase in poverty in our land, resulting from the loss of income due to the pandemic. The Muslim community has been addressing this with our Zakat and Sadaqah funds. The mechanisms have been used to assist others with paying and making the rents, purchasing grocery items, and more significant has been our hamper distribution program. Some hampers are paid for using government's intervention but the bulk comes from the private donations. Approximately 77,000 hampers were handed out by Muslim organisations. Government's subvention accounted for 3600 hampers which consists of roughly under 5%. Typically, the hampers consist of a grocery list excluding meats.



The Barakah Foundation and Islamic Broadcasting Network, and their well-wishers prepared and distributed 56,000 hampers to the needy. A very commendable effort. Another 21,000 hampers were sponsored and distributed by Muslim organizations and jamaat. Let me add, the zakat funds and the committee have several poor people on their “monthly payroll” so to speak, to ensure that some families with ongoing dependency are taken care of.

As a community, furthermore, as a part of our Eid-ul-Fitr celebration, which really is the culmination of the month of Ramadan, Imams solicit a one-time annual donation from members based on the number of occupants in their households. These donations are used to prepare hampers which are distributed towards the poor and the needy. To get the congregation involved, they are asked to identify the needy in their neighborhood and then they deliver the hampers to them. There are over 75 congregations or jamaats in the country and most participate in such hamper programs. Further help is rendered to the poor and the needy as part of our Eid-ul-Adha celebration. Animals are slaughtered to commemorate Prophet Abraham's attempt to sacrifice his son. A two-third portion of the meat which is obtained from those sacrifices are shared with poor families. For example, at the T.M.L St Joseph Mosque, six bulls and over 50 sheep were slaughtered this year. Most jamaats across the country engage in this annual practice.



There's a lot of charity being given by Muslims throughout the country. Of course, there's a belief that this should not be advertised and hence it's very difficult to capture all that takes place. There are small groups that I'm aware of who focus on housing. They solicit contributions and they build modest homes for needy families. There's another large group, Muslims of T&T, that's another organization which focuses on looking after the poor, mostly outside of Trinidad and Tobago. They ship containers of food and clothing to different countries. Following the Haiti disaster, they would have shipped container loads of goods to assist the people in Haiti. Also, there are Muslim doctors who run free medical clinics, maybe one day of the week or so. It's very difficult to capture the amount of charity that's being given by the Muslim community except for those that come out of the large organizations. However, the Muslim acknowledges the giving of charity is particularly important today. Many people have lost their jobs and are unable to feed their families and pay their monthly bills. Government aid is simply not enough and does not always reach the most in need.

I know in your guidelines for today's conversation you asked for suggestions that may be used to target the needy. I think a very effective way is by asking faith-based organizations to identify the needy in their communities and provide a list of the poor which the government can then address so that we see the most vulnerable in society receive the aid they need. I'm really very proud of the Muslim brothers and sisters who have come to their aid. I also applaud the non-Muslim religious organization which have engaged in similar efforts. We therefore ask God Almighty to inspire our hearts and to give generously so that we can strive to eradicate poverty, if not in the world, certainly in our country. Thank you.

# WELCOME: SEGMENT TWO OUTREACH

It's my pleasure now to call on Dr. Knolly Clarke from the  
Anglican Church to speak.

*Ira Mathur - Moderator*

# Speaker

---

## REVEREND KNOLLY CLARKE

Thank you very much indeed to speak again. I just want to move away a little from the idea of individual communities, talking about their own response. And I want first to praise so many of the persons who have spoken here, they are special, but I think it is time now that we don't just talk about things that we hand out but how are we going to empower the poor. Poverty my brothers and sisters, in my own theological reflection, is not just giving charity. It is empowering the poor to engage in their own future. Maybe we should have, an institute that would enable the pastors, the Imams, to enable the poor because the poor are people who need to engage in their own future.



We must not just only give them things. I remember when [the late] Dr. Hamid and myself ran what we call the Caribbean Ecumenical Program. Our response to people was to provide them with projects, programs, that they could empower themselves. Take for example the men and women, who were in the cane fields in the days of sugar, particularly the women. We had what we call a "Rural Aid Program," and a whole group of people enabled those women, [as] some of them could not read, they could not write. We did that work, and we also did the work of providing them at Christmas time to work with their hands. They had great skill with their hands, and we [had] them make toys, and gifts which they sold to people. They had bazaars and we used St. Andrews Theological College, where I was a lecturer, as the CCC had a program there. And we brought people there to train them, to get themselves empowered.

