



**25 FEBRUARY 2011, GEORGETOWN, GUYANA.**



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Editor: Mr. Colin Smith.

## **Editorial: Bring back Brer Anansi**

Calypsoes, just like folk songs all over the world are known to mirror in subtle or not so subtle ways the society in which we live. They provide laughter or force us to think and reflect on the culture in which we live. They expose the oddities, peculiarities and pretences of the society and especially those of the decision makers and more influential in our society.

In its message for Mashramani the ruling People's Progressive Party claimed that Guyana experienced "positive economic growth rate in the face of one of the worst financial and economic crisis internationally".

Quite a different, and many believe more note-worthy view, was expressed by this year's Junior Calypso Champion Diana Chapman in her winning song entitled: 'Bring Back Brer Anancy'. The lyrics tell of days past when the cost of living was extremely cheap, when Guyana was a leading Caribbean nation and its people held their heads high. "Guyana are you ready to move on?" was the poignant call for attention to the plight of our country, as well as the plea for help from Ms Chapman in her catchy tune with hard hitting lyrics. "I tired of rhetoric and political gimmicks, lets put that aside and get on with it. Let's bring back the glorious days that have disappeared over the years." the female, teenage singer implored. "You hear so many bad things about Guyanese, every where you go they want to bring us down to we knees.... We were more developed that most of the Caribbean , today they laugh and want to chase us out their country", she lamented.

Indeed it is well known that today Guyana indeed ranks as one of the most pauperized countries in the region struggling to stay ahead of Haiti the poorest. We have commented often on the fact that an unacceptably high percentage of Guyanese workers do not earn a living wage. In spite of this they are still called upon to pay a 16 per cent Value Added Tax for most goods and services. Some of our major industries such as sugar and bauxite are tottering precariously. Various reports give detailed accounts of corruption, serious human rights abuses, increasing violent crime and the list goes on.

Those who have dispaired of any change have been quietly obtaining their US visas or just slipping across to nearer countries. Now we are about to import teachers for the education sector.

Indeed many of the entries in this year's calypso competitions and previous ones articulated similar mind opening, concerns on pertinent issues. What should concern all of us is that they were composed by our young people.

## Rebuilding of Sacred Heart Begins

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“Speaking as someone who has been a parishioner of Sacred Heart all my life, I can confirm that emotions are running high today not only as we recall the tragic destruction of our church by fire .. but also as we gather today, to together celebrate this milestone event to mark what we are convinced is the symbol of the opportunity for a new beginning”. So said Ms Amamda St Aubyn in opening remarks in her role of Master of Ceremonies at last Friday’s turning of the sod to mark the start of the rebuilding of Sacred Heart Church.



Parishioners, well wishers, donors and others made up the small crowd of about one hundred people who gathered for the event at the site on which the old church stood on Main Street. The simple

ceremony consisted of prayers, music by the Sacred Heart Folk Group, a brief history of the Sacred Heart Church by Sister Noel Menezes, a vision for the Sacred Heart Church and site by Bishop Francis Alleyne and some details on the construction plans, costs and fund raising by Mr Ramsay Ali.

Mr Ali, co-ordinator of the building committee explained that the estimated cost of the project is G\$85M. It comprises of the rebuilding of three structures namely the church, presbytery and parish hall. He said that the remainder of the site which at the time of destruction was occupied by the Sacred Heart School will be developed by the Diocese at a later date.

The new church which will retain the façade to the one destroyed will be of concrete in a steel frame and will seat about 400 people. Just under this number attended the weekly services on a regular basis before the church's destruction. This will make Sacred Heart the second largest church in the diocese. Sacred Heart has been a large parish since its inception in 1861 as church which catered mainly for the large numbers of Maderians who came to Guyana.

Bishop Francis in his remarks said that the vision he has for the site is that it will be a good Catholic resource centre containing a library, archives, commissions and departments of the Diocese. He added that he hoped it will also be a place for the Catholic media, print and broadcast along with being a facility for workshops and seminars. "It is still at the stage of dream, discussion and sketch. As this vision takes form the intention and hope is that we can put as much as possible in place to access every means to better know and live our faith", the Bishop said. "We turn the sod today that we can plant the seeds of vision and hope, breath into it the breath of God that a living presence of God may thrive here for all to see and benefit from", Bishop Francis concluded.

