



# OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

## Faith, charity and justice

**C**ATHOLIC faith demands that disciples be a people of charity and justice, and in the Catholic tradition, charity and justice are to be focused clearly on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in the community.

However, quite often charity and justice become separated and they can lose some of their proper function.

First, what are charity and justice? Charity deals with providing relief and support for the immediate effects of injustice, whereas justice is directed at the root causes of injustice and addressing long term needs. It is not a matter of choosing either-or. As disciples of Jesus, it is about adopting both.

Focusing only on charity does not solve the social problem many may face. Focusing only on justice can overlook people's immediate needs. We need to grasp what it means to be a people of charity and of justice, and how the two are linked.

### God's love and people

God is love, and that is the way He is and will always be.

The Church teaches that the human person is made in the image of God. Therefore, every human person, without exception, has an intrinsic dignity.

God is also the Trinity; three persons in communion. In the nature of God, there is a dialogue of persons, in a sense, a community. We all share in this identity, made in and for community. We are meant to find our fulfilment in community.

So not only is there an obligation to recognise the equal dignity of every person in his personal attitudes and behaviour, but also to see that fulfilment for all is found in engagement and participation in the community. We have to work towards ensuring that society cares for those in need in practical ways, and that the structures of society include all people in the active life of the community, so that their dignity can be lived out.

Our Catechism goes so far as to say that "rights flow from the dignity of being a person" and "all should have the means to live out that dignity".

Each of us is, therefore, called to assist others to find fulfilment, to live out their dignity, to be a people of love, and of true charity. We are bound by the law of love, "love God and love neighbour" (Matthew 22:37-40) and "whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

### Justice in love and charity

In the same breath and just as important, as disciples of Jesus we are reminded that even in acts of charity, the demands of justice must be satisfied first.

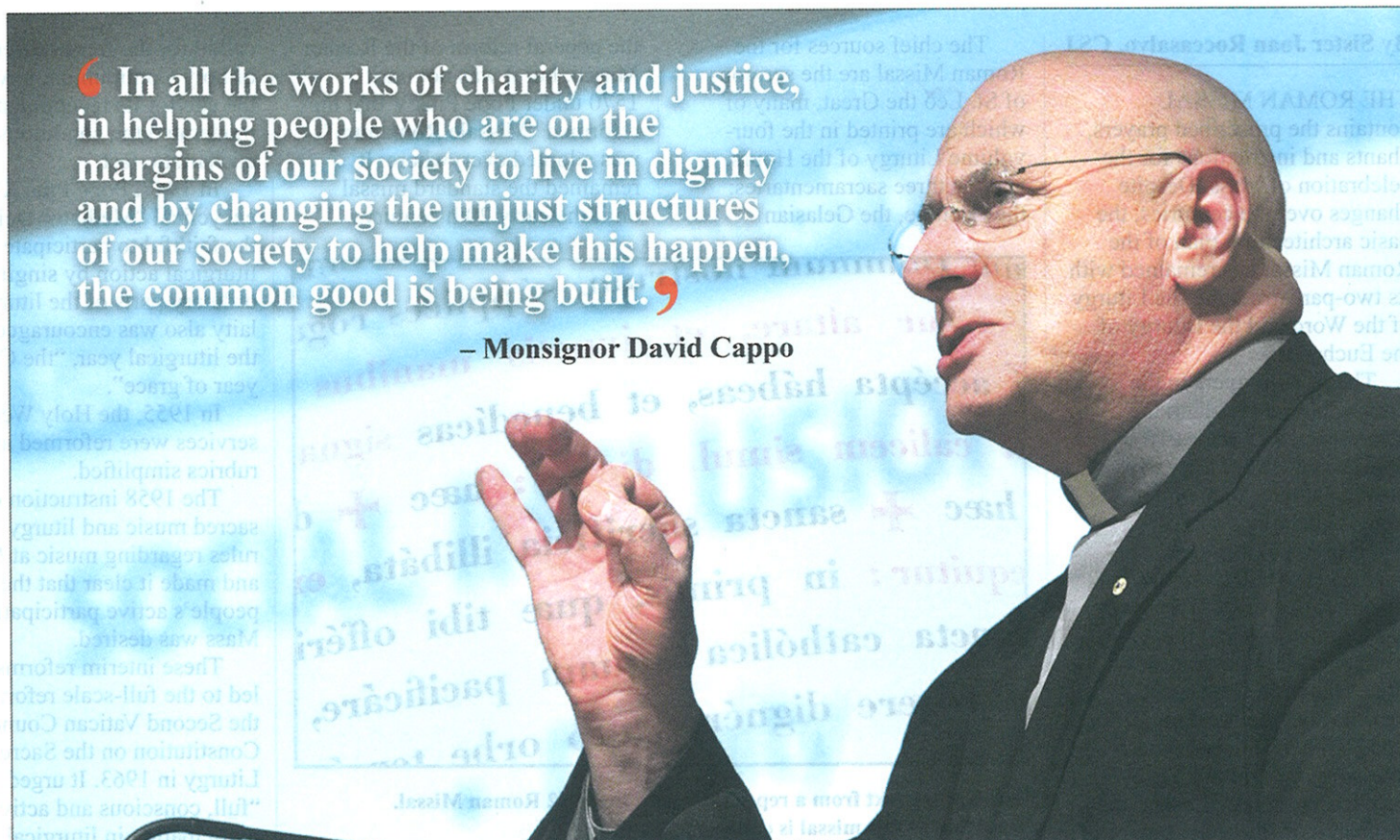
Too often societies deem the poor and disadvantaged to be either deserving or not of charity. Moral constructs are used to decide who is deserving and who is undeserving. And often part of that construct is how grateful and thankful the recipient of charity is. This is a shocking distortion of charity to be guarded against in all that is done as individuals and in the structures of the organisations and agencies.

