

WHY SHOULD CATHOLICS HELP THE POOR?



by Fr David Garcia

Because this is the core of the Church's mission.

A society that wants to develop healthily must practice the **principle of solidarity**. This principle tells us that we should take responsibility for each other and stand in solidarity with those who need help the most, especially the poor and disadvantaged.

The Church always shown a special concern for the poor, and in recent documents she refers to this concern as a “**preferential option for the poor**”.

“The preferential option for the poor should be reaffirmed in all its force.”

(St. John Paul II, Puebla 1979 in Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church #182)

The Church therefore does not consider the concern for the poor an optional act for those who want to go the extra mile. As a matter of fact, Pope St. Gregory the Great warned not to confuse mercy with justice regarding care for the poor: "When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice. ... what is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity" (St. Gregory the Great in Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church #184).



Photo: Mount Alvernia Hospital

St. John Paul II also considered poverty a matter of justice: "Poverty poses a dramatic problem of justice in its various forms and with its various effects, it is characterized by an unequal growth that does not recognize the 'equal right of all people to take their seat at the table for the common banquet'." (Solicitudo Rei Socialis, #33)

God is love. It is in the nature of love to prefer **those who need love most**. If a mother has five children and one of them is often sick and in need of care, to which of her children is she going to care first and foremost? Obviously, the one who needs care most.

Jesus showed his preference for the poor, the sick and the sinners. And so should the Church of Jesus.

The preferential option of the Church for the poor is not optional, and not only a matter of social justice. It is a sign of her reflection of the love of God.

And this is why, as Catholics, we should help the poor. It is our **identity** as Catholics.



CHARITIES WEEK 2019

16 March to
26 May 2019



De La Salle,
Br Collin Wee,
cutting the hair of a
resident at HopeHouse.

This LENT, let us give with LOVE

Your donation will help Caritas continue our work for the poor and vulnerable in our community.

Pick up a Charities Week 2019 appeal envelope from your parish. Caritas Singapore does not do house-to-house or street collections. Please **DO NOT MAIL CASH**.

DEDICATED TO EMPOWERING LIVES

Catholic Welfare Services (CWS) journeys with people with no or low-income to live life to their best potential. They are a team of professional social work practitioners dedicated in their calling and ever mindful of upholding the dignity of the human person.

Tang Chow Kheng is one of them.

Mdm Lim* sat across the table from Chow Kheng. She looked older than the number reflected on her form. Life has been tough as a single mother of three children and caregiver for an elderly mother. And yet, there was something in her eye. Chow Kheng smiled, delighted that Mdm Lim is motivated to change her circumstances.

Like other professionals in the sector, Chow Kheng is not a bleeding heart. She is **pragmatic, well organised, and a wealth of information** on where to go for help. There is also something special about Chow Kheng; her motherly nature flows into her work. It's tough love.

Like other social work practitioners, Chow Kheng is not judgmental. She believes in and respects the value and dignity of all people. Her client-centered and strengths-based approaches, as well as her capacity to demonstrate empathy and warmth, helps her to build trust and rapport with clients – an important element in determining their readiness and willingness to change, and helping them to identify and tap on their strengths.

“*What do you want to do next?
– How do you want to improve
your life?*”

For clients with multiple issues, Chow Kheng adopts a **multi-disciplinary approach** to provide integrated support. In the case of Mdm Lim and her family, which called for more than just financial support, Chow Kheng collaborated with a Family Service Centre (FSC) to provide counselling to Mdm Lim as well as an agency that could provide free tuition for her school-going children.

Chow Kheng knew she had to give Mdm Lim the tools to make change. “I think the client has the solution; but sometimes, they just don't know how to go about it.”

Sometimes, a little encouragement helps clients see that there's hope – a hope for a better tomorrow. When this is realised, they are more confident and positive. And that raises their resilience.



Chow Kheng's curious nature helps with her work. She said, “If they [the clients] are motivated, they will share more. From there, I will be able to assess how ready he [the client] is for the next level [of] helping themselves.”

The journey can be long

Some clients, however, have deep-seated issues that stem from a **fear of not having control**. Take for example, Mr De Cruz* who is in a smoking cessation programme. He knows that smoking is bad and he wants to stop, but yet, he is worried that he will not be able to manage his stressors without it. He's in a dilemma.