The parishioners are counting on the support of generous benefactors and donors, many of whom have made pledges but are awaiting the commencement of the project prior to injecting their contribution. The commencement of project is therefore of significance to the success and timeliness of completion as the parishioners feverishly continue their efforts to raise funds for the building fund. The wooden Sacred Heart Church was destroyed in a matter of minutes on December 25, 2004, mere hours after church-goers left the midnight Mass.

## **Priests for the people By Bishop Francis Alleyne**

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Some time ago I approached Bishop Roque Paloschi of Roraima Diocese in Brazil about the availability of an English-speaking priest who would be able to offer ministry to Brazilians in Guyana. Bishop Paloschi reminded me that in his diocese there are ten thousand (10,000) Catholics to one priest whereas in Guyana the ratio is about two thousand to one (Nat census 2002: 60,558 Catholics. At present 30

priests). In the whole world the estimates are about one billion Catholics and 400,000 priests (2,500/1) putting Guyana ahead of the average. I mention these amounts in response to feedback from the meeting with CPDs (Committees for Pastoral Development) where the recommendation was made to me that more priests would be available for ministry in the pastoral area.

The overall number of priests in ministry in the Diocese has not increased significantly in the last seven years but there has been a re-distribution to better suit the catholic presence in various parts of the Diocese. For example, almost half of the catholic population resides in regions 1, 8, and 9. Another factor influencing the allocation of priests to regions is the preference for priests to live in community i.e. more than one priest in the place of residence, rather than in isolation.

The whole church can be involved in giving increase to priestly presence and ministry. My own experience in sharing ministry with lay persons especially through the Retrouvaille ministry (to hurting and broken marriages), Teams of Our Lady (a spirituality for couples and families) and with Marriage Encounter has shown me the expression of “priesthood” that we all possess by merit of our baptism. The experience has been and continues to be a most positive one pointing to an immense resource of “priesthood” which supplements and goes far beyond the capability of the ordained minister. Married couples living their sacraments in peer ministry is a powerful “priesthood” gift to the church. Likewise, using our gifts and skills in the spirit of our baptism, whether it be in teaching, finances, caring, music etc., builds a “priestly people...to sing the praises of God” (1Pet.2). In this way every community, by living baptism, can give increase to “priesthood”. Even though this may sound a bit theoretical or idealistic I have seen it in action bringing abundant blessings to the Church.

If our young people are growing in and are formed by a vibrant faith community where sacraments are not merely received but are lived, they will more easily see the possibility and grow in a desire to give fuller service to the church in consecrated life and ordained priesthood. I have noted the appeal for increase and am confident that as a church this is within our grasp.

## **ANNIVERSARIES: VIEWPOINT BY VIBERT PARVATAN**

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*Parliamentary institutions, with their free speech and respects for the rights of minorities, and the inspiration of a broad tolerance in thought and its expression-all this we conceive to be a precious part of our way of life and outlook.... I ask you now to cherish them, too.*                      ..... Elizabeth II

**Each year there are Anniversaries which attract our attention and sometimes involvement. There are those associated with joy, happiness and celebrations. On the**

**other hand, there are some such as the death anniversary of a loved one, which takes us along memory lane - past activities, interactions and the sad moments of parting.**

In our time frame, there is the past, the present and the future. We are often fairly comfortable with the past, because whatever may have been the good and the bad, there is that stamp of permanency and the realities of that time which cannot be changed. This leads us to accepting the past and its experiences as a season, then with some objectivity, mixed emotions and recognition of the seasonal changes, evolving with time, we try to understand the present.

In that process, we may find strength and confidence based on experience to face the future, cognizant of the fact that the timelessness of life and the elements of love, success and failure which are all uniquely linked to almost every aspect of our lives.

