

**December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022**

## **LET'S SPREAD LOVE AND JOY THIS CHRISTMAS**

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### **Introduction**

This December 25<sup>th</sup>, many of our citizens and residents will join Christians the world over in the celebration of Christmas, the traditional celebration of the birth of Christ. We recognize that there live among us, individuals and groups who do not participate in this celebration, and we respect their perspective, harboring no intentions to offend them. We are a diverse people, and we welcome and encourage diversity, hence we wish to celebrate with those who choose to celebrate December 25<sup>th</sup> in the traditional way. Already, we are experiencing the increase in economic activity normally associated with Christmas shopping including the late opening of stores and the popular Sunday shopping. Across the country in both urban and rural communities, commercial buildings, personal residences, and some public spaces are already displaying colorful lights and wonderful arrangements that is usual at Christmas time. The nine mornings festival started with a bang, communities including Richland Park, Stubbs, Carrierre and Barrouallie staging events and of course those events in Heritage Square on Kingstown. The “Nine Nights of Lights” activity put on by the Ministry of Culture at the Botanic Gardens is already receiving excellent reviews and the nightly activities are generating excitement and interest among the young and old. Walking through a busy Kingstown, it is difficult not to “run into” the many Vincentians who have come home for the holiday season as well as visitors who have decided to spend this Christmas with us. From the appearance of things thus far, this Christmas is to be a busy, festive, and joyous one, as friends and family come together to celebrate the season, offering best wishes, spreading joy, and sharing love at a time when we remember the birth of Christ.

### **Government Setting the Christmas mood**

There is a line on one of our Caribbean Christmas carol that says “everyday should be Christmas day” and this line can be used to accurately describe many of the policies of this ULP administration. Throughout this year 2022 this government has executed many projects that have supported many individuals and

families, that to many, Christmas may have come early. Many of these programs were not directly linked to the Christmas season, but for several, if not most, of the beneficiaries, the significance of the gift can easily be considered an early Christmas gift. During the month of September, more than 900 students were awarded tuition scholarships by the government with values of up to \$25,000 to assist with their university education. In June, over 4000 families in the Red Zone were selected to receive 6 months of income support of up to \$600 per month from the Volcanic Eruption Emergency Project (VEEP). These families will receive support up to the end of this year, inclusive of the Christmas season, money that will no doubt be used to assist in their preparations for the holiday season. In September, 27 families from the North Windward constituency that had their homes damaged during the volcanic eruptions, were relocated, and given brand new homes at Orange Hill. These families will be spending Christmas 2022, as part of a new community, in new houses that came at no cost to them, thanks to the government of SVG in partnership with a generous donor from Trinidad and Tobago. These are just three examples where this government delivered generous benefits to citizens of this country through several policy initiatives, at a time when challenges were great, easing significant financial and other burdens they encountered. What a Christmas these thousands of Vincen-tians would have this year thanks to our government. Indeed, Christmas came early, but in our reflections, we remember the generosity of the government and remain grateful for the gifts throughout the year. Truly this year, we could say under the ULP, every day was Christmas day.

### **Keep Christ in Christmas**

We must be constantly reminded that the celebration of Christmas rests on the birth of Christ, who came to earth to sacrifice his life for humanity that had strayed from his teachings. Unfortunately, some of the celebrations that take place bear very little relevance to the reason for the season but instead involves excesses and extremes that reflect negatively on us as a people. We are encouraged during this season to focus on those positive virtues that underscore the values we hold dear, sharing and caring for the less fortunate and vulnerable among us; all those things that indicate we understand that we must be our brothers' keeper. During this period, it is normal that neighbors put aside differences and instead focus on the one uniting theme - the birth of Christ, and we reach out to others, spreading love, sharing joy and offering best wishes to all

for the season. In this case as well, we wish every day could be Christmas day as we would love to see and encourage this attitude all year and not just at this time, but we take small victories and encourage our people to remember the reason for the season.

Finally, we encourage all to desist from activities that encourage violence and to resist the urge to get involved in criminal activities; this is not the time. In fact, it is never the time to be violent, and we must insist that our people always shun all criminal activities. Our society must get to that place where we narrow the space for the criminals to act, especially at times when citizens appear most vulnerable to criminal acts of robbery, due to being in large crowds or because of absence from their home. Let's look out for each other and "look out fo dem"; they must not be allowed to put a damper on our festivities. Christmas 2022 is indeed shaping up to be a very good one and we take this time to welcome home our citizens and visitors who have decided to share this Christmas with their families and friends here.

The leadership, members, supporters and well-wishers of the ULP take this moment to wish all Vincentians a very merry, safe, and joyous Christmas and remind all to keep Christ in their Christmas.