



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL & COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Respect the dignity of all workers

In this ongoing series on the Church's social teachings, we focus on the Principle of the Dignity of Human Work. This is the second of two parts

MANY things in the world of work have gone topsy-turvy. Instead of a joyful co-creation with God, work has become drudgery for many people.

Instead of a spirit of cooperation which should define the workplace, we see excessive competition and back-stabbing. Instead of honouring the dignity of all workers, we see exploitation and discrimination.

Work is holy and has an infinite dignity because it is the action of a human being – a person created holy in God's image and given a share in God's act of creation.

Work therefore has a divine quality because of the worker. What a contradiction we show when we focus on the work and neglect or abuse the worker! It is not hard to find examples around us where the person who works is treated as an object and a means to an end especially in the pursuit of profit at any price.

It was precisely this problem that prompted the Church to make its social teachings more prominent over a century ago. In his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (The Condition of Labor, 1891), Pope Leo XIII spoke out against how workers were made to work in dehumanising conditions with insufficient wages during the time of the industrial revolution.

This problem still exists. As we seek to improve our physical infrastructure with lower costs, sometimes the human dignity of the worker, especially the foreign worker, is compromised.

This can happen in the form of inadequate wages, food, shelter or unsafe transportation. There are maids who do not have adequate rest or are even physically abused. Even professionals suffer from over-work and abuses at the office.

The Church urges us to put the human being back in the centre. "Work is for man and not man for work," as Pope John Paul II reminds us in his encyclical *Laborem Exercens* ("On Human Work").

The encyclical also highlights the rights of workers. In line with their dignity as human persons, workers have a right to adequate wages and social benefits, a right to working conditions that are not harmful to their health and integrity, a right to rest and a right to form associations to advance their well-being.

It all boils down to the truth that every human person is a child of God and that his or her welfare is important to God. We need to remember this at all times, whether we're dealing with our employees, colleagues, competitors, customers or suppliers.

Pope John Paul II also highlighted the importance of a "just wage" – a wage that is in keeping with God's justice.

A "just wage" is one that is adequate for a family's breadwinner to maintain the family and secure its future, including allowing for caregivers (especially mothers) to focus on their task of care-giving. "Just wages" can come directly from salaries as well as from various social measures.

The concept of the "just wage" stems from the Principle of the Universal Destination of Goods, which reminds us that God meant for all the earth's resources to be enjoyed by everyone, so that no one would be left hungry or homeless. Having an opportunity for fruitful work with adequate wages is the key means to achieve this.

The right to work is itself a key human right. Societies that promote the dignity of all persons are those that create opportunities for gainful employment, including opportunities for disadvantaged groups such as ex-prisoners or those with disabilities.

All of us have a part to play to ensure justice in the world of work. The following are some thoughts to reflect on:

- Do I tend to focus on the work rather than the worker? How can I uphold the dignity of the worker in my everyday life? (Think about the people who work with you or serve you at shopping centres, eating places, and your neighbourhood, for example.)
- Do I speak out to help rectify abuses of workers that I may notice in my workplace or community?
- Do I tend to regard others differently according to what they do for a living? Am I able to see that all work has equal value in God's eyes?

Governance or Stewardship?



By Willie Cheng
Chairman, CSCC

A CHIEF executive officer of a publicly listed company once said to me: "Let's face it, no CEO likes governance. Governance is for the other guy."

I agree with his observation on human nature. It's hard for the governed to relish governance.

Yet, the enlightened who are entrusted with power would view the issue less as governance and more as stewardship. "From the one to

whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded." (Luke 12:48). From a practical standpoint, if we do a good job of being accountable, our work also becomes a lot easier.

In the discussions leading to the formation of CSCC, that was one of the key concerns expressed by several of the social and community organisations on the creation of an umbrella body. Would CSCC be a governing body? What more reporting would we need to do? What new rules would there be?

Well, the reality is that events were overtaking us even as we met. The charity world – the space that CSCC and many of our member organisations operate in – is facing pressure in the aftermath of the National Kidney Foundation and other scandals.

The public and the authorities are demanding a

greater level of accountability than many in the charity world had been used to before. The Code of Governance for Charities & IPCs is only the most recent aspect of this evolving change.

CSCC has several roles in furthering our social mission and ensuring the effectiveness of our charity and community organisations.

In the area of governance, we concluded that we should start by being a model of good corporate governance, and over time, promote and facilitate good governance practices among our member organisations.

But like all good things, one can go overboard.

Two months ago, I had a debate with a fellow parishioner who felt that in the interest of transparency, one of our member organisations that raised over \$300,000 should inform all parishioners how the money was spent,

with regular updates after mass.

I argued that the publication of their use of funds in The Catholic News and on their website (which is available 24/7) was adequate. In my view, making announcements after mass at all parishes is neither necessary nor practical.

In the current climate of what sometimes appears to be an open season on charities, it may be fashionable to ask for all manner of accounting.

This should be balanced with an appreciation that many of our charity organisations are run by volunteers who come in to serve a cause.

The time they should and can spend on dealing with the administrative burdens of excessive accounting and reporting demanded in the name of good governance should be moderated to allow them to focus on their organisation's core mission.



CELEBRATION TIME: Archbishop Nicholas Chia (third from right) and guests recollecting on CSCC's first year journey.

CSCC is one year old

THE stars were aligned. And they shone bright in the sky. What looked earlier like threatening rain clouds held. The mood on the open-air terrace of St Teresa's Church on Nov 30 was convivial as CSCC and over 200 of its volunteers and supporters celebrated CSCC's first anniversary.

At the church auditorium earlier there was an hour of thanks, speeches and reflection on the Church's social mission.

Archbishop Nicholas Chia recounted the events that led to the formation of CSCC, describing how it was very much a ground-up movement.

He also shared how the name suggested originally, Catholic Social Council, was changed because it would have the same acronym as the Catholic Spirituality Centre.

CSCC Executive Director Joyce Koh noted that much had been accomplished in one year, thanks to the support CSCC has received. CSCC also released its inaugural annual report at the event.

Many of those who came stayed through the night – some until nearly midnight – just catching up and sharing on CSCC's first year's journey.



REFLECTION TIME: We are a light to those we serve.



MAKAN TIME: A chance to catch up and bond.



MINGLING TIME: Guests share stories of caring.