I want to compliment so many of you for your outreach. We do that kind of thing too, but I think we're in a phase now whereby we have to empower the poor to take hold of their future. Unless we do that, we will only be giving to the cycle of poverty. Let's organize workshops for the poor, empower them to take hold of their future. I think if we can do that, as a community, as a religious community, it would be a very important exercise for those in our country because a lot of the poor are being exploited.

The whole question of the man, woman relationship. Too many of our women are being violated because they depend on [men]. When I look at Alexander's programme, himself, and Marlon, I see them begging men to take hold of their responsibility, and women too. So, I think it's more than just giving things, I think it's empowerment. We want to transform, to heal, this thing of poverty. People are wounded by their poverty, and too many of them are things. We have to help them take seriously this question, that they are human beings, and they can be instruments. God has called them. and a lot of them have a lot of gifts. And we must begin with the family at home. It's just not the family at home, which is important, and there is where we have to give our children, a sense of purpose, a sense of direction, a sense of focus so that they could really take hold of their future. And that is the challenge I think we have as religious communities. We ought to have things for the poor. Teach them art and directions, and we do it together. We do it together.

I remember we had a program, another program called Sepak, and the vision was you do not hand out fishes, you teach people how to fish, and I think we are in this stage, which is very good. And I want to commend Leela and Marcia, and Ira, for this kind of exercise, and the Archbishop and all of us, but on the other hand I think we need to take a step further.



We need to carry this exercise further, to work with the poor in a new way, so to speak, and if we agree that we all have a lot to give, not one, and it must not be one religion or one religious group, it's the team, working together. The Anglicans working along with the Muslims, the Catholics, and all of us, the Christians, the Hindus, all working together in temples, in things, and in different places working together to empower the poor.

That's what I want to say as my contribution.



# WELCOME: SEGMENT TWO OUTREACH

Next, I'd like to ask Seventh Day Adventist Pastor Dr. Clive  
Dottin to speak.

*Jra Mathur - Moderator*



Speaker

---

PASTOR CLIVE DOTTIN

Let me carry you in the few minutes I have left on a journey, the year 2004. Hurricane Ivan struck Grenada with full force. In fact, we had a joke, it was tragic, yes, but one church, one house, actually changed their address!

Now, this was where a lot of churches were destroyed, and we [in the Seventh Day Adventist church] had that ability [to help]. We believed that we should join with other church groups and rebuild churches. The Catholic [and] Anglican Churches were devastated. [Within] the Seventh Day Adventist Church, we believe in reaching out to everyone.



# Seventh Day Adventist OUTREACH

We believe that everyone must be included in our prophetic gaze and perspective, so when Hurricane Ivan blasted Grenada, [there was] a lot of despair, and disappointment, and depression. You know business folks died even after that, they couldn't cope with the death of their business, the death of their lifeline, that was so critical.

[I]n our church globally, we have a group called ASI. They get the resources like the landowners in the post-Pentecostal era that triggered the issue of liquidating assets to help the poor. ASI follows the example in the post-Pentecostal period in Acts chapter two. ASI [stands for] the Associate Support Industries. That is what we have [as well as] what is called the community services. Very early in the Church (1874 and 1880), the Benevolent Society was established. This became the Dorca Society. [The Dorca Society was] basically, a group of women meeting together, sewing clothes, trying to clothe the needy and the poor, and even feed them.

After that, we came to what is called the welfare services, and today what we have, is the community services. You'll see community services vans and buses. We have divided the country into zones, so every zone will have their special transport, advertise community services of Seventh-Day Adventists when there is a crisis when we have to go into dangerous areas and high-risk areas to deliver food and hampers.

# Seventh Day Adventist OUTREACH

When we have to deal with the reconstruction efforts and help people rebuild their homes. What [Seventh Day Adventist] have are the community services, and ADRA, the Adventist Development Relief Association, and ASI, the Associate Support Industries Limited. What we have are these groups forming a network so every church has a community services leader and they will assess the needs of the membership and the needs of the community, and network with any other group and any other religion because we believe in a community initiative.

We have the local church with community services, and then we have the zones, and they will look at creating institutions like support groups and support services, revenue departments, the Master Guide clubs. We have three groups coming together, the ASI, the community services, and then we have ADRA, and in addition to those three groups, we have the health ministries department. All these groups come together and network to provide relief to the poor and the hurting and the suffering. That is what it is all about, there's an individual responsibility and then there's a corporate responsibility.

