



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL & COMMUNITY COUNCIL

When you take a maid into your home... Give her proper meals, and her own space too

This is the third in a series of articles to encourage Catholics to look at how to put the Church's social teachings into practice in their homes, with regards to how we treat our maids. Today, we focus on the issue of providing our maids enough to eat and adequate accommodation.

Dignity home

THERE are many things we can do to help our maids perform their jobs well. Providing them with adequate meals and proper rest are essential, basic parts of decent working conditions. What does adequate meals and accommodation mean? This is open to wide and subjective interpretation. But ask yourself: What would you expect if you were an employee? As employers, do we provide the same to our maids?

The answer is yes for many exemplary employers. They share their meals with their maids, treating them like part of the family. They not only eat at the same table at home, but when the family goes out, the maids go along too – not just to look after the children but to share the meal and the outing.

There are other families where the maids eat separately. Sometimes this may be due to specific circumstances such as the need to care for an infant or the elderly while the rest of the

family are eating.

But there are other homes where the maid is rationed lower quality food or, worse, is given only one meal a day. Some do not have their meals at a table, but eat while sitting or squatting on the kitchen floor.

Sometimes, we ought to give our maid different food. If a maid does not eat pork, for example, we should take into account her religious or dietary sensitivity. But always, the meals should be what we would have if we were in her shoes.

It is also important for us to appreciate cultural differences concerning meals. Most foreign maids come from developing countries, where rice is the norm for breakfast, lunch and dinner. While having two slices of bread may be satisfactory for us in the morning, this may be insufficient for the maid. She may need rice to have the energy to get through the day.

The sleeping and resting quarters for maids in Singapore generally leave much to



Adequate accommodation for your maid means providing her with privacy to rest, relax or write letters home.

be desired. One priest said he dislikes doing house blessings because he often gets depressed when he sees the maid's room.

Many maids sleep on a foldable mattress in the storeroom. Condominium apartments do not provide proper rooms for the maid. If there is a bomb shelter, it often gets converted into a maid's room. Some maids' rooms are smaller and less ventilated than the walk-in wardrobe in the master bedroom.

Yes, space is limited. But if we have a guest or relative come to stay with us, where

would we put them? A maid should be more than a guest, as they live in our homes.

We should provide our maid with adequate space to rest during and at the end of the day. And the maid deserves privacy as she rests, and we should respect the privacy of her belongings. Employers should not rummage through their maid's things.

Providing enough food and suitable accommodation helps to meet the basic needs of our maids. We should provide them the kind of home we ourselves would like to return to at the end of our workday.

Let's hear from you

The Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI), supported by CSCC, has launched the Dignity in the Home programme to help Catholics reflect on the Church's social teachings with regards to their maids. Join in our online forum to give your views on this series of articles on the Dignity In The Home programme. We welcome your input.

Sign on at: <http://forums.cscs-singapore.org>
Or go to: <http://www.cscs-singapore.org> and follow the link.

Catholic Nurses Guild Extending God's care and love beyond the hospitals



EACH September, thousands of Catholics turn up at Novena Church for the annual procession to honour the birthday of Mother Mary.

Among the teeming crowds are often about a

dozen women in nurses' uniform, first-aid kits handy, alert for any signs of unease in the crowd.

They are from the Catholic Nurses' Guild, a group of volunteers formed about 40 years

ago to offer nursing and caregiving services.

President of the guild Ms Theresa Cheong, a polytechnic lecturer on nursing, said: "We help out at the Novena procession and during parish feast days. We

render first aid when needed, check blood pressure and blood glucose levels of people who are unwell. We help take care of those who come in wheelchairs. If someone collapses, we call for an ambulance, and offer immediate treatment while waiting for the ambulance."

Providing back-up nursing support at events like the Novena procession and feast days at parish churches is just one of the activities of the 200-strong guild, whose members are nurses from restructured and private hospitals.

One key project is a training programme for foreign domestic workers, to equip them with caregiving and nursing skills. About 80 maids are trained under this six-month programme each year.

The guild is also active at an orphanage

in Batam. Together with doctors from the medical guild, the nurses' guild members go down to the orphanage to help tend to the medical needs of the 80 children there. "We had a scabies project to help treat the children of this skin disease. We've been there twice so far over the last year," said Ms Cheong.

The next big project by the guild: organising the 10th Asian Conference of the International Catholic Nurses' Guild.

Nurses from Mexico, Belgium, Ireland, India and Vietnam are slated to attend the conference with the theme "Embracing Holistic Care through Practice, Research and Education." Said Ms Cheong: "We are trying to raise about \$140,000 for the conference, so we can support nurses from poorer countries like India and Africa to attend."

How to help: Members are nurses. All nurses, Catholic or non-Catholic, are welcome to offer their services. Apart from the projects above, the guild organises retreats and faith formation programmes. Contact Theresa_Cheong@nyp.gov.sg or call her at 97879936.

Catholic Nurses Guild Executive Committee

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