Attempts may be made to measure various episodes in our lives and in so doing categorize each event with a sense of achievement, and sometimes disenchantment.

On the subject of Time, Kahlil Gibran observed:

*"You would measure time the measureless and the immeasurable.*

*You would adjust your conduct and even direct the course of your spirit according to hours and seasons.*

*Of time you would make a stream upon whose bank you would sit and watch its flowing.*

*Yet the timeless in you is aware of life's timelessness,*

*And knows that yesterday is but today's memory and tomorrow is today's dream.*

*And that that which sings and contemplates in you is still dwelling within the bounds of that first moment which scattered the stars into space.*

*Who among you does not feel that his power to love is boundless?*

*And yet who does not feel that very love, though boundless, encompassed within the centre of his being, and moving not from love thought to love thought, nor from love deeds to other love deeds?*

*And is not time even as love is, undivided and spaceless?*

*But if in your thought you must measure time into seasons, let each season encircle all the other seasons,*

*And let today embrace the past with remembrance and the future longing."*

**Looking at our lives and experiences, we find the changing scenes and seasons as in the case of a death anniversary, a wedding anniversary, a birth anniversary, all with its significance, linking times and seasons flowing from one to another.**

On a nation's anniversary, we look at the big picture, not just at ourselves as individuals, but as a people, and as a nation.

February 23, 2011 is a significant Anniversary for all Guyanese - the 41st Anniversary of Guyana becoming a Republic.

Different slogans have been presented by many nations over the centuries reflecting their hopes and aspirations;  
Freedom, equality and liberty;  
The voice of the people is the voice of God; and for Guyana,  
One People, One Nation, One Destiny.

All highlighting the importance of purposeful unity and national consciousness.

Like any developing country, especially a young nation, there are signs of both achievements and shortcomings. The challenge for every Guyanese is to work together, removing barriers which separate and alienate people. Instead to recognize how much we share in common as a people, knowing that success, prosperity and happiness of Guyana and its people are dependent not only on the administration but on all of us, as we have a contribution to make.

**May this 41st Republic Anniversary celebration in Guyana allow us to critically look at ourselves as citizens and commit ourselves to work towards the advancement and happiness of our people and the nation as a whole.**

Let us lustily sing and make meaningful, the chorus of the song of Guyana's Children:  
"Onward, upward, may we ever go; Day by day in strength and beauty grow, Till at length we each of us may show, What Guyana's sons and daughters can be.

**IT IS A TIME FOR REFLECTION, CELEBRATION AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.**

## **Church rebuilding head denies Washington Post story**

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Mr Ramsay Ali, co-ordinator of the Sacred Heart Rebuilding Committee has denied a story appearing in the Washington Post of Friday 18 that he declined to answer any question relating to Jim Jones.

The article stated that "officials in Guyana are rebuilding a stately, colonial church destroyed by fire that once served as a base for U.S. cult leader Jim Jones".

It quoted "church spokesman Ramsal Alli" as saying that construction of the new Sacred Heart Church in the capital of Georgetown will begin Friday."

The article then went on to say that, "Alli declined to answer any questions related to Jones, who obtained permission to use the church in the mid-1970s to provide what turned out to be fake healing services".

Mr Ramsay told the Catholic Standard that he was never approached by any reporter from the Associated Press nor was he at any time asked to comment on any connection between Jim Jones and the Sacred Heart Church.

## **YOUTHS ON 'MEMORABLE' ECO-RETREAT: Phelan Ramdatt**

On the evening of Friday, February 18th , after attending the historic turning of the sod at the Sacred Heart site, I departed Georgetown for Rockstone on the Essequibo River. The group consisted of myself and ten other young people, all members of the Youth Coordinating committee of the Pastoral Area: YCCPA. Also included were Joel Thompson from Holy Spirit and Julian Amerally from Sacred Heart, Brother Robert of the Presentation Brothers from Grenada and Father Edwin Thadheu. We were on our way to our first ever Eco Retreat.



On leaving Georgetown, I had no big inhibitions. Some of my fellow committee members were however apprehensive about spending the weekend in an area in which there was no signal for their cellular phones.