# Seventh Day Adventist OUTREACH

Let me give you an example, and I'm speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Union Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists. We triggered an institution called Operation Nehemiah. It is the latest piece of our infrastructure. Within Operation Nehemiah, we had skilled people, masons and carpenters, and builders that went to Grenada from all over the region. Some of them, [would use] their own funds [to travel], not depending on organizational funds because there's a vision of the good samaritan model, and they would buy their tickets, go to Grenada and carry their tools. Churches around the world would supply the materials. We did that for Grenada, and for individuals within the various islands because the Caribbean Conference consists of 25 island territories and is called the Caribbean Union Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists. The Nehemiah Project has a theme, we cannot count down. Remember the story of Nehemiah, when he was attacked by Sanballat? So, all over the Caribbean when there's a crisis, and in Trinidad when we have massive floods, these four groups, the health ministries department, the community services, ADRA, and ASI, come together to minister to the needs, if there is a significant need. For example, if a house is damaged.

# Seventh Day Adventist OUTREACH

Of course, government assistance is also sought, and whatever government department we will network with them, but we will not totally depend on that because we encourage our members to do their best, and to sacrifice and to recognize that God expects us to be generous. God expects us to demonstrate the love the good samaritan demonstrated when he met the wounded man. Remember, he paid some money when he carried the wounded on his beast and told him that there are any extra expenses when he comes the next day, he would satisfy the demands of the guy staying in that hotel. This is amazing.

We have the individual responsibility, and we also have the corporate responsibility. Apart from that, we have the system for tithes and offerings and the section for offerings we ask our members who are working to make a contribution on a monthly basis, so when a crisis strikes, when people in a community cry out and they have a disaster, in addition to the four groups coming together to pool their resources, what we have is the individual commitment.

# Seventh Day Adventist OUTREACH

We have individuals, that when we call upon them and tell them of situations, “listen, this person has experienced a storm or hurricane”, or “this person, nobody is working in the home with the pandemic and everything else”. We challenge our brethren, you know individually, to make a sacrificial offering so when that strikes, we have enough resources to assist those. We believe not just in assisting Seventh Day Adventists, but people in the community, you know, if there’s a cry from a Hindu family or Catholic family or a Baptist family or a Muslim family, we will do our best to respond to the cries of the hurting.

So, on this fifth World Day of the Poor, we are happy to be called by the Catholic Commission of Social Justice, and Ministry for Migrants and Refugees. We think it's an excellent idea, and I believe all of us, [all our religious communities], have come together [to] choose a couple of projects [to implement]. [We can show] the “powers that be”, that we can unite to respond to a specific challenge in the community, and we shouldn’t wait on a crisis or a hurricane but [immediately] help folks who are poor. Perhaps the resources of a particular denomination may be exhausted, we can pool our resources. [The Seventh Day Adventists] believe that at the community level, [we should] pool our resources together.

# Seventh Day Adventist OUTREACH

I wish, your Justice Commission all the best, and your Ministry to Migrants and Refugees, I wish all the Church groups here the best as we're going through a tough time in this pandemic. Let us network and collaborate in a loving manner. Let not our doctrines divide us but instead of building walls, let us tear down the walls and build bridges and show everyone, from every community and every religion, that we love them unconditionally. May God bless you and have a wonderful day. God bless you.



# WELCOME: SEGMENT TWO OUTREACH

I'd like to invite Reverend Winston Mansingh from the  
Evangelical Council to speak next.

*Jra Mathur - Moderator*



*Speaker*

---

## REVEREND WINSTON MANSINGH

Good day again. As we continue our discussions on alleviating the poverty that faces our world, I would like to bring to your attention some of the efforts of the Pentecostal Evangelical communities here in Trinidad and Tobago, over a number of years. I wanted to start by saying that I recognize the fact that we might have been a little late out of the blocks because of the timing in which the Pentecostal Church, the Evangelical community, became more active here in Trinidad and Tobago. We have made significant strides within the last three decades here in Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of addressing the social needs of the people.



# Evangelical Council

## OUTREACH

The Church of Jesus Christ, the Pentecostal Evangelical community, would have done a few things, and I'll just like to mention them. One, we have been actively involved in addressing social needs through the distribution of much-needed food and other requirements. Medicine, clothing, and school supplies. We have been engaged in rebuilding and building new homes for persons, families that have had their homes demolished or were living in conditions that were less than acceptable for human brothers and sisters.

Dear friends, I want to let you know that the Pentecostal Evangelical community would have set up various commissions and organizations. We are not just one church, but we have denominational churches and independent churches. We have those that are bigger groups, and those that are smaller groups. What I can tell you is that there [are] commissions. There are existing right now, committees and subcommittees, planning committees in some of the bigger organizations to help to organize strategies and plans that are geared towards addressing the issue of poverty. It is no longer just a haphazard sort of emotional response, but it has become a strategic well-planned out, executed, monitored, and evaluated response by the Evangelical community over the last three decades.