There is also the **fear of failure**. “I tried it before and it did not work for me”; this and other nay saying mantras bounce around in his head, building a deep resistance to change.

To manage this resistance, Chow Kheng would help clients **challenge their blind spots**. “That means I will say, ‘You want to smoke to destress. But you also want to improve your health because of your son’. So I bring up questions to allow him to think. When he's able to see the impact on his life and on those he loves, he will make a decision. At his time, not mine.”

Chow Kheng remains patient throughout. “My efforts are not wasted... we do our best.”

Chow Kheng advises young people interested to join the social service sector, “I was helped before ... and so, I want to help too. Have internal strength and a lot of patience to pace with the client. Be a very good *kaypoh* so you can learn where help is available.”

www.catholicwelfare.org.sg

**not their real names*

OUR MEMBER ORGANISATIONS



FAMILIES, YOUTH & CHILDREN

POOR, SICK & THE ELDERLY

RE-WRITING THE STORY

“What’s the name of the lady who cleans this building?”

This college exam question stupefied Walt Bettinger. Despite seeing her at his school campus, he had never taken the time to ask her name. Unable to answer, Bettinger failed the exam and got a B in the class. The Chief Executive of Charles Schwab Corporation has since made it a point to know every cleaner he has worked with.¹

What about you? We interact with low-wage workers such as cleaners and security guards on a regular basis, and rely on them to keep our public spaces clean, safe and well-maintained. Have you held a conversation with them? Do you know their names?

Some do, and sadly, some don’t. Even worse; some treat low-wage workers as invisible people.

The question, then, is: Why? And is our treatment towards them acceptable?

“I know I’m invisible. I have to get used to this, and learn to stop caring.”

– McDonald’s cleaner²



Illustration by Corinne Sim for Caritas Singapore

“If you work this kind of job, people don’t look up to you. They see that you are illiterate and uneducated, they don’t really see much value in engaging with you.”

– *Madam Lim, 59-year-old, Washroom attendant³

Myth of the ‘Lazy’ Poor

Such attitudes stem from ignorant stereotyped beliefs about the poor. “Lazy” and “unmotivated” are commonly used to describe them. Perhaps the most damaging of all is that they are poor because of ‘bad choices’. In other words, if you fail to climb up the income ladder, it’s because of your own failure to take advantage of self-improvement opportunities. Thus, you “deserve” your low social and economic position.

However, research has empirically debunked these stereotypes. A 2018 study conducted by Dr Teo You Yenn, Associate Professor and Head of Sociology at Nanyang Technology University, found that low-income families’ decisions are made with their child’s best interests in mind.⁴

Compared to parents with higher income, low-income parents also often made more intense sacrifices of comfort and wellbeing to meet their children’s needs first.⁵

Moreover, for many low-income families, it is bad options, not bad choices, that perpetuate their poor conditions.

Take for example, a single mother who has to juggle between work and caregiving responsibilities. If her child is medically unwell and is given one week of rest from school, she has two options: stay home and care for her child, or go back to work to keep the income coming. Coupled with limited resources, there will be negative outcomes for her family whichever way she chooses.

Capacity for Change

Low-income families are able to improve their circumstances when equipped with resources. Beyond Social Services’ one-year initiative in connecting low-income neighbourhoods to resources and relationships resulted in positive impact on families’ personal empowerment, support network, their sense of community, and mutual trust among neighbours.⁶

Thus, let us cast off the rusty chains of seeing the poor as a lot of lazy, unmotivated, and bad decision-makers. The poor are and can be people with strengths, capacities and assets. And they deserve every bit of respect.

¹Rittenhouse, Laura. (2018, June 2). Walt Bettinger of Charles Schwab: You’ve Got to Open Up to Move Up. *Forbes*. Retrieved from www.forbes.com/sites/laurarittenhouse/2018/06/02/how-a-cleaning-lady-inspired-awesome-leadership/#54d8db8d39d9

²Wong, Pei Ting. (2018, November 9). The Big Read: The ‘invisible’ people in a class-conscious society. *Today*. Retrieved from www.todayonline.com/big-read/big-read-invisible-people-class-conscious-society

³Low, Minmin, & Paulo, Derrick A. (2018, October 1). Class – not race nor religion – is potentially Singapore’s most divisive fault line. *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from www.channelnewsasia.com/news/cnainsider/regardless-class-race-religion-survey-singapore-income-divide-10774682

⁴Teo, You Yenn. (2018). *This is What Inequality Looks Like* (p. 85-6). Singapore: Ethos Book.