I love camping and nature and my family does it as often as possible. So I was completely at home with the idea of an Eco-Retreat, which I assumed would be just like any other: we would pray, sing, have a few discussions, do some bible study, have some fun, have Mass and leave. Of course I did not forget food, which I knew Fr. Edwin had gone to great lengths to ensure would be quite good.

How far from the truth was I? How very wrong I was? For this retreat has undoubtedly been one of the most memorable and one of the most spiritual experiences of my young life!

The retreat was organised by Fr. Edwin. The general theme was to mystically experience God through creation and be inspired with awesome wonder. Silence was encouraged.

The theme was further sub-divided into five categories, based on the five elements of which the universe was created: Ether, Earth, Air, Fire and water.

In each case we were encouraged to observe and silently contemplate each elemental aspect and to compare it to our physical body and glean from it all the knowledge we could.



The handouts and scripture readings that were included, coupled with the activities and discussions, truly helped guide us into a clearer understanding of ourselves, of life, of each other, and the sacredness of every day, and every moment and every aspect of life.

We on the committee have been great friends before, but now I feel we are really like family. The closeness that has resulted from the intimate discussions, has truly given me a sense of connection to God and my friends that is nothing short of amazing. To describe the retreat in words is difficult; I do not think time or words would be sufficient. It must simply be experienced.

There are three moments in particular that I would like to mention as my most memorable experiences of this retreat.

The first was our celebration of the Eucharist at sun down on Saturday evening. After we had all taken a dip in the creek, we sat down on the floor around a low table that was the altar. It felt like a humble family giving praise to a loving God. I think the day's experience that had brought us closer together, made the celebration even more beautiful. There were no shaking hands at peace, but deep emotionally charged meaningful hugs.

The next most memorable moment was also our celebration of Holy Eucharist, but this time on Sunday. Sitting at the edge of the creek with our toes in the water, some of us even sat in the water itself. The altar this time being a small triangular table built between two trees; jutting out right into the creek. Again there were no handshakes at peace time, only deep emotional hugs. The slight burst of rain during communion, only made it more memorable: we were on the theme of water at that time

My most memorable experience however, far surpassing the others, which is divided into two parts were the events of Saturday night. After supper, we were given the honour and privilege to have Exposition, Adoration and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and spend time with our Lord. This was done in a small hut close by the creek. No electrical lights were used. We were entirely surrounded by the light of two dozen candles. Light is perhaps my most favourite part of nature, and so coupled with Christ who is our Light; it was nothing less than intensely spiritual and profoundly inspiring! Some of us continued in prayer until the wee hours of the morning. I have often spent all night partying, but never the entire night in prayer, that too in the actual physical presence of the Lord. Many of the saints were not so blessed as this. I hope that many other Catholics will be blessed to experience a night like this one. I consider this the most blessed night of my life!

*I have often spent all night partying, but never an entire night in prayer, in the physical presence of the Lord too!. Many of the saints were not so blessed. I hope that many other Catholics will be blessed to experience a night like this one. I consider this the most blessed night and one of the most spiritual experiences of my life!*

At the midpoint of adoration, we broke for a moment and went down to the creek each with a candle in hand. Each with a prayer in heart: for our families, our friends and ourselves, for our wants, needs and desires, and for our loved ones departed. We set the candles afloat on the water and watched them float down stream. For many of us this was an emotional moment for it was also a tribute to our brother Dexter Gaspar, who was brutally murdered in his home last September. He was a member of the committee, May He rest in peace and May God grant his killers forgiveness.

To try and sum up my experience of the retreat, however inadequate; I will use the words of Dr. Wayne W. Dyer. Author of the book: Ten secrets to success and inner peace. – Every waking moment was an experience of the presence of God. The feelings of contentment and satisfaction that were felt cannot be put into words. Knowing that peace of spirit in life, made all life's concerns, problems, accomplishments, and accumulations diminish in importance.

In my own words It was like Elijah on the mountain top. Away, from all the turbulence and turmoil: It was like hearing the still, small voice of God.

