

## **Interfaith service**

**St. Augustine October 10, 2010**

First , let me congratulate Principal Sankat and his staff for the organization of this ceremony and also for the beauty of the arrangements in the auditorium. I also wish to thank the representatives of the different faiths who have participated and given substance and meaning to this morning's service.

Let me add my words of welcome to this interfaith service which is a part of the celebrations of the 50 years of existence of this campus in its present institutional form. I bring greetings from the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Harris who was prevented from being here by very personal family reasons. He sends you his best wishes.

I confess to being profoundly moved by the richness of the singing and drumming to which we have been treated. The variety is a reflection of the society in which we live and labor. It is worth while noting that from time immemorial, moments of joy, exultation and exaltation have been marked in human societies by the blare of trumpets, the clanging of brass, the beating of drums and the sounds of that most beautiful of instruments –the human voice. This morning has been no exception.

It is fair to ask why should there be such a service at this time and it is not only because of the richness of the faith community in Trinidad and Tobago. As a general point, there is considerable interest in the interfaith movement globally, and much of this is derived from the critical need to have better understanding of the world's great religions. Interfaith is seen as the cooperative and positive interaction between peoples of different religious traditions or faiths-faith used in this sense as the equivalent of a form of religious traditions and beliefs. I believe that interfaith activities are important for promoting understanding among religions –promoting the acceptance of religious diversity. This was not always so, there is a history of warring faiths and there is an old dictum that there will be no peace among nations until there is peace among religions.

It is appropriate that this interfaith concept flourish in universities in general, as these are places that cannot survive and prosper unless there is acceptance of or reverence for diversity. Discourse and diversity of opinion are hallmarks of the academic tradition. Good universities are committed to the thesis that all individuals have a contribution to make to society and in addition believe that it is part of their role to ensure that individuals from different backgrounds achieve the appropriate self actualization. Good universities celebrate diversity in teaching, in the composition of teachers and ensure that their company of masters and scholars represents diversity of backgrounds.

So why an interfaith service at this particular time? It is good at all times to promote and celebrate cooperation and positive interaction. But at this juncture, in this jubilee year, it is most appropriate for us to reflect on whether we have indeed lived up to the basic concept of the interfaith movement. One question we must ask ourselves is whether over the past 50 years we

have been positive about the kind of principle that is the essence of interfaith or have we been passive reflection of the disparities in society that may run counter to that principle. Reflection during and after this service and during our celebrations, will be useful for us, for if we have not embraced the kind of cooperation and positive interaction that is reflected in this morning's service, then we must set ourselves the task to do better. I believe that we have kept faith with that principle and can adduce evidence to prove it.

Finally, faith in a more generic sense is important for us as we look to the next 50 years and I hope this morning's service will not only be a mirror for us to look at our embrace of diversity, but will also give us comfort and faith in the rightness of what we have tried to do and what we wish to continue to do. If I might repeat part of the quotation from St. Matthew used by Pro Vice-Chancellor Sankat earlier, we will let our lights so shine before men and women that we will be seen forever as what we have prayed for this morning— a symbol of liberation from all that is restricting and enslaving.

Selah!

George Alleyne