⁵Teo, You Yenn. (2018). *This is What Inequality Looks Like* (p. 85-6). Singapore: Ethos Book.

⁶Ee, Gerard. (2019, January 3). Stop seeing people as problems. They’re assets who build social capital. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from www.straitstimes.com/opinion/stop-seeing-people-as-problems-theyre-assets-who-build-social-capital

WALKING IN TRUTH AND LOVE

MYTHS

1 "Lazy and unmotivated; they just don't want to work."

2 "Just no or little money, right?"

3 "Well, they made bad choices."

4 "It is cheap to be poor."

5 "Not my problem – I will never be poor."

FACTS

1 Some parents work long hours without adequate rest. They forgo their own comfort and wellbeing to meet their children's needs.¹

2 They face multi-stressors such as chronic physical and mental health issues, child behavioural problems, and poor family relations.⁸

3 Success is not always within your control. With limited resources, and without good options, some quit school early to work to support their family financially.⁹

4 Nope. They incur financial penalties when bills are unpaid or late. They also miss out on savings from bulk buying, cashback and shopping discounts.¹⁰

5 A sudden 'shock' such as severe illness, disability, death in the family, or unemployment could easily push a family in a parlous state into poverty.¹¹



PUT LOVE INTO ACTION

We can all play a part in making our society more compassionate and loving towards the poor.
Here is a handy checklist to help you start.

☐ **Greet them with a smile** and simple greeting, like "Hello" or "Good morning". Remember to thank people for their efforts so they know they are appreciated.

☐ **Do not judge** as we will not be able to fully understand their challenges. Their situation may actually be a result of a combination of unfortunate events and bad options.

☐ **Offer to help** if you see them struggling, and only if the person communicates that he or she needs help. We all want to be treated as independent people.

☐ **Share your blessings** with the Caritas Singapore family. If you have cash to spare, make a donation to Charities Week 2019. Or you could volunteer your time or skills with us.

Did you tick any of the boxes? Share your thoughts with us.

Write to arc@caritas-singapore.org. Your story may be featured on our social media platform!

Social Assistance

Catholic Welfare Services

T 6337 7954 W catholicwelfare.org.sg

Society of St Vincent de Paul

T 6801 7480 W ssvpsingapore.org

Montfort Care's **Kreta Ayer Family Services, Marine Parade Family Service Centre** and **@27 Family Service Centre**

W monfortcare.org.sg

Social Service Offices

T 1800 222 0000

W msf.gov.sg/dfcs/sso/default.aspx

Ministry of Social and Family Development's (MSF) **ComCare Long-Term Assistance, Short-to-Medium-Term Assistance, and Urgent Financial Assistance schemes**

T 1800 222 0000

W msf.gov.sg/Comcare

Kindergarten, Child Care, Student Care

Morning Star Community Services' **CareNights** programme

T 6285 1377 W morningstar.org.sg/carenights-morning-star

Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) offers

Child Care / Infant Care Subsidy

T 6735 9213

W ecda.gov.sg/Operators/Pages/OperatorSubsidies.aspx

Ministry of Social and Family Development's (MSF) **ComCare Child Care Subsidies, ComCare Kindergarten Subsidies, and ComCare Student Care Subsidies**

T 1800 222 0000

W msf.gov.sg/Comcare

Housing

Housing and Development Board's (HDB) **Public Rental Scheme and Fresh Start Housing Scheme**

T 1800 225 5432 W hdb.gov.sg

Healthcare

Ministry of Health's (MOH) **Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS)**

T 1800 275 2427 W chas.sg

Mount Alvernia Hospital's **Outreach Medical Clinic and Outreach Dental Clinic**

T 6262 4312 (Medical) / 6262 4313 (Dental)

W mtalvernia.sg/about-us/community-outreach

Legal Aid

Catholic Lawyers Guild's **Pro Bono Legal Clinic**

T 6801 7494

W clgsingapore.com

Employment

Ministry of Manpower's (MOM) **Workfare Income Supplement Scheme and Workfare Training Support Scheme**

T 1800 536 8333 W workfare.gov.sg

Education

Ministry of Education's (MOE) **Financial Assistance Scheme and Independent School Bursary Scheme**

T 6872 2220 W moe.gov.sg/education/financial-assistance

RESOURCES FOR LOW OR NO-INCOME INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES



Scan this QR Code for more information on the assistance available.

