



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL & COMMUNITY COUNCIL

We're all part of God's peace-keeping force

THE sight of United Nations peace-keeping forces has become quite familiar. We see them in the media whenever there is news about war-torn countries. Made up of soldiers from various nations, the peacekeepers help to make the host country more secure.

In a world wracked by conflict today, whose job is it to keep the peace? To answer this question we first need to understand what peace really means.

In Scripture, peace is not just the absence of war. It is much more than that. The original Hebrew word for peace in Scripture – “Shalom” – connotes completeness and that all is well. Peace in Catholic social teaching means life to the fullest, which includes right relationships with God, self and others.

The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World) describes peace as “the fruit of that right ordering of things with which the divine founder has invested human society and which must be actualised by man thirsting after an ever more perfect reign of

justice”. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 78).

This “right ordering of things” is what we need to seek. What does a “right ordering of things” look like? Catholic social teaching gives us a good idea: respect for the dignity of every human being, solidarity among all peoples, striving for the common good, upholding the universal destination of goods, caring for creation and so on. The promotion of peace is therefore a very apt principle with which to conclude this series on the Church’s social teaching.

So whose job is it to keep the peace? It is everyone’s job. We are all members of God’s peace-keeping force!

Peace is something we must each seek pro-actively. For example, do we address situations of injustice or simply go along with what others do (or not do), even if it affects the dignity of certain people? Do we share our resources and help meet the needs of others in the community, especially the most vulnerable? Do we enable others to actively participate in the development of society?

In this concluding article on the Church’s social teachings, we focus today on the Principle of the Promotion of Peace

Pursuing peace and striving for the “right order of things” is the responsibility of every Christian once we are baptised into the life and mission of Christ. It is what Scripture refers to when it speaks of the reign of God’s Kingdom, which we all have a duty to help bring about. Promoting peace is therefore not an optional extra.

Sometimes we feel the tendency of not speaking up or standing up for something we believe in for fear of rocking the boat. We avoid confronting an issue so as to “keep the peace”.

But keeping the peace is not about keeping quiet. It is about seeking what makes for a greater fullness of life.

For example, a relationship between two people can

flourish only when they deal honestly, openly and respectfully with each other on the challenges that confront them.

Peace is also not possible without forgiveness and reconciliation. In our zeal to “do good” we sometimes forget this.

Even as we try to perform a service for someone or make a contribution to the community, we fail to promote peace if our actions actually cause disunity and resentment among those we work with.

Getting our point across through violent means is also never the answer. Sadly, in our world today, we see extreme forms of this in the increasing trend of terrorist acts.

The violence that destroys peace is also not merely physical violence. It takes subtle forms that we encounter in daily life too: divisive attitudes in our family or workplace, prejudice in society, abusive treatment and any other violation of the natural order of things.

As Pope John XXIII points out in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), the key to peace is in seeking what is common among us, in looking for similarities rather than differences.

This happens when people meet to “discover better the bonds that unite them together”. At the core, what cuts through our social status, ethnicity or ideological leanings is the common human nature that we all share. And this common nature requires, above all, that it is love and not fear that defines the relationships among us.

As God’s peace-makers, let us reflect on the following:

- How closely does my family, my workplace and my community reflect the “right order of things”?
- How am I called to promote peace in these situations?

ACCT swings into action when disasters strike

THE massive earthquake and tsunami of Dec 26, 2004 remains vivid because that disaster struck so close to home and affected so many.

It shattered communities in Sumatra and in countries across the Indian Ocean, from Malaysia and Thailand to India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and across to East Africa. More than 300,000 people died.

Singaporeans gave generously to help rebuild those broken communities where people lost everything – their homes, their schools, their hospitals and places of worship.

Catholics in Singapore raised \$1,523,775 to help the victims.

Within a fortnight of the tragedy, Father Colin Tan SJ convened a team at the Archbishop’s House on Jan 5, 2005, to shape the Church’s response. The result was the formation of the Archdiocesan Crisis Coordination Team or ACCT.

It spearheaded efforts to help tsunami victims, and later moved on to help those stricken by other disasters.

Then an earthquake struck the island of Java, the Church raised another \$368,060 from parishioners.

ACCT felt it would be more practical to start a general fund to respond more readily to disasters. With Archbishop Nicholas Chia’s approval, a collection for the Disaster Aid Fund was made in July 2006, and raised nearly \$460,000.

Now, three years later, ACCT has again reorganised with a new constitution and committee structure. The new committee,

whose term began on Jan 1, 2008, is chaired by Family Life Society manager Jerry Ow. Four members are from the previous committee, and the rest have been involved with disaster relief work in various capacities.

“We plan to continue the good work that ACCT was founded on,” says Jerry. “We will provide aid in two ways – money and time.”

Since it started, ACCT has funded 22 projects in Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Peru, helping people in the aftermath of earthquakes, cyclones, typhoons and floods.

The assistance came in the form of new ambulances and healthcare facilities, help for widows to start earning a living, care for orphans, the restoration of wrecked hospitals, schools and churches, as well as cash aid for victims to get their lives back to normal.

ACCT wanted Catholics in Singapore to come forward as volunteers to help too.

So it teamed up with the international agency Habitat for Humanity to build houses for disaster victims. About 200 Catholic volunteers have since gone on 11 mission trips to disaster-hit areas in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India.

The house-building missions benefited not just the displaced natives but also the Singapore volunteers, who underwent formation sessions before embarking on their trips.

“The development and bonding of the volunteers is evident in how they continue to meet and continue charity work after they come back,” Jerry said.



ACCT chairman Jerry Ow (back row centre) with his house-building teammates and local residents in Indonesia’s tsunami-hit Aceh province.



Archdiocesan Crisis Coordination Team

About ACCT

The Archdiocesan Crisis Coordination Team seeks to ensure a coordinated response by the Catholic Church of Singapore to provide aid for disasters and crisis.

Can You Help?

ACCT welcomes contributions to the Disaster Aid Fund and volunteers for its overseas missions to help victims of disasters.

Where to go

Find out more at www.acct-sg.org or call Jerry Ow at 6488-0278.

ACCT Committee

Spiritual Director: Monsignor Eugene Vaz
Chairman: Jerry Ow
Deputy Chairman: Vivienne Lim
Treasurer: Angela Goh-Lim
Secretary: Cyril Lim

Members

Willie Cheng Dr John Lee
 Christopher Chua Mark Foo
 Dr Sally Ho Darren Soo