I hope that there will be many more retreats of this kind, so that many more people can have this mystical experience with God.

Lastly on behalf of The Youth Coordinating Committee of Pastoral Area-YCCPA; I would like to thank Fr. Edwin for all the hard work, time and energy; he put in to making this retreat a truly sacred experience. Special Thanks to Miss Cheryl Peters for the use of her Shiba Kaleko resort and bus, and for being our chuffer as well as our cook. May God Richly bless you. Thanks also to Bro. Robert for taking time out to travel all the way from Grenada to retreat with us.

Roseanna has asked me to remember to mention our friend Jock the monkey.

## **10 Lessons for life I've learned from Guyana By Father Edwin Thadheu, SJ**

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### **1. Breathe Afresh, Live Free**

As I landed in Guyana, what struck me were the poetic lines of Gerard Manly Hopkins, the English Jesuit, "THE WORLD is charged with the grandeur of God". The drive from the airport to the regional house on the full moon night along the Demerara River lifted my spirits and dispelled any lingering doubts. It was a mystic experience of God's indwelling and abiding presence and the words St. Ignatius



heard 'I'll be propitious to you...' echoed in my heart. The verdant landscape and the gushing waters invited me to start life afresh. So my first lesson here in Guyana was from the nature: "Breathe afresh; live free".

## **2. Adapt and Adopt**

When the need is greater, life gets harder. So confine your needs to the minimal. The Amerindians, the indigenous people have very limited needs. "Sling a hammock to the trees and sleep" is a lesson I have learnt from the Amerindians. 'Simple living and high thinking' is what I need to do to be useful in this new found land.

## **3. Celebrate Life**

One need not wait for feasts and festivals to celebrate life. Here in Guyana every weekend is a festival and every occasion can turn into a celebration. Life is a continual celebration. In a lighter vein, I would say clubs and bars in Guyana outnumber houses. Sing, dance and let go; so at the end of the day, you hold nothing against your brother. So I learnt to let go and celebrate life every day without waiting for the festival calendar.

## **4. Be Spontaneous**

"Everything ok?" "Alright!" is the instant response you get accompanied by a broad smile whenever you wave to a passerby. There is neither reticence nor reserve when you genuinely relate to others. A free society cannot afford to be inhibited. Shyness is not a virtue here in Guyana. Male or female, they all smile, hug, express their friendly feelings spontaneously. So from the women in Guyana, I have learnt to feel what I say, say what I feel, and share what I feel!

## **5. Reduce the Spin**

'Gaffing' and 'liming' are two words that characterise the chat of the youth here in Guyana. While the North Americans are driven by time, our youth always let relationship drive them. So when you look out for some youth for any outreach programme, you will get them in numbers. These still have time for others. Life is not all about winning and trophies but "living it to the brim". I have learnt to join the youth of Guyana as they sing, "Stop the world I want to get off; and find myself a better ride".

## **6. Be Sensitive**

The national motto of Guyana is "One People, One Nation, One Destiny". It is a magical mix of six races. The word "race" can be a veritable tinderbox in Guyana, as elsewhere. But the people here learn to live in harmony by avoiding what hurts their neighbours. Most people work for harmony proactively by participating in joint ventures rather than opening the Pandora's Box of past bitter conflicts. During my homilies and interpersonal relationships, I have learnt to display that 'difference makes no difference' which in turn draws people closer to me.

### **7. Collaborate not Compete**

Guyana is 52% Christians, 28% Hindus, 7% Muslims, and 2% practise other beliefs, including the Rastafari movement and Baha'i faith. An estimated 4% do not profess any religion. Despite such diversity there has been no incident of religious riots in the country. Once in a Kali temple (church), they asked me to give a spiritual discourse on "Hindu Gods and Goddesses of Madras". Through incident like this I have learnt to move from competition to collaboration.