# Evangelical Council

## OUTREACH

I want to acknowledge that we need to be more strategic in how we would accumulate data, and how we would analyze this data so that we can present more facts to enable us to be more effective. Another thing that is very significant, and that we would like to recommend [is education]. We know that education is a key driver if we are to alleviate poverty. Secondly, we need to consider prison reform. If we had to consider and if we had to look at some of the families that are affected by poverty, you would find that somewhere in the line, there is a link to a person who is in prison, has been imprisoned, and upon release from prison, there was insufficient reform, insufficient efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate such a person into the community that created a stigma. And so, that person was not able to become gainfully employed, and to provide for his or her family, those things that they needed. And so that brought some destruction to that family system.

Another factor that we saw, is the use of illicit drugs. That has really decimated a number of families. How then are we addressing these? We have strategically set up programs that are educational in nature. We are addressing it from that perspective. Teaching, and empowering our people about how to address these issues meaningfully.

# Evangelical Council

## OUTREACH

A very significant aspect of poverty alleviation dear friends comes from the Church's responsibility to speak about the issues facing our nation, and the behaviour of persons who are charged with the responsibility to lead from a corporate, and governance perspective. We must recognize, and we want these people to recognize, their role in leading with honour and integrity, and understanding that there must be equity and justice for all. The poor must not be seen as people who are just to receive handouts, but they must be seen as people who must be respected, empowered, and given an opportunity to improve themselves.

Dear friends, [our church promotes] education, justice, equity in our society. Thirdly what is important for us to do to continue to address poverty, and alleviate this burden is to empower and challenge our people, and we have been doing that. [Reviewing the pandemic response], I can say assuredly, in just one group of churches that I was able to speak with, the average church was putting out at least \$20,000 in addressing some of the issues, and this is over a six-month period. That is a considerable amount of money for churches that are smaller in congregations and from rural communities. These dear friends are some of the things that we are doing at present to alleviate poverty, address this issue, and contribute in some way. Thank you.

# WELCOME: SEGMENT TWO OUTREACH

It's my pleasure now to call on Pundit Navin Oma-dath Maharaj from the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha to speak.

*Jra Mathur - Moderator*

# Speaker

---

## PUNDIT NAVIN OMA-DATH MAHARAJ

Jai Sitaram. Today it is estimated that over 700 million people worldwide live in extreme poverty. This figure is expected to climb as a result of the continued economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We cannot deny that the pandemic has greatly affected the economies of many developed countries and for developing countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, as it is, the economic outlook is bleak. The Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS) of Trinidad and Tobago from its inception in 1952 is a charitable, as much as it is a religious organization.





The organization has assisted less fortunate families directly, and indirectly through schools and mandirs. Over the years, our schools have assisted students through the provision of books, stationary items, and even allowances are given to help with travelling expenses, and the provision of food. [Within] the community, our mandirs regularly assist those who require necessities. Poverty in Trinidad and Tobago is nothing new today, and the SDMS has been providing assistance for years. In 2018, the SDMS led the way in providing hampers to members of the national community in the aftermath of devastating floods. Our schools and mandirs also contributed and we have done so over the years as flooding is now a regular occurrence. However, the present pandemic has meant that the SDMS has stepped up even more. Devices have been provided to many students to access online learning and on a regular basis since last year, the SDMS has provided hampers and enhanced hamper distribution. We have provided such with assistance from the government of Trinidad and Tobago, and from many well-wishers.



At the community level, our mandirs have not only distributed hampers but have also provided cooked meals. In one case in example, ministry agencies reached out to the administration of one particular mandir to enhance the outreach of hamper distribution on behalf of the government of Trinidad and Tobago where it was thought that the members of the mandirs would actually be more in reach with the members of the community. The same goes for ECCE, primary and secondary schools.

The Sanatan Dharma has worked closely with a number of stakeholders over the years on this very impacting social issue known as poverty. As previously mentioned, we have worked closely with the government over the last months to ensure that hampers were distributed to members of the national community. We've established a relationship as well with a number of NGOs with the objective of providing help to those in need. Recently, the SDMS was invited to be part of a workshop that was held by the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. As many of us would be aware, the Children's Authority has many responsibilities which include the need to assist financial families through welfare grants, housing assistance, and conditional transfer program cards or what we call food cards.





In establishing at the present time, and hopefully, for the future, a close relationship with the Children's Authority, the SDMS remains firm in its commitment to providing assistance to this body in addressing the many social issues including poverty that affect our children.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the argument can be made that we do not lack the resources to help those in need. We have in fact witnessed on many occasions the desire of the private sector, religious organizations, and NGOs to readily assist. The problem has to do with the outreach, and here the government can be asked to play a more crucial role in getting what is needed to those in need. We can, for instance, establish food kitchens in rural and economically depressed areas to help those in need, and make it a priority to use our local agricultural produce in the preparation of these meals.

