



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL & COMMUNITY COUNCIL

God wants Earth's resources to be enjoyed by all

"FINISH your dinner! How can you waste this food when millions are going hungry all over the world?" It's a familiar refrain in many homes. And how often we wish we could just zap the uneaten food into the laps of some poor person!

Somehow the gap between rich and poor in our world today looks so hard to bridge. How did it come to this?

In the beginning it was not meant to be so. The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* reminds us that "God destined the Earth and all it contains for all human beings and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 69).

In Catholic social teach-

ing, this is the Principle of the Universal Destination of Goods. It means God intended what He made to be enjoyed by all, not merely those who can afford it.

In God's plan, Earth and all creation are given so that each of God's children will have what he or she needs. In fact, everyone has a right to what is needed for proper development. Such is the extent of God's loving care for us.

The Church upholds the importance of the right to private property. This ensures that a family has what is needed - such as food, shelter and clothing - and is able to live in freedom, autonomy and responsibility.

Today, however, it is not difficult to see excessive consumption and wastage on

This ongoing series on the Church's social teachings focuses today on the Principle of the Universal Destination of Goods

one hand and, on the other, a vast number of people who do not even have enough to eat.

The Church reminds us that the right to private property must be seen in the light of the Universal Destination of Goods. It means whatever I own is intended by God to serve not only myself but the greater good of humanity as well. Put another way, the surplus I have rightly belongs to the poor.

The late Pope John Paul

II goes as far as to say that what we possess is under a "social mortgage" - we do not really own it until every debt to the needy is paid!

This is echoed in the words of St Gregory the Great: "When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice."

Such a teaching runs counter to our worldly tendency to accumulate more and more.

To be sure, most of us do this by honest means, working hard, putting our ingenuity to good use and by taking calculated risks. But the Church reminds us that God gave us our abilities and resources, and what we possess is a gift from God for the good of all His children.

Indeed, if each of us could bridge the gap in our own way, more people can start to enjoy the goods of creation.

Jesus always identified himself with the least and took special notice of the marginalised. In urging Catholics to show a "preferential option for the poor" the Church's social teachings ask us to follow in Jesus' footsteps and pay particular attention to the poor, disadvantaged and voiceless.

These are questions we can reflect on:

In my striving to feed myself and my family, do I help to ensure that those who are disadvantaged also have the opportunity to do likewise?

How can I make a start today, to avoid wastage and over-consumption?

Care and shelter for those with HIV

WHEN Benjamin learnt that he was infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, he was at his wits' ends.

He was in his 50s and divorced, with two grown-up children. The odd-job worker did not know how to deal with his new medical bills. Worse, he did not know how to face his family.

Nurses at Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Communicable Diseases Centre told him about a shelter for people like him, and that was how he found out about Care. The Catholic Aids Response Effort runs the only shelter in Singapore for people with the dreaded virus, for which there is still no cure.

"Nobody knows I'm here. My relatives don't know and I don't want them to know," said Benjamin (not his real name), the longest-staying resident at the shelter.

More than 20 years after AIDS arrived in Singapore, it remains a disease which carries stigma, shame and discrimination.

Care's roots go back to 1992, when Mrs Anne Webb, a Catholic, began visiting the CDC. She prayed with AIDS patients at a time when fear and ignorance made most people shun those afflicted.

Her daughter Jacqueline visited the patients one day and, moved by what she experienced, wrote to the Catholic News to rally more support.

A motley crew of pioneer volunteers - housewives, retirees and students - responded, and began befriending the sick and journeying with them to their final days.

In those early days of AIDS, most who were diagnosed died. Today, there are medicines that enable most people with HIV to continue living healthily, but the medication is costly and must be taken for life.

"Care has come a long way since the early days and I am happy to see that such a seemingly low-profile, poorly-resourced organisation has managed to survive and come this far," said Mr Mike Png, its president.

It has a list of about 40 volunteers, not all of whom are active. They pray with patients, provide a listening ear, celebrate birthdays and accompany them to hospital and make funeral arrangements too. Care also runs school and church awareness programmes, among other activities.

Care was registered as a society in 2004 and one of its biggest initiatives was to set up the shelter for those in financial difficulty but not ill enough to be warded in hospital or a hospice.

It can house a maximum of 25 residents and currently has eight residents. It needs a minimum of \$300,000 a year to run. For now, it takes in men only.

"We take in people who are destitute. While they are staying at the shelter, we hope to help them reintegrate into society, find jobs, homes and to reconcile with their families," said Mr Png.



About Care

Catholic Aids Response Effort reaches out to abandoned, marginalised and destitute people with HIV and AIDS and their families. It provides companionship and pastoral counseling, and runs Singapore's only shelter for people with HIV/AIDS.

Can you help?

Care needs volunteer befrienders and people to serve on its committee. It also needs donations to carry out its work.

Contact Care

Call 6354-2807, e-mail care@catholic.org.sg or visit www.veritas.org.sg/care

World AIDS Day Mass

Care organises the World AIDS Day Mass around Dec 1 each year. It will be held at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd at 6.30pm on Dec 1.

My prayers are with you. It must be unbelievably difficult and painful but God knows your every ounce of suffering. He will compensate you with His love.

Many need help. Are we doing enough?

"LORD, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or lacking clothes, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?" (Mt 25:44) The Lord is challenging each one of us. As believers, we do not have the option to see nothing, say nothing and do nothing.

The griefs and anxieties of others must raise an echo in our hearts, and we have a duty to play an active role in addressing the needs of our society, just as Jesus answers the call of those who are in need.

Historically, the Church in Singapore responded actively during the early days of Singapore. Catholic missionaries, in particular, set up hospitals, schools and social services.

Today, the Church is still at the forefront in some ways, responding to new issues and to those whose needs have been relatively neglected - people with HIV/AIDS, migrants and refugees abroad.

But are we doing enough?

We may not see grinding poverty or gross injustice in Singapore. And today, a lot is already being done by many players - the government, non-profit organisations and even the private sector.

But many in our midst still need help. They may be neglected, abused or find it difficult to cope with the realities of modern living.

Unlike secular charities, which may focus on the



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arts, sports, and other general aspects of the good of the community, Catholic charities need to remain focused on human services, with a preferential option for the poor.

Gaps can be filled through enhancement of services by existing agencies or the creation of new agencies. In looking at solutions, we need to also differentiate between short-term solutions that may alleviate the symptoms and long-term ones that go to root causes.

In co-ordinating the work of different agencies responding to community needs, we also need to resolve overlaps.

Towards this end, CSCC is forming clusters of our member organisations to look at common issues. The current clusters are Families, The Poor and Humanitarian Overseas.

There is indeed much to do on the road ahead. We need the support and involvement of all Catholics. We especially need constant prayers for the work we do so that the love of Christ can be felt in a real way by many in Singapore and abroad.