



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

**MESSAGE FROM HIS EXCELLENCY ANTHONY THOMAS
AQUINAS CARMONA O.R.T.T., S.C PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AND HER
EXCELLENCY REEMA CARMONA ON THE OCCASION OF
CHRISTMAS 2016 AND THE NEW YEAR 2017**

His Excellency:

Fellow Citizens,

In this blessed and holy season of Christmas, my wife Reema, our children Christian and Anura and I, bring greetings to each of you in that sacred place called home. There is none quite like a ‘Trinbagonian’ Christmas. Christmas celebrates and commemorates the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is a time to love, appreciate and honour family and friends, a time to open up our homes to those near and dear to us and a time to engage in genuine volunteerism and charity. It is a time to extend a helping hand, to assist in making someone’s Christmas brighter and festive triggering goodwill, well beyond the season.

His Grace Archbishop Joseph Harris, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Port-of-Spain stated in 2012, *“The spirit of Christmas is not just about a season. It is about a way of life that is possible for all of us to live, that all of us are called to live, that all of*

us must live if our beloved Nation is to become what God desires it to become.” This way of life associated with Christmas can manifest itself in our daily lives, in the way we treat each other, our parents, co-workers, our children and even strangers that we meet. Our sense of giving should be boundless at Christmas time and at all times. This is how we can create a better world, with better people, who will care about the holistic well-being of each other.

Christmas may be an emotionally and financially trying time for some of us. Jobs have been lost, homes and roads have been shattered and destroyed by the force of Mother Nature, the results of climate change and environmental degradation. And then there is the ultimate- the loss of cherished ones through natural causes and regrettably through violence. It can all put a damper on this yuletide season and there is no easy fix to ease that sense of loss and grief. We have all lost loved ones and Christmas time can be a stark reminder of what really matters. Bring back we must, the Christ-Child in Christmas.

Her Excellency:

Like The Three Wise, we too individually and collectively, can seek and follow that symbolic Star of Bethlehem which can lead to brighter, better and hopeful days not only for ourselves but for everyone. And we can find that Star in our lives at Christmas time, when we celebrate the real magic of Christmas, one that ensures that the weak becomes strong, the sad, happy, the marginalised, to feel a sense of inclusion and the broken-hearted to be embraced with a caring heart.

We cannot therefore allow the true meaning of Christmas to be forgotten and Christmas must not be about mere dividends, goods sold and bought and profits made. In the energised, happy hustle and bustle of Christmas shopping and preparation, we should always take some time to truly appreciate the reason for the

season, the birth of the Saviour Lord Jesus Christ. Let us therefore, give a gift that lasts, a gift that endures for all time this Christmas. We can all be a better son or daughter, a better husband or wife, a better neighbour, a better friend, a better citizen and most of all, the best person that we can be.

His Excellency:

And if you want to give an enduring gift, that gift should really be the giving of one's self to noble ideals, to fellowship wrapped in kindness, compassion and loving care. Every day will be Christmas, if every day of the year you give of yourself, by spreading love, by respecting each other and by being kind to others. Your personal acts of kindness and understanding can create some of the solutions that we all seek to many of life's problems.

We sometimes can be a little excessive in our giving and we often feel it is a timely solution to win hearts, souls and minds. It is not. The dispirited and the broken hearted among us, need the greater gift of courage, hope, solace, vision and encompassing love. Let this Christmas therefore, not only be about gift giving but also one of caring and consideration for each other. Let our Christmas breakfast, lunch and dinner be a banquet of love. It is a religious holy time so it should not be happy holidays but merry, holy Christmas.

Her Excellency:

There is no denying that the spirit of Christmas is realised in great measure through the joy, laughter and sense of contentment in the hearty smiles of children, big and small. Christmas time gives us the opportunity to create in our children irreplaceable memories that can be passed on generationally. The truth be told, a child may not ever forget the special toy his mother or father gave him/her; and you know what,

even if that child forgets that toy, one thing that a child will never forget, is that feeling of genuine love, laughter, adoration and giving from family and friends at Christmas time. It is one undying legacy we can all pass on to our children.