How at the same time do we ensure that there's equity in the distribution of food cards and welfare grants? Here the government plays a crucial or critical role. This rule extends as well to provide greater employment opportunities, and on reducing the economic burden on those who are already economically vulnerable.



Additionally, the SDMS remains equally concerned about the reduction of the national scholarships which to a large extent provide a pathway to children from economically challenged homes to access tertiary education. It is our hope that soon we'll be able to return to some level of normalcy, but even when we do, the issue of poverty may be further exacerbated by the pandemic and families, unfortunately, may face the consequences for years to come. The SDMS as we have always done remains committed to assisting in any way that it can to bring about the remedy to this great social condition.

Jai Sitaram.

# WELCOME: SEGMENT TWO OUTREACH

I would now like to ask Baba Neal Ryan Rawlins from the Orisha faith to speak next.

*Jra Mathur - Moderator*

# Speaker

---

## BABA NEAL RYAN RAWLINS

Hello again. It is rather difficult to continue based on hearing Dr. Knolly Clarke's contribution on the aspects of poverty, and the direction we should go, you know, but in as much as I support Dr. Clarke's view on many things, what I'd like to say also is that the aspect of poverty could be graded because in my personal experience, I have come across persons who have the funds to pay their rent, and bills but they don't have money to buy food. And yes when we hear poverty, they are all at different levels of poverty, but one of the most important aspects of [poverty alleviation] is providing food or a meal or groceries for the family, and it's something that I see almost every day.



In my community, [and] my community is not an established community, as some of the more established religious organizations. Our Palais are in the home of the elder, which is a family home, and it [is] comprised of the family and other persons who are Orisha devotees. They are small in number, more or less, 30-person membership as a maximum. There are 30 various shrines in all parts of Trinidad and Tobago throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago from Port-of-Spain to Moruga to Grande, to Valencia, to the West. And what [the traditional elders] have been doing over the years, is helping the people by creating what they call a "needy program", or a "needy people program", funded by the members of the "ile" or the shrine or the community or the church, and basically what they do is to provide meals or groceries. There are some of the shrines that assist first-time students in secondary school. We have purchased iPads for school, books, [give] school grants, uniforms, and the elder would always say don't bring used books, buy new books for new students who are now entering secondary school. But the basic issue is food. The basic issue is food. There are some of the shrines that do a weekly distribution of bread, sausage or something to go with the bread, with drinks, to the needy, the very needy in their community.

Each of the shrines functions within their space and their community, and the community is not just persons who are Orisha devotees, it's generally in the community.

As I indicated, a lot of the elder shrines are managed by elder females in their late 70's and 80's, and they act as guardians in the community. [The elders] feed and assist, they help with herbal medicine, they see about the sick, they see about the poor, and they help in every way with their own funding. We, as our community, do not receive funding from any NGO state enterprises. We were extremely shocked when we were part of the grant by the government to assist with the food program, and that was distributed throughout the various shrines in Trinidad and Tobago. [The elders] did the distribution because they knew the persons who were in need. [Food distribution] is still happening today. Prior to the grant, [food distribution] happens every month or every week and in addition to that, even though there are monthly distributions, people pop into your home anytime, day or night because they have nothing to eat. We try to encourage persons who live and who have a property or piece of land to plant something, put something in Mother Earth. Plant the land.

# Orisha

## OUTREACH

Put something in the ground to help in every way and that is an important issue that we need to push, [the] return to the land. Push the agriculture sector. Rear "fowl", get some animals, plant something because when you plant and it produces, there is always food.

As a religious community in Trinidad and Tobago, there need for better, equitable distribution [of resources] because there are places [and areas] that people don't go. There are communities, [that] when you go there, you must have a strong heart, a strong mind, and a strong stomach to see where people reside. It is real out here! There are persons, who as I said, might be working [within] a small job that [gives] little pay. There are children who only get one meal per day. So [there] is greater than what we think it is. I'm on the ground and I will go out there and you see the conditions and we try to assist with our own funding, with our own pocket, with money from our pockets. There's a lot of social organizations that assist but I think that one of the problems is that they don't reach down to ground zero. Most of the state enterprises don't reach down to ground zero. There's a ground zero that exists in Trinidad and Tobago and the pandemic has accelerated that process, in addition to all the other conditions that exist.