### **8. Treasure is just around the corner...**

Guyana is a land rich in gold and diamond deposits. Those who go mining always believe "the treasure is round the corner". The same hope is displayed in every walk of life. Could I call it a land where hope never dies? Yes, Guyana had its bitter past of slavery, indentureship, racism, etc. But the current generation without denying the past marches forward with hope. 'Hope can lift your wings and lighten your burden' is another lesson I have learnt.

### **9. Earn Freedom**

I once heard a girl of 16 saying, "Mom, I won't be there for the weekend; I am going to a youth camp". The same sentence would have triggered a Tsunami in my house! Girls and boys enjoy mature freedom that allows them to grow responsibly. I too have learnt to respect and promote responsible freedom especially those in the periphery of the society.

### **10. Value Others**

The most painful thing in this world is to feel rejected. In Guyana, everybody feels wanted. Personally, I feel wanted everywhere despite my age, colour, race, religion and origin. This sense of being wanted gives me great joy and fulfilment and energises my ministry and life. This experience has taught me to value others.

***Father Edwin Thadheu, SJ from the Madurai Province in India has been working in Guyana for a few years. This article is published in JIVAN (February 2011), the Jesuit Magazine for the South Asian Assistancy.***

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### **Hurts in the Pastoral Area**

Dear Editor

Many Catholics are unhappy with the state of affairs in the Pastoral Area and that is a matter of truth, except for the ones that see things through rose coloured spectacles. The concentration of power /authority in one place or by one or two persons is hurting and does not seem to bode well for the Catholic faith. I am surprised that with so many complaining to each other these problems do not come to the surface.

The letter in CS of February 11th 2011 pointing out the fall off in attendance at St. Pius may be part of a bigger picture which our Bishop and Priests are not looking at. There is need to relook at this idea of a Pastoral Area and ask the question “has this system made our church better” and if the answer is even fifty percent “NO” corrective action must be taken. Most importantly the needs of the Catholic people must be met.

My suggestions are as follows. Put a priest in charge of Holy Spirit and St. Pius. Another in charge of Holy Rosary and St. Theresa, another could be the Administrator of the Cathedral in charge of Sacred Heart. Now that the Jesuits are resident in Oronoque Street, Queenstown they could look after Fatima Parish. This leaves the Meadow Bank/East Bank area where I understand a priest still resides. I am sure a Priest could be found for Hauge and Malgre Tout. These priests should be free with the help of the lay people to truly “take ownership” and run the parish communities under their care. No need for one priest to run finances and buildings another Youth and so on.

The story of a shortage of priests is now worn out and since there are four priests currently working in the Pastoral area this argument does not hold water. We have heard a lot about Vatican II (since 1965) even sometimes misleading. The care of our Catholic communities must take priority over irrelevant ideas.

I was happy to read your article on the arrival of Fr. Cristovao Primo SJ from Brazil so he could celebrate and preach in Portuguese to the Brazilians here. Look how history has repeated itself in 1858 priests were brought in to speak Portuguese to the Maderian Portuguese and so help them to keep the faith in their adopted country. By the way he is another priest in the Pastoral Area.

**THOMAS JONES**

## Joy at new church

Dear Editor,

I felt such joy and emotion at the turning of the sod for our new Sacred Heart Church. Thank God it was a beautiful ceremony and it gives us much hope for the future.

**ENID CHEONG**

## Showcasing our culture sustaining our pride...

Dear Editor,

Mash in Guyana. People going crazy. It is a mixed connotation. I guess you can say celebration for freedom liberates you. It is beautiful to see everybody participating in 'we' culture, where joy and peace meet. But it can be annoying too. The masqueraders blocking your freedom as they dance and prance in your face. For me, it is spectacle to my eyes. I enjoy seeing unity of people, and this is what it symbolizes, that we join together to commemorate being a Republic.

Young people are the ones that are mostly going crazy. Let them have fun; it is a rare privilege sometimes. I certainly learn a lot from others. Like Jesus, I may someday bring a child into the midst of his disciples and scold them. The little one is the most free, most trusting, and most loving. They can bring us back to true life. Red and yellow, black and white and green, you are precious in His sight. Let us pray for and love the little one. God bless you.

**ANDRE BULKAN.**

