



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

5 loaves, 2 fish and 12 baskets of leftovers

A Christian response to food security and sustainability

We have heard it more times than we can count: the story of Jesus and the boy with five barley loaves and two fish. Along the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus gave thanks for the food and handed it out to 5,000 men. When they had all had enough to eat, He said to his disciples: "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled 12 baskets with the scraps.

Have you ever wondered what the disciples did with 12 baskets of scraps? The Bible doesn't say, but we can imagine that they might have saved it for the next day, or given it to the poor, heeding Jesus' command: "Let nothing be wasted."

In this glorious miracle, we can see at work two principles of the Catholic Social Teaching. The Principle of the Universal Destination of Goods calls on the Church to ensure that everyone has enough for their basic needs, because God intended His Creation to be enjoyed by everyone. The Principle of the Dignity of Creation states that when God gave man dominion over the Earth and all its creatures, He made us stewards of our environment. So it is our responsibility to treasure the resources of this world wisely and sustainably.

These two principles are closely linked. After all, it is only when we use our resources carefully that we will have enough for everyone.

So what has this got to do with us in Singapore?

First, there are still many in our society who struggle for the basic things in life: food, shelter and dignified employment. In our public campaign, "Singaporeans Against Poverty", Caritas Singapore shared that there are 100,000 families earning on average \$1,500 a month. After accounting for housing, education, medical and other costs, these vulnerable people are left with just \$5 a day to spend on food and transport – barely enough to get by in a city where the cost of living has been steadily rising. You can read more on the campaign at our website - sgagainstpoverty.org and on Facebook at [facebook.com/SingaporeansAgainstPoverty](https://www.facebook.com/SingaporeansAgainstPoverty).

Second, there is more than enough food for everyone in Singapore. We threw away 796,000 tonnes of food in 2013, according to the National Environment Agency, and the figure is growing fast. The Straits Times estimated that this is equivalent to every Singaporean wasting one packet of "economy rice" every day.

The solution seems obvious. Give excess food to the poor and both problems disappear, right? But waste has become institutionalised in the different stages of our consumption cycle, and will need to be tackled holistically.

For example, most of our fruit and vegetables are imported, and the lengthy



There are many in Singapore who struggle for the basic things in life, including food. But there is more than enough food for everyone, and a lot goes to waste – we threw away 796,000 tonnes of food in 2013. We can start to put things right.

transport process not only burns fuel but forces importers to discard spoilt and damaged products. Instead, businesses like ComCrop, Sky Greens and Edible Gardens are finding new ways to grow food in our urban environment, guaranteeing that it will reach consumers faster and fresher.

At the next stage, unhealthy consumption habits are at play. When we shop at the supermarket, we are guilty of choosing the best-looking items, even if they don't taste different. As a result, "ugly" vegetables and fruit stay on the shelf until they rot. NTUC Fairprice hopes to change this by offering more discounts on items that need to be

consumed sooner.

At the end of the food chain, groups like Food from the Heart and Food Bank are setting up distribution networks to channel unsold items and still-fresh leftovers from bakeries, restaurants and even corporate offices, to those who need it most.

Caritas Internationalis has launched a "One Human Family, Food for All" campaign that raises awareness of hunger crises such as the current situation in Sudan. It encourages people to learn more about hunger and ways to solve it, and calls on governments around the world to guarantee a right to food

for all.

In a message supporting the campaign's launch, Pope Francis said: "We are in front of a global scandal of around one billion – one billion – people who still suffer from hunger today. We cannot look the other way and pretend this does not exist."

Are you ready to be a responsible steward of God's blessings? It's time to look at our personal consumption habits, from being picky eaters to ordering more food than we can finish. Join us at [facebook.com/CaritasSingapore](https://www.facebook.com/CaritasSingapore) for more ideas on how we can live out Jesus' mission for humanity.

Urban Farming at Agape Village

At Agape Village, the Catholic Church's integrated social services hub coming up at Lorong 8, Toa Payoh, we hope to make a small contribution to food sustainability with our own 275sqm rooftop urban farm. Therapeutic gardening activities will be part of our holistic-care approach to allow the poor and marginalised, including people with intellectual disabilities, to socialise and do things at their own pace. We welcome schools, corporations and members of the community to partner us in tending the herbs and vegetable plots.

Stay tuned for updates @ [facebook.com/AgapeVillageCaritasSg](https://www.facebook.com/AgapeVillageCaritasSg)