Christmas is a time of deep reflection and introspection and allows us to recall the Christmas things that we did not do during the year. The real joy and spirit of Christmas will not be necessarily found in the wrapped gifts under our Christmas trees. It could rather be found in the company of a happy, loving family and dear friends.

His Excellency:

Our traditional Parang echoes the good things about us, the joys we have in our hearts and the hopes we cherish at Christmas time. I do recall the Christmas tradition of ‘Paranging’ and my family in Dalley Village, Santa Flora, waiting anxiously for the arrival of my grandparents, who were Parranderos, their arrival announced at 10 o’ clock, on Christmas Eve, by the barking dogs. We would wake up to the sound of the Parranderos singing the ‘Saludo’- a type of hello/ wake up song- at our doors and on entering our home and on entering our home, they would sing the ‘Annuncion’, a song celebrating the glorious birth of Jesus Christ and all the Parang songs would praise the birth of our Saviour. Departing, they would sing the ‘Despedida’, thanking in song the family for their gracious hospitality. That warmth, joy and family love of that merriment have remained with me till this very day, such can be the magic of Christmas to a young child.

A unique feature of our Christmas is that it is a festive season for everyone, Christians and non-Christians, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or beliefs.

Cuisine is a defining feature of our Christmas celebrations- yes! sorrel, Ponche-de-Creme, ‘Pastelles’ and Paime- and we cannot forget the black cake baked with love

and sent around the world for those who could not make it home for Christmas. But, I have to tell you, do go easy on the amount of food you consume and as Sprangalang would say, “*Watch yuh contents!*”

Maybe the time has come to bring joy and love to the home of our neighbours and strangers by “*Paranging the wrong house*”. We need to share each other’s love.

Her Excellency:

I have been privileged to live in a community of Hinduism mixed with strong Christian traditions in the form of La Davina Pastora and the Hindu Saint Soparee Mai in Siparia. I too experienced traditional Parang in my home and apart from all the traditional Christmas food, I recall my father ensuring that all Parranderos would have Roti, Dhal, Curried Goat, ‘Patchowni’ and other Indian delicacies. When the ‘Parranderos’ sang about the birth of Jesus Christ, there was a divine sense of oneness in us all.

Dear citizens, we are all entitled to celebrate the love of family and friends but please be responsible, and also, do not drink and drive.

Remember as well that the core message of Christmas is that Jesus Christ was born to redeem all humankind of their sins. The message of Christmas is not just about generosity or charity it is not just about the act of giving, but the act of forgiveness, as Jesus has demonstrated at the Cross—even to the least deserving.

His Excellency:

His Holiness Pope Francis declared 2016 as the Ecclesiastical year of mercy and forgiveness. To the families that have grown apart for whatever reason, Christmas time can be the balm that can heal and unify broken family relationships and fractured friendships. We must engender hearts and minds that rejoice in the miracle

that is Christmas. What better time for forgiveness than this season of peace and harmony. The author, Clarence Baird, summed it up all in his Christmas message in December 1919 in *The Spirit of Christmas*, and I quote, “*Close your book of grievances against the universe and look about you for a place to sow a few seeds of happiness and go your way unobserved.*” Let this Christmas be the catalyst that transforms our personal lives and positively change our relationships with each other.

At this Christmas time, extend a helping hand to your fellow man, whether it may be to assist a differently-abled person to cross that street of life, to purchase a toy for a child whose parents cannot afford to or simply by being kind and compassionate to each other. Your genuine act of kindness will not only assist someone else but will fill you with tremendous personal joy and contentment.

Her Excellency:

Let us embrace this Christmas and the New Year 2017 with enthusiasm, optimism, fervent hope and great anticipation.

His Excellency:

We wish the Christian community and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago a very blessed, holy and celebratory Christmas and Happy New Year. As a Nation, we have a lot to reflect on but we also have a lot to be thankful for and celebrate. At this Christmas time and as the New Year beckons, have the courage to hope, have an unbridled enthusiasm in tomorrow and let us believe in ourselves. Trinidad and Tobago is a great place with great people and it is the duty and responsibility of each and every one of us to make it even better and greater.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from all of us!