⁷ Teo, You Yenn. (2018). *This is What Inequality Looks Like* (p. 86). Singapore: Ethos Book.

⁸ Ng, Irene Y. H. (2013). Multistressed Low-Earning Families in Contemporary Policy Context: Lessons from Work Support Recipients in Singapore. *Journal of Poverty*, 17(1), 86-109. DOI: 10.1080/10875549.2012.747998. Wong, Pei Ting. (2017, October 19). Sunday Spotlight: More complex than meets the eye, Singapore's homeless struggle to find support. *Today*. Retrieved from www.todayonline.com/singapore/sunday-spotlight-more-complex-meets-eye-singapores-homeless-struggle-find-support

⁹ Teo, You Yenn. (2016, March 10). Why low-income parents may make 'poor choices'. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from www.straitstimes.com/opinion/why-low-income-parents-may-make-poor-choices

¹⁰ Paulo, Derrick A. & Alshahab, Sharifah Fadhilah. (2018, November 25). How poverty tends to trap people into making poor decisions. *Channel NewsAsia*. Retrieved from www.channelnewsasia.com/news/cnainsider/poverty-tends-trap-people-poor-decisions-singapore-class-divide-10965206

¹¹ Fujii, Tomoki. (2016). Concepts and measurement of vulnerability to poverty and other issues: A review of literature. *The Asian "poverty miracle": Impressive accomplishments or incomplete achievements?*, pp. 53-83. Research Collection School Of Economics. Retrieved from https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/soe_research/1939t

EVENTS

16 – 26
MAR – MAY

Charities Week Appeal in all Parishes

This annual fundraising campaign during the Lenten season across all parishes is in support of the work of the charities under Caritas Singapore's umbrella.

To donate:

- 📍 Drop the envelope at a parish offertory box / Mail the envelope to our office
- ✉️ caritas-singapore.org/donate

26 – 07
APR – JUN

Personal Moral Compass 2018 – Christian Morality (Module 3)

This module explores the role Christianity plays in the area of Morality. This includes: What is Christian Ethics; how we are saved in hope; how this helps us to love in the Christian way etc.

Rev Fr David Garcia, OP will cover the following topics:

1. Ethics and Religion
2. Christian Ethics
3. God's Graceful Moves
4. The Faith that Saves
5. Saved in Hope
6. Loving, the Christian Way
7. A Christian Version of Happiness

🕒 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm

📍 Catholic Centre, Level 3 (55 Waterloo Street, Singapore 187954)

(Every Fri)

To register

☎️ 6338 3448

✉️ formation@caritas-singapore.org **Cost** \$70

APR – MAY

Agape Experience (Church of Divine Mercy, St. Anne's Church and Church of the Holy Trinity)

A programme specially crafted for Youths who will soon receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. Through prayer, experiential learning and engaging activities, the Youths will learn about our Catholic Social Teaching and its connection with the Sacrament and our Catholic social mission.

6 Apr Church of St Anthony, Church of the Holy Family

27 Apr St Joseph's Church, Bukit Timah

4 May Church of the Holy Cross, Church of St Michael

11 May Church of St Vincent de Paul

18 May Church of St Mary of the Angels, Church of St Francis of Assisi



To register

☎️ 9144 4933

📍 Agape Village, 7A Lorong 8 Toa Payoh S319264

✉️ eve@caritas-singapore.org

10
MAY

Public Talks @ Agape Village

In You, Death Has Lost its Sting – Preparing for Death (in Mandarin)

Edward Lim, OCD, will share on the Christian understanding of death, and the various spiritual aids available to the Christian to prepare for death. Ms Liao Kehua, Registered Nurse (Gerontology Nursing and Palliative Care Nursing), will explain the need of Advance Care Planning.

🕒 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm

📍 Agape Village, Multi-Purpose Hall

To register

☎️ 6801 7400

✉️ agapevillage@caritas-singapore.org



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