



In this article drawn from the recent Social Mission Conference, Caritas Singapore Executive Director Joyce Koh shares the focus of our next lap in fulfilling the Church's social mission in Singapore.

Charity & Justice

The Social Mission Conference

IT HAS been four years since Caritas Singapore was formed as the umbrella body to provide coordination and leadership to Catholic charities and groups that support the poor and the community. Today, Caritas Singapore has more than 20 member organisations running over 70 programmes that benefit more than 50,000 beneficiaries.

Caritas Singapore itself has nine core programmes to discharge its role as the social arm of the Church. Its Community Strategy programme seeks to develop the overall Archdiocesan strategy for meeting the community needs.

SOCIAL REALITIES AND RESPONSE

Caritas Singapore has sought to build our understanding of the community landscape, identify gaps and overlaps in existing interventions and how these can be improved. Despite its considerable economic development, Singapore continues to face a wide range of social problems and issues that require addressing:

- A fast ageing population
- Threats to the institution of the family
- Growing income inequality
- Threats to moral values
- The large influx of migrant workers, foreigners, and foreign spouses
- Needs of the disabled and mentally ill
- Climate change and sustainable development

The Church has an important role in meeting these social needs. It can be a model in promoting the dignity of the human person and a provider of needs holistically. It should also be an advocate for the cause, beyond charity to justice, as well as to be an experimenter and a leader in social service provision.

The Community Strategy that was developed a year ago, identified strategies and action items in four key areas to achieve these goals.

1. Enhancement of existing service programmes

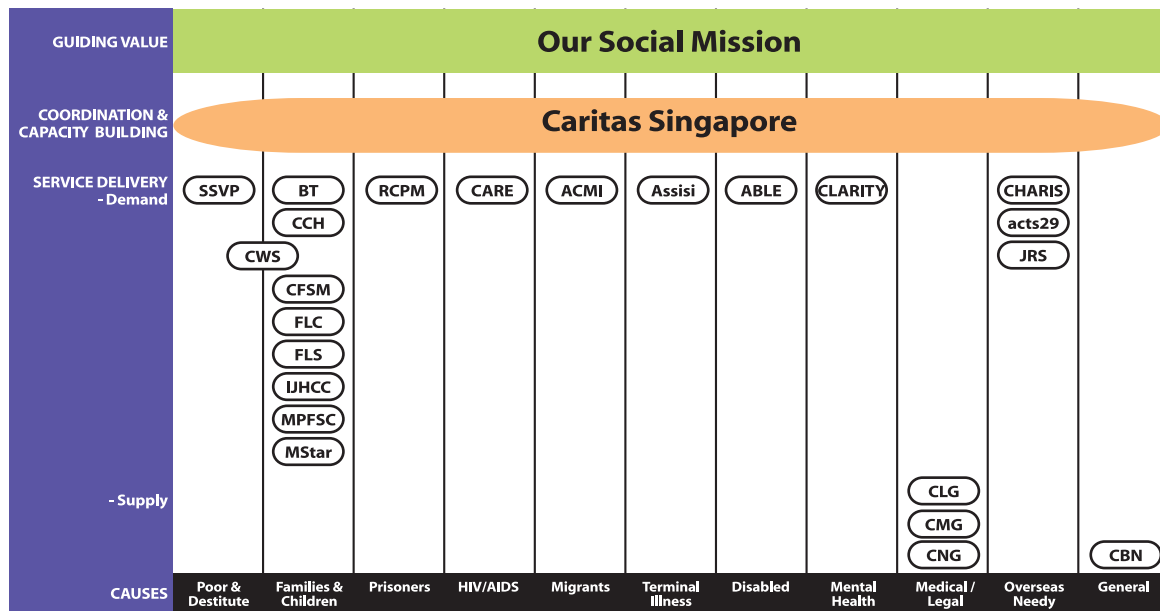
This involves strengthening existing member organisations to help them extend their work to cover gaps that have been identified. Two major initiatives are currently underway.

The first seeks to help low-income and poor families. Caritas Singapore, together with Catholic

Social Mission 2.0



Beneficiaries of Caritas Singapore member organisations' programmes had a fun time at A Big Day Out earlier this year. There are many needs in the community to be met and, aside from setting up new charity groups and programmes, Caritas Singapore also hopes to attract more Catholics to volunteer work.



