



# OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

## Seeing Christ in the elderly

**A**S Singapore society ages, we Christians need to reflect on how caring for the elderly, especially those no longer healthy and active, is part of the mission of the Church. We need to look at how we relate to the elderly who are sick, confined to the home, and who have dementia and no longer recognise their family and friends.

As members of the Church we need to support each other, not only in our parish ministries but also within our community. The centre of our lives during the week is the word of God that we proclaim and share. This same word pushes us out to show mercy to our elderly neighbours or others in need of different faiths.

As a Christian community, we are called to care for the elderly and sick in our neighbourhoods. However, this ministry to the elderly has largely been reduced to taking communion to the Catholic elderly once a week, supplying provisions and taking residents of an old folk's home to dinner.

Many of us are busy with our own lives. When it comes to parish life, it is usually about worship, prayer, praise, choirs, reading, liturgical celebrations, food fairs, or fundraising to help those in need.

But what of the elderly in our midst, not just the ones we see in Church but the ones unable to leave their homes? Do we visit them? Do we bring the world to them in our companionship and conversation? Do we know they exist?

It cannot be a matter of not knowing what to do or say. For the past ten years, the Singapore Pastoral Institute has run training programmes and workshops to help ensure that the sick, elderly and mentally challenged of all faiths in the parish are not neglected or lacking in basic spiritual care.

It also has manuals to guide lay persons on how to prepare for a visit to an elderly person with prayers. The manuals provide practical information on how to pray and use the Bible when visiting a Christian sick person, to listen more than talk, and to be able to work with family members of the

*In this final article in our 'Dignity of the Elderly' series, we look at the mission of the Church and what it means in the context of the elderly in our community.*

elderly or the sick to observe their needs and the needs of caregivers.

We need to realise that the mission of supporting each other extends beyond our immediate circle and their families. It extends to our neighbours especially those who are elderly and infirm. We are more than a community of friends; we are a community of believers called to be as Christ to all our neighbours.

Our Small Christian Communities can help parishes make the first step by embracing this ministry. A simple way to begin would be to reach out to elderly neighbours in a team of at least two members by initiating regular, not necessarily frequent, visits.

We need to wake up to the fact that our society is ageing and our families are not doing so well. We need to realise that all the busyness and numerous parish-centred ministries, while good in themselves, are only a part of the whole of our mission.

In a time when Singaporeans are drawn to mission trips aimed at helping the needy overseas, we should not forget those in need right in our midst.



## Medical guild keeps ethics at the forefront

THE Catholic Medical Guild is more than a group of doctors who gather to pray together.

It is a platform to help Catholic medical professionals realise their profession is "not just a job, but a vocation", says its master, Dr Sally Ho.

"This means that we practise ethically, see each patient as a whole person, beyond their disease, minister to and show them love. Some of these things can be lost because of our busy pace of work, so the guild is a reminder of the ideals of our vocation," she explained.

How the guild does this is through weekly Bible sessions, annual retreats and a welcome tea for fresh medical graduates, where doctors discuss issues such as surviving their first year of work and potential ethical dilemmas they might be confronted with.

Dr Ho, a 39-year-old family

physician, said that in her early days as a doctor, it was inspiring to see other guild members full of zeal in caring for their patients. The meetings also raised her awareness of ethical quandaries she could face as a doctor, such as being asked to carry out an abortion.

It prepared her for the time when she would face such situations and strengthened her conviction to stand up for her faith – she would not perform an abortion.

She said: "Being in the guild has kept my spiritual life alive and deepened it."

The guild was set up in 1952 by a group of doctors who wanted to do something for the Church and to share their knowledge of medical matters, said Dr John Lim, a guild member and a semi-retired general practitioner. In the 1960s, it ran a free clinic at

Waterloo Street.

The guild has organised medical missions to countries such as Myanmar and Indonesia to treat needy people there, among other activities.

It also acts as a voice on bio-ethical issues, such as euthanasia, abortions and human-animal combinations for research, by organising talks and writing to the press and government agencies on such issues. In March, it will hold a sexuality education forum for parents and educators.

With about 100 members, who are mostly doctors plus a few dentists and pharmacists, Dr Ho said the guild is exploring how to provide free medical services for people in need, such as migrant workers.

It is looking for volunteer doctors or non-medical professionals who can help out in logistics and operations to run such services.

### Who's who in the Catholic Medical Guild

Master:  
Dr Sally Ho

Deputy Masters:  
Dr Gabriel Seow & Dr Colin Ong

Honorary Secretary:  
Dr Benedict Lam Meng Chon

Honorary Treasurer:  
Dr Daniel Chor

Immediate Past Master:  
Dr John Hui

Chaplain:  
Fr Colin Tan, SJ

To contact the guild, email [contactus@cmg.org.sg](mailto:contactus@cmg.org.sg)  
The guild's website is [www.cmg.org.sg](http://www.cmg.org.sg)