# Orisha OUTREACH

We try within our Orisha community to do the best that we can with our own resources. I pay homage and honour the mothers, to the Iyas of the spiritual yards that do what they can to assist the poor. With respect to education, there's a particular shrine in Diego Martin, [in which] the head of the shrine, tries her best to promote culture by teaching. I think right now they're having some sessions with young children in the community, but again she uses her own funds.

In moving forward, I pray that we really reactivate the agriculture sector, that we try to reach down to ground zero, that we try to have equitable distribution of grants because we have to add [monetarily] to the grants. You have to add [funds] to [grants] because, when [the needy] come to you, even at my home, they come calling, and there's nothing to eat. I always have some package or something at home, so that I can give a bag to needy people. The world is in a crisis and [in] need. Trinidad is not the only place, but if we really try to encourage people to go back to traditional ways of planting and rearing and sharing, I think we would achieve a lot, so thank you very much.



# WELCOME: SEGMENT TWO OUTREACH

It's my pleasure now to introduce Pundit Satyanand Maharaj who is the Spiritual Head of the Satya Anand Ashram Temple of Truth and Bliss to speak next.

*Jra Mathur - Moderator*

# Speaker

---

## PUNDIT SATYANAND MAHARAJ

Thank you very much Madam Moderator, and a very pleasant, good day to all who are here with us on the panel, and those of you who will be viewing later on. Poverty alleviation might be with us for very, long time unless we get to the root cause of poverty. Now we can deal with the immediate needs which is [the] need of hunger and what we must also realize is that we also have not just those who need food hampers because they're unemployed or unemployable or they've lost the will to be employed, but we also have because of the pandemic, the educated unemployed.



We have also the working poor in this country, who have the money to pay their rents, but they may not have money to feed themselves a proper meal, take care of their children, and of course, get all the nutritional requirements necessary.

[P]overty extends not just to meals but [also] from food to clothing [and] to shelter. Now, a word of caution to all our religious bodies is just that we should not, while we reach out to those who are in need, use the opportunity to exploit. [We must not] exploit the souls to fill our dues, and this has always been a sore point with myself, and I brought it out because I feel that when we give, as in the case of my mandir, we do not look at race, religion, or culture. We look at the humanity of mankind, we look at that. We should strive as much as possible to be our brother's keeper. Some of the many ways in which we can, and we have been giving, [is by] taking care of the basic needs, which is [the distribution of] food. As you know, pundits, whenever we do pujas/poojas, we do collect quite a lot of foodstuff personally. Leela, you would know that because you gave me quite a lot for your father's funeral. [The food] is redistributed, as we package and we redistribute it, and all the pundits are engaged in this. Quite apart from the formal way of doing things, temples come together and gather food stuff, [as well as] gather materials and distribute it to the poor.



I want to make an appeal to those of you who can rummage around in your kitchen cupboards because we often buy groceries that we don't use that would go on to expire, and I want to encourage individuals, as we encourage our flock, individuals, to give with your own hands. You know, the hands that serve, are greater than the hands that pray. And I want to continue to reach out to the various communities to ask people to [give] once a month, once a week, whatever you can, as you clean out your cupboards, don't wait for the foodstuff to expire to give it, to throw it into the garbage, but on an ongoing and continuous basis to create these packages, and reach out to the communities that need us most. All of us know who are the [needy] in our communities [and giving excess] foodstuff is one way of distributing of helping to eliminate the immediate hunger, and now to address the root cause of poverty.

So often people lose the will to do for themselves. [W]hen you lose the will to do for yourself, it's almost as if you've lost everything. [W]e have a culture of transmitting to our children, and significant people in our lives, our values, morals, and everything else, [and] we run the risk of transmitting to the next generation that it's okay to just put out your hand, [to] throw your hands in the air, say that you know, there's nothing I can do, and then live a life of poverty.

As Leela and I discussed earlier, there are people living in galvanized huts, feeding their children flour with water in lieu of milk and they can't afford it. [F]inding the people to give these hampers to is also a very important part. So, if you make it, you need to take it to them, and you need to find these communities, and of course, as our dear brother from the Orisha faith said, you really have to have a lot of “belly” to go to some of these communities, especially if you become accustomed to the finery of life, [and] the luxuries of life yourself, [as] this is a foreign way of living to you, but it is seen as an opportunity. In Hinduism, we have a saying that we have a duty and responsibility to humanity and that is daily! [N]ot monthly, not weekly but daily. So having the responsibility to our brothers and sisters and having a responsibility to be their keeper, we not only have a responsibility to help to package the good for them, but we have a responsibility to make sure it reaches the most vulnerable amongst us. And you know if we are our neighbours' keeper if we take an interest in our neighbours' children then we're taking an interest in our own safety and security.

