



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

One-stop Catholic centre coming up in Toa Payoh

Fundraising drive for \$15-million Agape Village, which will house services of Caritas Singapore member organisations, will kick off this Advent

SINGAPORE'S Catholic community is going to have its own "kampung".

Agape Village, commissioned by Archbishop Nicholas Chia as a Catholic village to serve the poor, is a project by Caritas Singapore, the social mission arm of the archdiocese.

A key consideration in setting up the facility, scheduled to be completed by the end of 2014, was "how to bring back the kampung spirit in Singapore and how Agape Village could be a platform to mobilise Catholics and others of good will to act out our concern for the poor and marginalised," said Ms Janet Ang, chairperson of the volunteer committee spearheading the project.

The centre will take shape on a 3,000 sqm plot at Lorong 8, Toa Payoh, which became available to the Catholic Church in Singapore as a result of the government's urban development plans.

Agape (pronounced ah-gah-peh) denotes unconditional love as revealed in Jesus Christ and that underlies the vision for the project. Ms Ang, the managing director of IBM Singapore, said: "Our faith is that this 3,000 sqm plot can be ... the five loaves and two fishes that enables God's grace to multiply in support of the poor and marginalised."

The centre will bring together the services provided by 23 member organisations of Caritas Singapore, whose wide range of work includes helping the poor, children from troubled homes, prisoners, migrant workers, the dying and the physically and intellectually disabled.

As a one-stop help centre, it will provide an integrated and holistic approach to helping potential beneficiaries, who could drop by or be referred by parishes or welfare organisations.

Agape Village will also provide training, assistance, counselling and identify areas of need, and work with other



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organisations and partners to achieve these aims.

Citing the Study of the Poor, a report by Caritas Singapore which highlighted the need for a more integrated approach to helping the less fortunate, Ms Ang provided examples of inter-connected problems that can be better addressed.

For instance, when an offender goes to prison, his wife, children and ageing parents would be without a breadwinner and may be in need of counselling and support. In a different situation, family members might not be able to spend time with a dying relative because there is no one to take care of their young child. Agape Village could help families facing such layered problems to receive the support they need, by directing parents in the second example to suitable childcare providers.

Some ideas being considered include having a respite centre for caregivers, a cafe, shops and social enterprises that provide opportunities for the disadvantaged.

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– Ms Janet Ang, who chairs the committee spearheading the Agape Village project.

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Agape Village will also welcome volunteers willing to share their expertise, interest and time. Caritas Singapore has diverse volunteer opportunities, ranging from help with developing a homework supervision programme for

children of poor families, to reaching out to youths via online counselling, and researching and conducting household surveys to collect accurate data on poverty in Singapore.

One of the upcoming challenges is raising funds for Agape Village. The building and initial operating costs are estimated to be about \$15 million, said Ms Ang. In line with the kampung spirit of cooperation, she hopes that Catholics and others will help build the Village, "whether with \$2 a week or a \$2 million

cheque".

Reflecting on the experience of heading such a large project, she said: "Every corner I turned, God seemed to be telling me, 'You can't be an armchair missionary and simply have compassion for the poor sitting at home.' I felt a calling – usually this feeling is accompanied by a feeling of discomfort, precisely because it is not easy. If God wants us to do something, He will open all sorts of avenues, bringing people to help with the task."

Ms Ang added that she has seldom received no for an answer when she asked people to join in the Agape Village project. She hopes that being an "All Catholics hand-on-deck-to-serve-the-poor" initiative, the project will have the support of everyone when the Agape Village Fundraising drive is launched in all parishes this Advent.

For more information on Agape Village or Caritas Singapore, please e-mail raymond@caritas-singapore.org or visit www.caritas-singapore.org.