



# OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL



**I**N the romantic comedy, *Forget Paris* (1995), Mickey is in a relationship with Ellen, who is contemplating quitting her rocky marriage to marry Mickey.

Late one night, she storms into Mickey's apartment with her luggage, goes straight to the window and asks: "Do you sleep with the window open?"

"Yeah," replied Mickey.

"I don't like it. You will have to stop that."

"OK."

"Do you squeeze the toothpaste at the top or the bottom?"

"Top."

"Don't do that, I hate it. If you ever use my car, make sure the mirror is back where I put it."

"OK, I can do that."

"All right. Do you want to talk about religion, politics, whether you want to have kids?"

"Nah, that crap will work itself out. We are fine with the big issues."

"OK, I'll marry you," said Ellen.

What is more important: agreeing on mundane daily issues or agreeing about your deepest-held convictions?

Mickey and Ellen are a couple of our culture. When it comes to marital life, where one person presses the toothpaste can matter more than how many children one would like to have.

The scene may be from a comedy, but reflects the drama of society today. When it comes to living together in society, deep convictions seem invisible.

Do we really understand the values we hold dear well enough to speak up for what we believe? Do we have a stand?

This new series of articles will address many misconceptions and misunderstandings that Catholics struggle with in dealing with various life issues, including difficult ones many of us might prefer to shrink from.

## Religious values in a secular world

Expressing the Church's ethical views that may be considered controversial in the secular world can make many a Catholic feel uncomfortable. We prefer remaining silent rather than speaking up to explain our opinions based on our Church teachings. Discussions on divorce, birth control, euthanasia, homosexuality and the like, have become new taboos in a society that prides itself in having overcome old mythical taboos.

It seems as if, when it comes to living together in society, ethical opinion and religious values must remain "private" and we prefer to keep our deep convictions to ourselves. This has two implications.

Firstly, Catholics give the impression that we belong to a ghetto, a private club, with strange opinions whose only argument is: "Because the Church says so."

Secondly, it deprives society of being enriched with the Catholic perspective. After all, a truly pluralistic society should consider the opinions of all groups.

At the bottom of this lies a crisis of an understanding of truth. Are we able to realise there is objective truth about ethical views? And if not, why not?

# Let's talk about what really matters

*Today we begin a new series on Values by the Catholic Medical Guild and Caritas Singapore to help Catholics understand ethical issues in order to explain and speak up for the Catholic way.*



## The need for dialogue

Unlike in the past, people today are not convinced merely by tradition or authority. In this era of education and information, people want solid reasonable justifications.

Here is where the traditional Catholic who aligns with the Church on moral issues out of obedience alone – without a firm grasp on why the Church teaches what it does – may feel handicapped to articulate his ethical views. It is made harder in the face of sliding moral consciousness.

The Church has long been criticised for its views on various ethical issues. Yet, we should not be afraid of these criticisms. We must not stand aside, silent and non-critical. We have a mandate from Christ to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

Has our silence contributed to recent events and trends: the financial crisis of 2009; the wave of apathy sweeping across youth; the increase in the pursuit of the trivial, and others? They compel us to understand and share the truths of the real issues at hand.

We must engage in dialogue. It will encourage us to think along different lines, force us to go more deeply into the subject and find better ways of expressing ourselves. However, the desire to come together as brothers and sisters must not lead to a watering down or whittling away of truth. Embracing this challenge with clarity, in humility, with confidence and prudence will help the Church purify itself.

## Re-learn our beliefs and make it personal

We have a responsibility to learn our beliefs anew, in the light of the arguments over various ethical concerns that are raging through society today. Failure to do so will be a great sin of omission on the part of Catholics.

Abortion, euthanasia, contraception, in-vitro fertilisation and homosexuality are not issues only for theologians to debate. These are real issues which when translated to policy, affect our lives in very personal and concrete ways.

## Consider these questions:

- Why is abortion wrong?
- Is it wrong because the Church says so?
- Or would it be wrong simply because the killing of an innocent is wrong?
- Can abortion be wrong because it hurts the mothers who go through abortion?
- Would it still be wrong if it is legalised?

These are difficult questions when emotive sides are taken. They have an impact not only on mothers but also on all of us in respect of our core beliefs as Catholics. The reality of these questions hits home when a friend, wife or daughter comes to us with these questions.

## Bring this dialogue to others

It is futile to shout in the wind. The nature of ethical debates in our pluralistic society is that non-Catholics are not predisposed to scriptural quotes. At the same time, it is important for Catholics to understand alternate views and what they are based on.

The articles in this series will provide both sides of the arguments in the secular world, as well as insights into how the Church's position can be constructively proffered.

In a pluralistic society such as ours, ethical opinions are social issues.

Catholics need to learn how to engage the world in a manner that is constructive towards societal development, along with ethical development of the whole person.

We must not go quietly into the night, while apathy eats away slowly at our moral and social fabric.

## The Values Series in a Nutshell

- **Objective:** This series aims to provide the context and perspectives for Catholics to understand specific social and personal issues in order to be able to engage constructively in dialogue with other Catholics and non-Catholics.
- **Topics:** The series will cover sex, contraception, in-vitro fertilisation, abortion, homosexuality, physician assisted suicide, organ donation and gambling.
- **Framework:** Every fortnight we will have a main article as well as an "In a Nutshell" box that will give:
  - Definitions of terminology used
  - The current landscape (legal, societal prevalence, etc)
  - The secular arguments for and against

The Church's position, with references to Scripture and Church documents, will be highlighted in a separate box.

## Our Church Teachings

- **Be ready to give a reason**  
 "...always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have."  
 (1 Peter 3:15)
- **Do the right thing**  
 "So for one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, it is a sin."  
 (James 4:17)
- **The Church benefits from criticism and persecution**  
 "Indeed, the Church admits that she has greatly profited and still profits from the antagonism of those who oppose or who persecute her."  
 (The Church in the Modern World, 44)
- "...but the greater the number of persecutions which are inflicted upon us, so much the greater the number of other men who become devout believers through the name of Jesus."  
 (cf Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphena*)