



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Transforming ourselves in charity and justice



Archbishop Nicholas Chia addresses participants of The Social Mission Conference. The Church teaches that charity is driven by justice. We must give to the other what is due him. Giving to the poor out of our abundance is not charity on our part.

OUR Church's response to social issues over the years has been coordinated and manifested through many Catholic charities and organisations.

We have family-focused groups like the Family Life Society and Morning Star Community Services, those serving the poor such as Catholic Welfare Services and the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and we have many working for the marginalised such as Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI), Catholic AIDS Response Effort (CARE) and the Roman Catholic Prison Ministry (RCPM). Altogether, there are about 20 Catholic charities and organisations under the umbrella of Caritas Singapore.

Caritas Singapore will establish three new Catholic charities in the coming months: CHARIS for overseas humanitarian work, CLARITY for the mentally ill, and ABLE for the disabled.

With all these charitable groups in the Church, are we doing enough for the needy?

The Church does not intend to cover all ground, preferring to work with other charities – secular and from other

Charity & Justice

The Social Mission Conference

Today we begin a series on charity and justice, drawn from the recent Social Mission Conference. His Grace Archbishop Nicholas Chia gave participants his take on the Church's journey in fulfilling our social mission

religions – to ensure that societal needs are met. The approach of the Church is to focus on areas of greatest need and where Catholics and the Church can make a significant difference.

In this, our Catholic ethos and approach to charitable work is key.

Many think of charity as giving alms, a handout, or a hand-up to the poor and downtrodden. When we give, we feel good.

But the Church's teachings on charity go beyond that.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his latest encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* or *Charity in Truth*, says there are two criteria for social action that flows from the principle of "charity in

truth": justice and the common good. Justice means giving each person his due; the common good is the good of oneself and the rest of society.

The Church teaches that charity is driven by justice. We must give to the other what is due him. Giving to the poor out of our abundance is, therefore, not charity on our part.

Charity also demands justice. It is not enough to donate generously to those in need yet do nothing to address the systems that prevent the disadvantaged from rising up in society.

The challenge for Catholics, Caritas Singapore and its member organisations is how to reach out to our beneficiaries in both charity

and justice. Perhaps it involves questioning our social norms, unjust treatments, and our attitudes to our fellow men.

The ability to discern between charity and justice is important. One must not be mistaken for the other, and both are important in our social mission.

Transformation is also needed. Many Catholics need a personal transformation in their attitudes to fully embrace the concept of charity and justice. Certainly, society too, will be transformed when true justice is brought to the table.

God has given each of us gifts and talents to use to transform ourselves and move society. Like the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), we are called to use our talents creatively and boldly in the service of God and our fellow men.

We are challenged to respond with charity to those in need and to advocate justice in the process of identifying the root cause of problems, addressing unfairness and resolving inequalities.

Just as in the song, "It only takes a spark to get the fire going", each of us plays a part in improving the lives of our brothers and sisters, regardless of race, language or religion.

WHAT PLENARY SPEAKERS SAY

"The work that I currently do is in the field of social inclusion. Underpinning the concept of social inclusion is the dignity of every person, a dignity that must be respected by all; the right of every person to participate in the life of the community; creating opportunities and removing barriers for people to participate; providing access to opportunities so that people can engage with dignity, the economic and social networks of society.

In order for all this to happen, we focus on key structures of society. I call them 'vehicles', because we need to 'drive' them, sometimes at different speeds and in different directions to bring about better outcomes for people. The main 'vehicles' I use are the structures of housing, health, education, skills training, employment, and family support."

Monsignor David Cappelletti

Vicar-General, Archdiocese of Adelaide and Commissioner for Social Inclusion, South Australian Government

"It was, at least for me, an awakening to learn that the charitable act of giving to the poor may not be so much a reflection of kindness on the giver's part, but more of giving a poor man his due. For the receiver, it is his right, and for the giver, it is his duty. And further, that giving to the poor and needy their due, requires us to not just be giving in monetary terms, but to also advocate for them and to seek to change the structures and strictures that caused their condition in the first place."

Willie Cheng

Chairman, Caritas Singapore

"I propose we begin in our own persons to dismantle the supports of our socially conditioned apathy by adopting what the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur coined 'a second naivete'. It is a determined return to innocence: a conscious willingness to put good faith in our relating to others. To choose to trust rather than to suspect, despite full realisation of the possibility of failure and rejection. For Christians, it is an engagement in the Asian spirituality of contemplating the face of Christ in all people, especially in the poor and the outcast.

This positive attitude towards people sensitises us to the needs of others, and directly challenges the climate of self-absorption and self-preservation. We must nurture the willingness to risk ourselves to be with the poor, in recognition that we are all made by the same God, dwelling places for the same Divine Spirit, put in the same world, and headed out in the same direction. Matthew 26:11 states: 'You will always have the poor with you.' For that, we should be grateful."

Arthur Goh

Director, Singapore Pastoral Institute