So quite apart from food, clothing, and shelter which the poor are in lack of and need, we also have to look at what has transpired over the last year. What is it 8-9 months now where we have been dealing with a pandemic where particularly children, need education to lift them out of poverty?



[H]aving taught for 28 years, I [was] always heartened to see families that [have been] able to lift themselves out [of poverty] because the children themselves by the gift of their hard work and their perseverance, were able to acquire a good secondary education, and go on to become professionals or skilled tradesmen, whatever it is the [individual] might set out to do, and they're driven to do that. But [during the pandemic] we have had a further dividing of the those who have and those who have not, and it is the technology that has divided us.

I have been able to acquire devices for my children because ...we [are] preparing them for a new world. But what about the children who do not have these devices as a means of communication, means of learning, and that itself can be categorized as a kind of poverty where they have been denied learning, and many of them continue to be denied learning. Teachers are often running around looking for their students to give them packages so they can do their work, and they can keep up, it's not the same thing. So, in reaching out, we have encouraged our flock to make contact with the less fortunate in their communities and to look beyond our religious grouping.

# Hindu OUTREACH

I think that is particularly important because you might live, you might belong to a temple that is an affluent temple, and no one in your immediate congregation has that particular need. [W]e need to look beyond, and we need to see ourselves in Trinidad and Tobago as not just separate religious groups. [W]e need to see ourselves as a nation filled with people of diverse cultures and religions. And so when we distribute whatever we have, let us look beyond our own flock, let's look beyond the people of our own religious persuasion so that we can lift all because a rising tide lifts all, and we [must] continue to encourage. [D]o not look to race, religion, culture when you give and do not expect to use the opportunity to just gather and to fill pews but rather to fill your heart with love because you have an opportunity to serve and to fill a belly with food because you have something to give.

Everything is a gift from God, and that is our universal theme as you know. [W]e celebrated Divali quite recently which is the advent of Mother Lakshmi, and that has to do with recognizing that God is a giver of wealth and prosperity. [T]hose of us who have, as in Pundit Bhadase's contribution, [in which] he spoke about *artha*, wealth that is honestly acquired. [P]art of the distribution of that wealth is not to just hoard it in the bank, see about your family, or put some away for a rainy day, but it is about giving and helping others to rise even as you rise.

# Hindu OUTREACH

So the Hindu community would formally through the temples and the schools, would have been doing quite a lot but we also encourage our members to [also] give privately. I have a view on whether we should record those we give charity to, and I think we should always leave it up to them, to know if they want to go public or not. [W]e should not take that right from them to say thank you, and we should not take that right from them to quietly take what is given to them, but it also helps to encourage others to give willingly and most of all whenever we give we should give always with love. And in Hinduism, we have a particular saying when we give a gift, we say, “om shri krishna arpanam,” “I give this not in my name, I give this in the name of God.” And I want to publicly recognize the Paladi family who has been giving tremendously by the truckloads of hampers. [M]any people might not know this but they have, over the years, been building homes, two-bedroom, three-bedroom homes, and furnishing it for families, not just here in Trinidad but across the Caribbean. I think it's worthy to note, [as] they do not advertise what they do. They always say, wherever they go, if you're a Hindu, if you're a Muslim, if you're a Christian, it is God that has sent this to you, this is not from us, this is from God.

So Leela, I want to thank you very much for the invitation to join in, to be here. Of course, I look forward to further invitations in the future. God bless and thank you all very much.



# WELCOME: SEGMENT TWO OUTREACH

It's my absolute pleasure now to invite the Chair of the Catholic Commission for Social Justice, Ms. Leela Ramdeen, for her closing remarks.

*Jra Mathur - Moderator*

# Thanks

---

MS. LEELA RAMDEEN

Thank you, Ira, and thank you, everyone, for participating in what really, as Ira said, this is a time of hope in the midst of the pandemic when many are depressed and have lost their jobs or their businesses. We who belong to different faith communities can bring that home, and today's event really lifted my own spirits. I became very emotional because I realized we're all in the same boat as companions. [A]s Pope Francis said, "companions on the same journey".

Our goal, our aim, is to live by the tenets of our faith, and if you listen to what each person has said, in summary, there's a call for unity among the different faith communities. A call for us to develop projects together, to work together, to collaborate. To not only give handouts but [a] "hand up". To empower people. And one of the things that struck me was that we must ensure that we when we do so, we don't do it for recognition, we do it [as a gift from] God. All that we have is gift from God. In the Catholic Church, we believe in the **concept of integral human development, authentic integral human development which Pope Francis has developed over the years, saying that development is about each person and about every dimension of the person.**

---

Thanks

---

MS. LEELA RAMDEEN

Baba Neal talked about the fact that at the end of the day what people wanted was food, but that's not the only dimension of a person. There's the political, spiritual, physical, mental [aspects], there's so many dimensions of a person. Some areas I've been thinking about while the speakers were sharing, was corporate social responsibility. The private sector was mentioned, but I think we need to call on the private sector even more to collaborate with religious communities, to share the gifts that they've been given with the wider community, and also the government.

