



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY
SERVICES**

ADDRESS

by

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE DONNA COX

**MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
AND FAMILY SERVICES**

on the occasion of

THE 4th ANNUAL GOSPEL AWARDS

SUNDAY, MARCH 7, 2021

QUEEN'S HALL, PORT OF SPAIN

6:00 p.m.

SALUTATIONS

- My Cabinet Colleagues:
 - the Honourable Randall Mitchell, Minister of Tourism, Arts, and Culture;
 - the Honourable Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, Minister of Education;
- Pastors;
- Producers, Artistes, Promoters, DJs and Announcers as well as those Influencers and Sponsors;
- My Brothers and Sisters in Christ;
- Other Specially invited Guests;
- Awardees;
- Members of the Media;
- Ladies and Gentlemen

“Even in the road blocks, Even through the rough spots. When you're feeling you're giving all that you got. I'm with you in the next step, giving you the next breath. I'll be the voice saying ‘You're gonna make it’. When you're out there on your own you are never alone. Keep fighting the good fight”. Sung by the group **Unspoken** – an American Christian band.

Good evening to everyone!

It is a great pleasure to share this evening with all of you here at the 4th Annual Gospel Music Awards of Trinidad and Tobago!

This Awards Ceremony has always been a showcase of excellence and brilliance, as it seeks to celebrate the achievements of our local Gospel Music artistes and industry influencers, and is also geared towards reminding all Christians that the purpose of our existence is to celebrate and glorify our Creator through the various gifts and talents He has entrusted to us, whilst simultaneously spreading the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As I begin, let me take this opportunity to say *thanks* for the considerate support of all sponsors and contributors over the years. Your commitment to the industry must be publicly recognized and applauded.

This year's thematic focus on *One Nation, One Community and One People* is of immense relevance in light of the new context in which we have all been called to exist. If there is a time for unity of mind, spirit and purpose, it is now. The spirit of the pandemic engenders separation and isolation, but as a people and especially the people of God, we must continue to be agents of cohesion and inclusion.

This is the foundation of the teachings of Jesus Christ and is the only way that we would be able to build a **resilient** nation as we join hands and hearts to recover from the pandemic.

But we are not here this evening to reflect on negatives, but instead, we are here to celebrate with the best of the best, the cream of the crop, who were chosen as potential awardees in the various categories and genres of gospel music. We would all agree that Gospel Music is composed and performed for many purposes, including religious and ceremonial, as well as entertainment for many. The ultimate goal however, is to worship God and minister to others.

The past year has undoubtedly revealed many opportunities for creativity, a renewed sense of purpose and a call to be unified in our beliefs and religious pursuits.

Our experiences with COVID-19 and its associated destruction to humanity, reminded us that Gospel music provides a way for people to maintain balance in their lives, to maintain peace of mind in the midst of the storms of life. Sometimes it is just that song at the right time; that perfect message, making the right impact in our lives that helps us find balance when things appear out of balance.

Eleven-time Grammy award winner, Shirley Caesar, known as the first lady of gospel music, had this to say:

"If you take gospel music out of the church, preaching is going to cease. ...It's something about those songs that brings joy. It helps you to get over a lot of bumps that you're going through in your life... the burden is much lighter".

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I myself have experienced the power of gospel music and no doubt many of us here today have experienced this power - the way it feeds our souls, inspires, uplifts us and gives us courage through life's many battles. And the beauty of gospel music is that it can hold its own against any song on the hit parade. Gospel music is known and loved the world over; it is how God's Word has been taken to the highways and byways of the world. Indeed, it has changed the world.

Gospel music sustained Martin Luther King and other freedom fighters during the Civil Rights Movement - a movement which, we can all agree, has indeed changed the world.

It was Mahalia Jackson and other gospel singers who gave fundraising concerts to finance the movement. And it was Mahalia Jackson who Martin Luther King would call very late at night, it was said, when he felt down and weary and ask her to sing for him, to lift his spirits and feed his soul, so he could carry on with the struggle. Sounds much like the account of the young lad David of the Old Testament, whose music brought comfort to the troubled first King of Israel, Saul. Spiritual music has long been a therapeutic balm for the soul.

Gospel music truly reminds us that there is always a higher power at work, despite the tribulations of the world we live in today.

I also want to take some time to give honour to all the gospel music Ministers here this evening. You are all winners in your own right, regardless of whether you walk away with a physical award. Remember, God is a rewarder and He will reward you in your own right as a Minister. This evening I encourage each of you with the words of Galatians 6:9, do not be weary in well doing for in due season you shall reap if you faint not. Continue in faith with the development of your giftings; this is your sacrificial offering to your Creator.

I note with great pride that we have a number of women among the music Ministers in the line up for awards this evening.

This is a truly encouraging feature and you serve as exemplars for upcoming, talented young women. Tomorrow as the world takes a moment to applaud women in various ways, I ask you to remember how much Jesus valued women and how he intentionally included them and relied on them during his ministry.

Throughout the Gospels, we see that Jesus was sensitive to the social exclusion, which women faced on a daily basis. The creation of Eve tells us there is something about womanhood that is necessary to fully express God's image. I pray for all of us here tonight that we will be known for our care and concern for the welfare of all women and our desire to cherish and protect them.

May we speak the words of life to our girls and remind them of how fearfully and wonderfully God made them; unique gifts, endowed by God.

Ladies and gentlemen, in these difficult times, prayer is powerful, but so is the music that pulls our souls toward God. Gospel music is indeed very important over the world and it is important to us here in Trinidad and Tobago. It will encourage and uplift us, as we face the challenges of COVID-19 and the many other social and economic challenges that come our way. It reminds us that we can have joy, hope, and courage no matter what life sends our way.

And so this evening, we salute those in the industry – the Artistes, Producers, Promoters, DJs, Supporters, Media Houses and Announcers as well as those Influencers and Sponsors who continue to create that enabling environment for this genre to prosper. I therefore wish to congratulate in advance all awardees tonight as I do all contributors to this magnificent industry. Continue to strive to be a light in the darkness and lift the name of Jesus high.

May God bless you!

May God bless the Gospel Music Awardees!

May God bless our nation!

I thank you.