



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL & COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Why charity and justice must go together

QUESTION: If we donate generously to charity but do nothing to address the systems that prevent the disadvantaged from rising up in society, have we practised Christian love? And does it matter whether we give money to the poor out of the kindness of our heart, or because we believe that it is their due?

Yes it does matter, for the Church draws a distinction between the two virtues of charity and justice, and says that one must not be mistaken for the other.

Charity commonly refers to works of mercy to relieve human need of every kind. Justice, on the other hand, is to render to one's neighbour his or her due, addressing the root causes of problems and resolving unfairness and inequalities.

In the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People issued by the Second Vatican Council, the Church highlighted the

difference between the two. It says: "It is imperative that the freedom and dignity of the person being helped be respected with the utmost consideration; that the purity of one's charitable intentions be not stained by seeking one's own advantage or by striving for domination; and especially that the demands of justice be satisfied. That which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity." (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8)

Here, the Church clues us in on why the distinction between charity and justice matters. The explanation hinges on respect for each person's freedom and dignity.

Central to the Church's social teaching is the belief that every person is made in the image of God. Thus, what is due to each person - without exception - includes the means necessary to live his or her life with dignity.

Hence are we giving people what should have been due to

them in the first place according to their human dignity? That is the benchmark against which we assess the justness of our own actions and those of our society.

Every day we are faced with this choice.

For example, as consumers, we love a good bargain but do we consider whether the lower price of a product or service has resulted from compromising on some workers' safety or well-being?

Or perhaps the workers might have been underpaid? You might say these workers entered a contract with their eyes wide open and technically, no law has been flouted. But is this just?

Justice demands that we ask what has compelled these workers to accept poor working conditions and what has caused this situation. More importantly, have we

contributed to it by what we have done or not done?

The Church's social teachings also remind us that it is unjust to keep consuming and accumulating more than we need, not questioning the means by which we have made our money or whether we have deprived someone else of the earth's resources, even if we occasionally give some of our surplus money to charity.

The Church upholds that what is due to each person must be decided based on both that person's contribution and needs.

A proper understanding of justice will lead us to help see to it that our society is set up so as to ensure that each person receives his or her due, especially those who are most marginalised. Do our current laws, systems and practices contribute to a just end? If not, what can we do to

address this?

This is where the call to work for justice can be unsettling, because it challenges us to question some social norms that we have grown up with and feel attached to.

And the more comfortable we are within the system, the less we will want to change the status quo. We instinctively sense that if the structures are changed, we will have to change along with them and that could well be painful!

We must remember that the Church calls us to practise both charity and justice, which are the hallmarks of a Christian.

Our lives need to show the fruits of both qualities so that the world might indeed become a better place. Only then will we truly be salt of the earth and light of the world.

A place where children can always feel at home

IT STARTED as an orphanage for boys and girls run by the Canossian Sisters. Almost 70 years on, the Canossaville Children's Home remains committed to helping disadvantaged children.

But over the years, the home has evolved, coming up with a programme to help latchkey children and those with special needs.

In 1983, it started the Before and After Student Care Service now called the Student Care Service, in response to the rising number of children returning to an empty home after school because both parents were still at work.

There are now 80 children in this programme. At Canossaville, they have their meals and are supervised while doing their homework.

The centre aims to provide a conducive environment "for children to be formed in the head and heart", executive director Anne Siew says. So time is also set aside for moral education, as well as indoor activities like board games, computer work and reading.

To help children with learning difficulties, its Total Learning

Centre provides individualised attention.

The student care service also helps children with special needs, especially those who are hearing-impaired. It became an Integrated Special Student Care Centre in November 2004.

Canossaville however still holds true to the very aim it was founded on and continues to be a refuge for children.

The children it takes in now are mostly girls. There are now 11 girls aged 12 and below and most are from troubled or single-parent homes. While it provides the girls a place to stay, Canossaville also hopes to help reintegrate them with their families.

"The number of residents we have is very low because we don't want to institutionalise these children. We try our best to help them go back to their families," Madam Siew explained.

Because most of the children the home reaches out to are from dysfunctional families, plenty of emotional and psychological support is needed, she said.

At the end of the day, her hope is that all the children who come to Canossaville will become happy, confident, resilient and creatively other-centred.



Lunchtime for students who attend Canossaville's student care service. The programme has 80 children who are supervised before and after school.

About Canossaville Children's Home

It was founded in 1941 by the Canossian Sisters as an orphanage. It is now open mainly to girls and has 11 residents. It also offers a student care service for latchkey children and has 80 children in this programme.

Can you help?

About 20 volunteers help out on a weekly basis. There are also corporate volunteers who help regularly. The home welcomes more volunteers, especially those who help with the student care service during the day. Canossaville also welcomes donations.

Who to call

Call Executive Director Anne Siew at 6748 5777 or email info@springville.org.sg. You can also go to: www.catholic.org.sg/canossaville

Management Committee of Canossaville Children's Home

Chairman: Sr Elizabeth Tham
Vice Chairman: Mr Yong Kwet Leong
Secretary: Ms Annabelle Leong
Treasurer: Mr Michael Saw Tian Syh

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Mr Stephen Tan
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