Now I read in the paper yesterday, that the housing ministry will be collaborating with UN Habitat on housing for migrants. We do not have equitable distribution of our resources in Trinidad and Tobago, and there are too many who [are] falling through the net. If you're poor in an area where the roads are so bad that your children, [and yourself], can't afford the taxi fare [due to] the bad roads, the taxis put up their prices, and many families cannot afford to pay the taxi fare for the children to go to school.

# Thanks

---

MS. LEELA RAMDEEN

Although we have free education, we cannot say that we have a level playing field because many of our children cannot afford to go to school. Many [poor] cannot afford online [education], including many migrants, [who] cannot afford to pay for the data, or they don't have connectivity in their area. So, as I said in my article in the Guardian yesterday, “we have to become advocates for the poor,” and today it cheered me, no end to hear, the advocacy work that all our religious communities are engaged in, and the voice, all our voices together. We have to make sure that we become advocates to “the powers that be” so that they would listen and ensure that our constitution becomes a reality, and our anthem, when we talk about “every creed and race find equal place”, they’re not finding an equal place.

Today, although we [spoke] about poverty and a lot of the time today we spent on focusing on material poverty, there is a lot more than that.

# Thanks

---

MS. LEELA RAMDEEN

As faith communities, you're developing the spiritual poverty of those who really need to reflect on God in their lives, and put God in the center of our lives, but we need more than that. In the Catholic Church, we have the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, but we need to make sure that we stand on our soapboxes and become fearless advocates. Why are the poor, poor?

I said recently, you know there was a Brazilian Bishop called Don Hélder Câmara, who said, "when I give food to the poor, they call me a Saint. When I ask why the poor are poor, they called me a communist." We have to start asking more and more "why are the poor poor?" and as one speaker rightly said, we need to involve them in the process of empowerment. When we say "teach a man to fish", as Rev Dr. Knolly Clark said, when we teach them to fish it doesn't mean that we impose things on them. All our people come with gifts, with intellect that they have and this [can be] dormant or hidden.

Thanks

---

MS. LEELA RAMDEEN

[O]ur task is to lift them out of the doldrums that they find themselves in because they're so oppressed by poverty and social exclusion. And remember poverty is very much linked to social exclusion, and poverty is intergenerational. We signed in 2015, like many other countries, the Sustainable Development Goals, the first of which is to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030, and we know because of the pandemic, we've made retrograde steps, but by signing that, we must do more than that. We must look at how poverty is linked to what is termed “social exclusion”, which the UK government describes as:

“a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health, and family breakdown.”

Thanks

---

MS. LEELA RAMDEEN

We know family breakdown is a key issue here. So we cannot look at poverty in isolation from all these other linked problems. Any project that we have that only focuses on filling hungry belly, without looking at those other dimensions, poverty is multidimensional. Read the 2021 Multidimensional Poverty Index and see where Trinidad and Tobago falls and look at the indicators that are actually considered when this report is put together. We must look at the multidimensional nature of poverty.

Once again, I thank you all for your contribution, let's pray that this will be the first of many, many, other sessions like this, doesn't only focus on poverty but focuses on other social ills and other opportunities that we have for building a better T&T. No knight is coming in shining armor on some horse, white or other colour, to help us out of the difficulties we find ourselves in.

Thanks

---

MS. LEELA RAMDEEN

We are very intelligent people in Trinidad and Tobago. We have a lot of religious communities whose tenets, the tenets of all our faith communities, tell us that each of us is worth, more than we're giving up, more than we're meeting. The dignity of the human person is the vision and moral vision of society, and we need to consider what kind of society we want to build. A society that is inclusive, that is just, that is equitable, and distributive justice is what we must embrace. Thank you all once again. God bless us all and let's pray for each other.

Thank you.



# World Day of the Poor

## CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

We envision a transformed national/world community where Justice, Peace and Love prevail, as divinely ordained by God, and which, ensures human rights, duties and human dignity; celebrates diversity and promotes equality; promotes the common good, respect for human life and ecology justice.



- o CCSJ TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
- o @AMMRRCCOMMUNITY



- @SOCIAL\_JUSTICETT
- @CFS\_AMMR



Thank you Lord