In the powerful words of the great St John Chrysostom: "Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours but theirs" (CCC, 2446).

He breaks through this notion of charity as a gift to the poor, of the distinction

**“In all the works of charity and justice, in helping people who are on the margins of our society to live in dignity and by changing the unjust structures of our society to help make this happen, the common good is being built.”**

— Monsignor David Cappel



Monsignor David Cappel told participants that there is a difference between charity and justice. For Catholics who are disciples of Jesus, the choice is not either-or. We have to embrace both.

### Charity & Justice

The Social Mission Conference

*Continuing the series of articles drawn from The Social Mission Conference, Monsignor David Cappel, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Adelaide, reflects on what our faith says about Charity and Justice in helping those in need.*

between "us" and "them". He points to the equal human dignity that all share, including the poor, and society's obligation, to ensure that everyone has what is necessary to live in dignity in community.

So do not expect to be thanked for gifts to the poor. Do not expect the gratitude of others. This satisfies the ego, but diminishes the poor as well as the giver. Such distorted charity becomes a great indignity, and a great injustice of the disadvantaged in society.

St Gregory the Great similarly said: "When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice."

### True charity

True charity is defined by the Church as follows: "Charity is the greatest social commandment; it respects others and their rights; it requires the practice of justice; and charity alone makes us capable of it; charity inspires a life of self-giving" (CCC, 1889).

A life of self-giving – that is the context of charity and justice, not one's own needs, but fulfilment in generous self-giving to the needs of the vulnerable and the poor.

### The difference between charity and justice

Charity ..... Social Service	Justice ..... Social Change
Scriptural Reference: Good Samaritan Story	Scriptural Reference: Exodus Story
The Gospel story does not try to survey the causes of highway robbery. The Samaritan provides temporary and immediate relief	Moses does not ask for food and medicine for the Jewish slave-labour force. He challenges the institutional system. Message: "Let My People Go."
Private, individual acts	Public, collective actions
Responds to immediate need	Responds to long-term need
Provides direct service: Food, clothing, shelter	Promotes social change in institutions
Requires repeated actions	Resolves structural injustice
Directed at the effects of injustice: Symptoms	Directed at the root causes of social injustice

### Examples:

Homeless shelters, food shelves, clothing drives, emergency services

Legislative advocacy, changing corporate policies or practices, congregation-based community organising

Source: Office of Social Justice, Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis

And in all the works of charity and justice; in helping people who are on the margins of our society to live in dignity and by changing the unjust structures of our society to help make this happen, the common good is being built.

"Do not live entirely isolated, having retreated into yourselves, as if you were already justified, but gather instead to seek the common good together" (CCC, 1905).

### The common good

We are here to build up the common good: "The social conditions that help us to reach fulfilment more fully and more easily."

We need to respond with charity and

justice in our community. We need to live out for the good of all, particularly the most oppressed, disadvantaged and vulnerable in the community.

In loving service must we give food to the homeless, organise shelters and daily care. But never see that this is enough and never see it as a gift we give, but rather a demand in justice where we serve the poor.

And never see that this loving service, this charity, can be separated from the demand in justice to change the structures of society that cause homelessness.

May these words give increased energy to the zeal you have for the work of faith, charity and justice in your community.