



A masquerader from Genesis 1 Creation enjoys the band's steelband as the band prepares to leave their camp on Carnival Monday.



Yasmin Charles and Kurt Charles dress mannequins as the band moves into its Mucurapo Road headquarters at the end of January, 2011.



Katrina Ladoo and Daniella Walcott prepare for a photo shoot.



Pat Bevan adjusts a costume for Nicholas Peters for promotional photo.



Fr Robert Cristo offers communion at a mass for the band's members in the chapel at Fatima College.

MASS in yuh mas

Bringing faith back to a secular celebration

Photographs and story by MARK LYNDERSAY

Depending on how you do the accounting, the idea for a Carnival band representing Christian values is either three months or seven years old.

The band, The Word and Associates, announced their first presentation early in the new year, a reimagining of the Bible's origin story, Genesis 1 Creation.

But the conversation about the band began in 2003, when Father Joe Harris, then the parish priest for Petit Valley, talked about a Carnival band for children with Derek Walcott, a particularly keen member of the laity.

Both men travelled separate paths in the following years. Harris travelled pursuing his calling and Walcott, accepted as a Deacon, began years of study.

"This year," Fr Harris recalled, "Derek told me we're doing the band. I know we have a group of people who are enthused about it. I don't know if we have a lot of people in the country who are enthused."

Harris supported the idea, but it would be Walcott and his team who would make the idea a reality.

"Clergy has their task in the scheme of things," Harris said, "but it is the task of the laity to evangelise in the secular world. People ask me if I am going to play mas. Of course not, but I don't think that people want me to do that. Bhajan had done a small band years ago on an environmental theme, but sought the advice of Rosalind Gabriel who pointed out what would work and what would have to change to make

her designs a reality.

Other Carnival notables included Raoul Garib who worked on costumes and Wayne Berkeley who designed the band's Queen.

That initial enthusiasm would be tested in the weeks after the band's introduction. First as the plan was debated among the public and then as the church itself considered what it would mean to become so directly involved in Carnival.

The week before Carnival, Tunapuna priest Fr Reginald Hezekiah agreed that there was a division within the church over the band, "The division stems from the feeling that Carnival has deteriorated to vulgarity and the Church should stay out."

Two weeks before that, a wooden structure meant to protect the construction space for the band's queen costume collapsed. The tarpaulin, weighed down by rainwater, fell on the frame of the costume, leaving the designer and his assistants working unhurt.

The final crunch came just days before the band was to hit the road as the reality of slow sales brought costume manufacture to an abrupt halt. At a triage meeting on March 01 that went on for hours, tough decisions about the band's finances were made.

"We got the steelband sponsored," Walcott said later, "but our biggest expense, the one that's the biggest challenge, is the DJ. That's the biggest line item for us at \$65,000, but you can't go on the road without a DJ."

The band rolled out of its Mucurapo Road camp at midday on Carnival Monday after an hour long mass in the chapel at nearby Fatima College. The small but enthusiastic group chipped on the pavement to the DJ and steelband accompanied by a refreshment truck and a decorated trailer for children and the elderly.

It was a small mission into a much larger world of mas, but Walcott was confident and smiling, "We don't have to be big; we can just be the salt in the pot."

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Costumed children play at the back of the chapel after the mass on Carnival Monday.



A Genesis masquerader prepares his son for the road.



The band gathers on Mucurapo road to leave.



Lisa Bhajan, the band's designer, tie-dyes fabric at her Couva home.



Wayne Berkeley designed the band's Queen, Eve, which was portrayed by Dr Charisse Bovell.



The three-hour triage meeting that focused priorities to complete the band.



Shane Dunmore paints the support frame of the queen costume. The wooden frame behind him would collapse two days later.



Dr Charisse Bovell is made up by Richard Young for the Carnival Queen Preliminary.



Wayne Berkeley directs Andrew Boodoo in the assembly of the Queen costume.



Pat Maurice works on a costume detail for the band's queen.