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CATHOLIC ACTION

Speaking to an (almost) empty room

Only 15 persons attended a talk on migrant workers by social activist Braema Mathi. Does it mean that we are simply not interested in migrant workers or the Church's social mission? Or is it a case of migrant workers information fatigue?

By Joyce Gan

SINGAPORE – Normally, when the Scheut Missions (CICM) organise and promote a talk – by advertising in The CatholicNews, parish bulletins, and email to religious communities and to those who receive the Missionhurst magazine – some 35 to 60 people would attend talks on mission and 60-100 people attend talks on inter-religious dialogue.

However, the latest talk, “Welcoming the Foreigner in our Midst”, by Braema Mathi at Church of the Holy Spirit where the talks are usually held, attracted only 15 people.

More than 60 persons had been expected, said Father Paul Staes, following the series of “Dignity in the Home” articles prepared by Archdiocesan Commission for Migrants and Itinerant People and Caritas Singapore Community Council and published in The CatholicNews; a booklet summarising the articles was then distributed in parishes.

“The poor attendance was a surprise and disappointment, but

that does not mean that I will be discouraged,” Father Staes said. “On the contrary, I am even more strongly motivated to work harder” to bring issues of social relevance to the attention of our Catholic population, he added. The social mission of the Church should be claimed as “our own thing”, he explained.

Ms Mathi is one who has claimed this mission as her own though she isn't a Catholic. Catholic social mission is something that has articulated a lot of her own thoughts, she told a July CSCC social mission conference.

She professed that she's worked on a few causes before “but it's the migrant workers one I'm most concerned about”. She is a former senior correspondent with The Straits Times, is coordinator of a human rights group MARUAH, vice-president of Action for AIDS, is involved in AWARE and is the founder of Transient Workers Count Too.

The poor attendance at the talk is a pity but as Father Paul Staes commented, “Information, we can get from many places. Motivation, we usually get from people, like Ms Mathi.” □

Braema Mathi shares her thoughts with the few people who attended her talk on migrant workers. Though not a Catholic, she has embraced Catholic social mission, making it her own.

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