



# OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

## Filipina stays 23 years with one employer

*The Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI) together with Caritas Singapore launched the Dignity in the Home campaign in July this year to help Catholics become better employers of foreign maids.*

**A**T THE heart of the Catholic Social Teachings is the human person, and the Church encourages us to treat each person with dignity and to respect the dignity of work.

These key principles on the Dignity of the Human Person and the Dignity of Work can, and should be applied every day in our interactions with our maids.

Each of us is created in God's image and hence we should treat every human person with dignity regardless of race or religion, stature or designation.

And the Church teaches that all work, even the humblest, has intrinsic dignity by virtue of it being done by a human being. Jesus Christ showed us how to live with dignity and respect the dignity of others. By His example, we should respect the dignity of every individual and love as Christ taught us.

The five pillars drawn up by ACMI help us achieve Dignity in the Home.

There are many exemplary employers who have succeeded in bringing dignity in their homes. They embody Christian love and their maids often stay with them for many years.

Nancy Chin, who is married without children, is one such example. Her maid, Liberty Clemente, has worked with her for the past 23 years!

"The most important thing is empathy," says Nancy, explaining how her maid stayed so long. "When you put yourself in their shoes, you start to realise how hard it must be for them, to be in a foreign land, to leave their loved ones, to work with unfamiliar things like a microwave or washing machines. When you understand the challenges they face, you can't help but be more patient and kind."

In this way, Nancy epitomises what Christ taught us: "In everything do to others as you would have them do unto you." (Matthew 7:12)

Nancy advocates communication and respect as the cornerstones for building stronger relationships with our maids. When Liberty first came to Singapore, there were some communication challenges even though she was a Filipina and spoke English.



A long-term relationship: Nancy Chin's maid Liberty Clemente (right) has her own room, shares meals with the family and gets a day off every week. That's doing the right thing, says Nancy. It may also explain why Liberty has stayed for so long.

To help, Nancy bought Liberty an English dictionary, made sure that she wrote a daily and weekly to-do lists and explained her expectations clearly.

"Mistakes will naturally be made," says Nancy. "We ourselves make mistakes all the time, so how can we expect our maids to do things perfectly after being told once? Scolding, shouting and screaming at your maid won't solve anything; instead it often has the opposite effect of either creating resentment or making your maid so scared that her mind goes blank, and the 'lesson' for the 'mistake' made is forgotten."

Two-way open communication is critical. Nancy recalls how she once confronted Liberty about her rudeness, only to realise later that Liberty was completely oblivious to the fact that her actions came across as insolent behaviour.

Liberty's friends often comment that she is lucky to have such a generous employer, because she has her own room, she eats with the family and gets a day off every week. Nancy does not see any of this as special, saying these are basic things she would have hoped her employer would do if she were in Liberty's position.

Still, Nancy is one of the special people making an effort to "go the extra mile" to care for the growth and development of her maid. She encouraged Liberty to take up courses to develop her skills, even went with her for computer training.

Over the years, their relationship has deepened significantly.

Nancy talks to Liberty regularly, sharing their lives together as one family. But all this did not happen overnight, it was built over time, through conscious efforts to care and share, and through living Christ's example to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

### DIGNITY HANDBOOK

## 'Now we give our maid a day off'

The handbook, A Guide for Catholic Employers of Foreign Domestic Helpers, was launched in September 2008. It provides employers with practical points anchored on the Church's social teachings so that they may reflect on how to make a difference in their maids' lives. Here is what some Catholics thought of the handbook.

"The handbook has had a positive impact on my family. We changed our mindset about giving a day off for our helper after reading the booklet. Our apprehensions haven't disappeared overnight, but the handbook has helped to cement our beliefs and catalyse us to do the right thing."

~ Lionel Chng, parishioner, Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

"The Dignity in the Home handbook provides food for thought and presents a balanced view on the rights of maids."

~ Joseph Silverayan, parishioner, Church of St Teresa

"The series of articles in the Catholic News on Dignity In The Home have challenged people's thinking and, I trust, have also guided some families towards a more Christian attitude regarding their maid. I hope that parishioners will re-read the handbook and reflect on how they can make further progress to be better Catholic employers."

~ Father Paul E. Staes, vicar

"The handbook was very good because it has a lot of useful information. I've told all my friends that they should try to get a copy for themselves and also try to give it to their employers to read!"

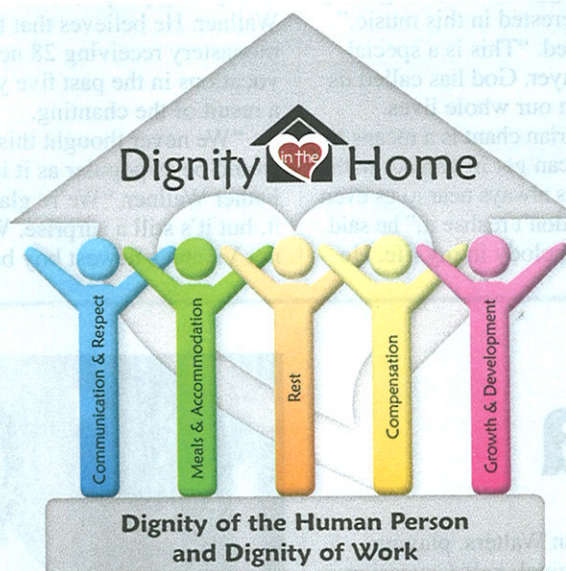
~ Fely Molos, foreign maid

"I was very impressed with the handbook, I felt it was very timely and it captured the key themes that all employers should be aware of. I feel really proud that the Church is taking a stand about Dignity in the Home and what we could do to be better Catholic employers."

~ Rachael Tan, parishioner, Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour

"Like most youths in Singapore today, I grew up with a helper at home. I felt the handbook brought to light the difficulties that maids face. It serves as a good reminder for youths like myself to show our helpers more appreciation and respect for all their hard work."

~ James Chia, parishioner, Church of Our Lady Queen of Peace



## 5 pillars of Dignity in the Home

### 1 Communication & Respect

Respect begets respect, and communication is often the first step towards establishing this. We need to respect differing cultures, work ethics and values. How can we do this? By having open two-way communication.

### 2 Meals & Accommodation

Having sufficient food and adequate accommodation are a basic part of decent working conditions. We should be fair when dealing with our maids, and ensure that their basic needs are met.

### 3 Rest

The Ministry of Manpower guidelines recommend rest days for maids. As workers ourselves, many of us would not be able to survive the work week without the weekend. We should therefore not expect our maids to be on call 24/7.

### 4 Fair Wages & Compensation

Getting paid fairly and on time is an expectation of every Singapore worker. Foreign maids are no different. They are here to do a job, and they need the money. Paying the maid a fair wage and on time is a basic duty of all employers.

### 5 Growth & Development

Whether you employ a first-time maid or an experienced one, she will have to learn new things in order to do her job well. As employers, we can help our maids to learn and be motivated to do a good job.