CSCC Catholic Social & Community Council

OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL & COMMUNITY COUNCIL

There is no such thing as an unimportant person

In the previous issue of Catholic News, we focused on the heart of the Church's Social Teachings – the dignity of the human person. Today we take a closer look at what this means for our relations with others.

RECENTLY The Straits Times ran a story of a poor couple living in China's Hainan province where boys are still valued more than girls. Over the years this couple took in and saved 14 baby girls abandoned by their parents, even at great cost to themselves. The love they showered on their adopted daughters was clear to see in the reports and pictures.

This story shows us the stark contrast between how society sometimes treats human beings and how the actions of individuals can make a difference. In a world where people are often reduced to mere digits, commodities or faceless enemies, the Church reminds us that each human being is created in God's own image and is of infinite dignity. This has important implications for us as Catholics.

The human person is subject and not object

Think about how our workplace, schools, hospitals, factories, businesses or parishes are organised. Can we say that the well-being of each and every human person is the focus? The Church teaches us clearly that a person should never be used as a means to an end. Rather, our ultimate goal must be caring for each person's well-being. This is not only in terms of material needs but also emotional, social and spiritual growth - that is, the development of the whole person.

Each person is unique and unrepeatable

Sometimes, without a thought, we change maids, fire employees or stare right through a hawker assistant. Society often treats human beings as dispensable and replaceable. To God, each person is unique, irreplaceable and infinitely precious! "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his life?" (Matthew 16:26) This scripture text tells us, among other things, that in God's eyes, a single human life is more precious than the whole world.

We are all of equal dignity

Since all of us are created in God's image, we all have equal dignity. No person or group is worth more than others since God values each person infinitely. Can we see - through skin color, cultural differences and religious diversity - the image of God in another person?

The human person matters most in all we do

Everything we do in society must be directed towards the good of the human person. The term "human rights" evokes a wide range of reactions but it simply means treating the person as a human being, honouring the infinite dignity that God sees in each person.

You can make a difference today. For a start, ask yourself:

In my work, do I focus on performance and profit to the extent of neglecting the good of people in my family, school, workplace, clients, competitors or the environment?

Do I treat every person as equal in dignity to me, having the same human needs?

Making a difference

By Kwek Mean Luck
Chairman
CSCC Grants & Capacity-Building Committee

WHEN I was asked to serve as Chairman of the CSCC Grants and Capacity Building Committee, I thought it would be easier than fundraising and having to ask for donations. Surely, giving would be much easier than receiving?

But that has not been the case.

Part of setting up CSCC has meant putting in place systems to manage money well - money that comes from donors who worked hard for the money, who sacrificed to give, and who like us in CSCC, want to get the most benefit from every dollar.

Together with the heightened awareness today of accountability and new charity regulations, the process of giving grants has to be especially rigorous.

The reality is that there is not enough money to meet all requests. Priorities must be set and hard decisions made. Sometimes we have to give out less than was requested.

CSCC also wants to help build up the capabilities of our member organisations, so that they can better meet community needs. This means identifying new needs and programmes, and this in turn creates even more pressure on the use of limited funds.

We will do all we can to make sure CSCC uses donations well and channels them to those in need.

Any more that you can give will help us do more. From speaking to those actively serving the community, I realise that there are many more needs than we can provide for.

Some days, what we can do appears to be no more than a drop in the ocean.

But I am heartened by the story of the old man who was ridiculed by a young man for tossing a beached starfish back into the ocean.

"There are so many starfish on the beach, you cannot possibly make a difference," the young man scoffed.

Gazing towards the starfish he had just thrown back into the water, the old man replied: "Yes, but it makes a difference to that one."

SOUP KITCHEN ANGELS: Volunteers cook, pack and deliver nutritious food to newly-arrived construction workers who do not have enough money for proper meals.

A friend to foreign workers

SHE is a 29-year-old Filipina, married with a four-year-old daughter. Lina (not her real name) came to Singapore expecting to work as a maid, but her employer made her serve drinks and sing songs in a pub.

She put up with her unhappy situation for over a month. "I was sad and scared. I didn't want to work in a pub. Once, a customer suddenly kissed my neck and I slapped him. Then I got scolded by my boss."

She turned to her agent, who took her to the Manpower Ministry and she was referred to the Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI) while her case was investigated. Lina has spent the past year at a shelter for abused women run by the Good Shepherd Sisters.

People like Lina are a reason why ACMI was started in 1998. The thousands of foreigners in Singapore include men and women working as maids and construction workers, as well as those who are students or married to Singaporeans.

Sometimes, they need a friend. That means being there for them in times of crisis and providing all kinds of support, said ACMI chairperson Elizabeth Tan, one of four full-time staff.

Volunteers provide emotional support, befriending migrant workers facing loneliness, homesickness, or abuse, and visiting those warded in hospital.

Practical support is given by linking foreign workers to the relevant agencies and authorities when they have specific issues, including those which are work-related or require legal assistance.

ACMI's training centre helps maids learn new skills and about 400 women spend their days off learning English, computer skills, sewing, baking and hairdressing in classes run by volunteers.

ACMI also runs a soup kitchen which provides decent meals to recently-arrived construction workers who are short of money. Three times a week, volunteers cook, pack and deliver about 300 lunches to worksites, giving the men a meal of rice, meat and vegetables.

Mrs Tan said: "Many construction workers are in debt just to come to Singapore to work. Many survive initially on just rice with some curry gravy drenched on it. We deliver meals to boost their nutrition."

ACMI helps people from several countries, including India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. They are referred by hospitals, the Manpower Ministry, family service centres and other agencies, or hear about ACMI from their friends.

Although she had an unhappy start to her life in Singapore, Lina found care and friendship at her time of need. "I feel I'm important to people at ACMI and the Good Shepherd Centre," she said.

This is the first in a series to highlight the work done by CSCC's member organisations.

ARCHDIOCESAN COMMISSION FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS & ITINERANT PEOPLE

About ACMI
This group provides support to migrant workers, foreign students and spouses. It runs a training centre and a soup kitchen with help from about 100 volunteers.

Can you help?
ACMI needs volunteers to run classes in cooking, care-giving, English language, hair-dressing and computer skills. It also needs volunteer drivers, IT support for its training centre and volunteers who can speak Bahasa Indonesia or Tamil to act as translators.

Where to go
Find out more at www.migrants.org.sg or call ACMI at 6280-5424