



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Go beyond your comfort zone: Share food, share joy

THERE is much to celebrate as Singapore turns 50 but even in this year of joy, we must not forget the people on the peripheries. According to official data for 2014 published by the Department of Statistics, an estimated 107,500 Singaporean families or about 387,000 women, men and children survive on about \$1,775 (including Central Provident Fund) every month. Official figures tell us there are also about 990,000 foreign workers in our midst, including domestic workers and others mostly in construction and service industries.

These are people on the peripheries, but they are not forgotten. Without fanfare, members from the Society of St Vincent de Paul have been sharing food, joy and laughter with about three thousand friends in need, low-income families and individuals. This year, more has been asked of these members, known as Vincentians. In April, they were entrusted with a project for the Archdiocesan SG50JoY Celebrations – to provide food for 50,000! It was a call to lead parishioners and others out of their comfort zone. The Vincentians were a little daunted at first, with some asking: “Fifty thousand? Is that 50,000 people or 50,000 meals?” But they soon swung into action to brainstorm how to meet the challenge, tossing up ideas and more questions:

- How about food packages – can include as meals?
- What about monthly meals for our Friends-in-Need (FINs) at the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Church of St Stephen, Church of St Ignatius, Church of St Mary of the Angels, Church of the Sacred Heart, Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary?
- Can we do more? Hampers or meals for migrant workers – can ask ACMI about their Bread Basket for the dorms?
- How about outreach to rental flats...?
- Who can help? Are you sure we can get young people from our parishes?

As days and weeks went by, plans fell into place as Vincentians mobilised family members, friends and parishioners to open their hearts and join in the efforts, initiating projects which saw Catholics moving out of their comfort zone.



Vincentians from the Church of St Vincent de Paul in Seletar Hills rallied parishioners to go door to door, floor to floor in two rental blocks one weekend, bearing gifts and asking the residents about the help they need.

“Let us go to the poor. We must not only speak but affirm by our actions the vitality of our faith.”

– Blessed Frederic Ozanam, founder of the Society of St Vincent de Paul

Besides regular meals and special celebrations with FINs, Vincentians organised and planned outreach to residents in rental flats, dinners with migrants in parishes, visits to migrant worker dormitories and went online to rally Catholics to pledge to “Share one meal with the poor.” For their Easter Outreach, Vincentians at the Church of St Vincent de Paul rallied parishioners to go door to door, floor to floor at two rental blocks one weekend, bearing gifts and survey forms. They received a warm welcome, with 250 out of 390

occupants approached opening their doors and 125 responding to the survey on their needs and the help they would like. Similarly, Vincentians from the Church of St Francis Xavier visited residents of some 50 rental flats in Serangoon at Easter. Both outreach efforts brought Vincentians closer to their neighbours and encouraged several families in need to seek help.

Over in Tampines, Vincentians have tied up with Willing Hearts who prepare, cook and pack meals for low-income families every day. Together with parishioners and residents, Vincentians deliver the packed meals to occupants of one-room flats. The project has grown and volunteers now deliver 60 to 70 meals a day to people in two blocks. “It’s good to have residents involved. They know who needs the meals. But we give to everyone who turns up. We have Whatsapp chat groups so we can be sure there will be one or two persons everyday to collect and

distribute,” said a Vincentian from the Church of the Holy Trinity who is involved in this project.

Those on the peripheries are not only the poor and migrant workers. Vincentians have also planned lunches and activities for patients at the Institute of Mental Health. Vincentians and parishioners from the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary held their event on June 27. With Vincentians from St Anne’s and St Vincent de Paul churches, Vincentians from Holy Family Church are getting ready for an event on August 23 before involving their own parishioners in another on November 21.

Parishioners visit migrant worker dormitories. “It was a great honour and delight to have the opportunity to spend time with the foreign workers,” said Amanda Lee, confirmands’ catechist at the Church of Christ the King on FaceBook. “Some teens and Vincentians were even invited to try the curry duck dish whipped

“Each ‘Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel.’ ”

– Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 1:20

up for their dinner, and also to understand more about their families and work background.”

Together with the Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI), Vincentians and confirmands from the Church of Christ the King visited a workers’ dormitory on June 27, taking food baskets for the 650 migrant workers staying there. They found the dormitory old and run down, the living conditions poor, with no proper place for cooking and no doors for toilets and showers. But the visitors were struck by the warmth and community spirit among the workers who take turns to cook dinner for one another.

On August 8, more than 300 Vincentians and parishioners from six churches visited about 5,300 migrant workers at the WestLite Dormitory in Mandai to deliver food baskets, rice, noodles, biscuits, condensed milk, tea bags, energy drinks, shampoo, toothpaste and soap. And on August 22, parishioners from the Church of the Risen Christ will visit another small dormitory with food gifts.

The numbers are not important any more. It is the spirit of community ignited in the hearts of Vincentians that has spread to various ministries in the parishes as well as to parishioners who have been moved to reach the poor, the migrant workers and others on the peripheries.

Would you like to feel the love of Jesus in your heart?
Would you like to see the face of Jesus?
Sign on to the “Share a meal with the poor” pledge today!
<http://sg50.catholic.org.sg/pledges-for-the-nation/>