Welfare Services and the Society of St Vincent de Paul, has commissioned an independent study on poverty issues and root causes faced by beneficiary families served, with a view to implementing new service programmes to provide targeted and integrated help to them.

The second, "Parenting United", is aimed at promoting strong marriages, tactful parenting skills, and resilient parent/child relationships. This is a joint initiative of Family Life Society and Marine Parade Family Service Centre and two other non-Catholic charities, Focus on the Family and Centre for Fathering.

2. Three new charity organisations

Three groups are being formed to deal with new areas of needs: overseas humanitarian efforts, the mentally ill and the disabled.

CHARIS - Caritas Singapore Humanitarian Aid and Relief Initiatives, Singapore - is coordi-

nating body for overseas humanitarian aid. It replaces and expands on the work of the former Archdiocesan Crisis Coordination Team.

CLARITY Singapore Limited is being set up to help those with psychiatric illness through programmes providing rehabilitation, support and essential training to those from low- to middle-income families.

ABLE - Abilities Beyond Limitations and Expectations - is being formed to help the physically challenged. Its focus will be on training, skills development and integration into society.

CHARIS was launched by Archbishop Nicholas Chia in August this year, and the other two groups will be launched over the coming months.

3. Social mission outreach to parishioners

The resource for the Church's charitable work is the Catholic community. Through volunteering, fundraising and many communication initiatives, Caritas Singapore has sought to mobilise Catholics at the parishes to the cause of charity work.

But there is a need to integrate our faith to our Christian mission of helping others. Caritas Singapore has therefore developed programmes to help Catholics better understand the Social Teachings. Some of these publications include *Salt of the Earth*, a group study guide, and *Salt and Pepper*, which contains articles on the Social Teachings.

Another group study guide, *Labourers of the Harvest*, is now available to help Catholic adults live their faith at the workplace.

A study is also in place to determine best practices of social mission outreach at parishes.

4. Public education and social response

This concerns the importance of ensuring justice with charity. To effect lasting social change, we need to increase the number of prevention programmes and advocate actively on issues that deal with the root causes of social problems.

"Dignity in the Home" is a programme conducted jointly with the Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI) to focus on foreign domestic helpers. It challenges Catholics to reflect on how we relate with and treat our domestic helpers in aspects such as rest days, compensation, living conditions and communication.

"Dignity of the Elderly" is a project jointly undertaken by the Singapore Pastoral Institute, Family Life Society and Caritas Singapore to focus on the elderly. It involves a series of workshops and seminars which highlight issues on active ageing, the value of older persons, transmission of values, care-giving and end of life matters.

A social response group has also been formed, comprising representatives from Caritas Singapore and member organisations such as ACMI, Family Life Society, Catholic Medical Guild and Catholic Nurses Guild. It will provide the Church's perspective on issues of social concern relating to migrant workers, families or bioethical matters.

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| SSVP | Society of St Vincent de Paul |
| BT | Boys' Town Singapore |
| CCH | Canossaville Children's Home |
| CWS | Catholic Welfare Services |
| CFSM | Christian Family and Social Movement |
| FLC | Faith and Light Community |
| FLS | Family Life Society |
| IJHCC | Infant Jesus Homes and Children's Centres |
| MPFSC | Marine Parade Family Service Centre |
| MStar | Morning Star Community Services |
| RCPM | Roman Catholic Prison Ministry |
| CARE | Catholic AIDS Response Effort |
| ACMI | Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People |
| Assisi | Assisi Hospice |
| ABLE | Abilities Beyond Limitations and Expectations |
| CLARITY | CLARITY |
| CHARIS | Caritas Humanitarian Aid and Relief Initiatives, Singapore |
| ACTS29 | acts29 |
| JRS | Jesuit Refugee Service Singapore |
| CLG | Catholic Lawyers Guild |
| CMG | Catholic Medical Guild |
| CNG | Catholic Nurses Guild |
| CBN | Catholic Business Network |

- Caritas Singapore plays the role of a coordinating and capacity building body for member organisations.
- In terms of service delivery, most member organisations provide services directly to the needy and the larger community.
- A few - the lawyers, nurses and medical guilds, as well as the Catholic Business Network - are focused on the supply of specific skills and support to the community.