The Social Mission Conference 2014

“I want a Church which is poor and for the poor” – Pope Francis

Held on 23 August 2014 at the Performing Arts Centre, Catholic Junior College, the conference drew 757 participants, speakers and invited guests.

Our Emcee for the event – Helen Choo.
Highlights of the Day

George Lim, Chairman of Caritas Singapore giving his welcome address.

Archbishop William Goh – Opening Address

Our archbishop talked about the need for us to encounter the poor. They have much to teach us and we are called to reach out to them.

Voices of the poor

Two brave ladies shared on their struggles with their poverty situation – financial difficulties, the multiple stresses from illnesses, death in the family and relationships. Yet above all these struggles, they have a positive attitude and outlook of life and are grateful for those who assist them along the way.
Prof Irene Ng - Social Realities of the Poor

Professor Irene Ng from the Social Work Department of NUS talked about her research on the poverty attitudes of Singaporeans, poverty facts and income inequality. She also raised the situation of multi-stressed families and the struggles of being poor in wealthy Singapore. As a Christian, she also shared her belief in her faith and own personal calling. “God cares about poverty, and how His children respond to poverty”.

Question and Answer with Prof Irene Ng
Bishop Isao Kikuchi – Theological Reflection

“Everyone has forgotten us”

Sharing his encounters with the refugees, the poor and the suffering people in Ghana, India, Rwanda and Japan, Bishop Isao said that this was the common phrase these people lamented after the first wave of humanitarian aid and relief has died down.

What will happen to these people? How is the church called to respond to them and others in our society?

“Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s most neglected members.” (EG 186)

By bringing the poor to the center of the Church we are “to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them. (EG 198)"

Besides mentioning the different phrases and quotes from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the previous popes and documents, Bishop Isao highlighted to all that our Church has always had an important focus on the poor from the start of Jesus’ ministry and this concern is integral to our faith, to us who call ourselves Christians.
Dialogue with Bishop Isao Kikuchi.
Meditative Prayer with the songs of Taizé Led by Bro Ghislain and the Taize team and choir

We stopped, in the middle of our conference, for a time of prayer. A time to listen to God and let the Holy Spirit move us more deeply towards a generous response to His call.

Bro Ghislain giving an introduction to the Time of Meditative prayer.

The Taizé Prayer Space.
Wendy Louis - Response to Theological Reflection

Framing her talk on the Magnificat, Wendy proposed a connect to the theological reflection and what could be some of the actions and responses that Catholics in Singapore could take to answer our Pope Francis’ call to be a church which is poor and for the poor. Among other things, how can we understand the sharing of our wealth with the poor, the lives that we lead, the development that we experience in Singapore today in the light of this call.

Brother Matthew Tan, SJ - Partnering the Poor

5 principles of service has been recently conceptualised and put into practice by Caritas Singapore and her charity affiliates. Brother Matthew highlighted to all how these principles can bring our charity affiliates a step closer to offering services that respect the dignity of the poor, to empower them in their struggles and to accompany them through the process of breaking their cycle of poverty.
Breakout tracks

Participants split up into 4 different tracks (Low income families, Migrant workers, Youth at Risk and The Marginalised) to listen to the sharings by the various organisations on their work, the situation faced by their beneficiaries and how they help to partner their beneficiaries in alleviating their struggles and challenges. Youth from HopeHouse and Beyond Social Services sat in with the participants in this track for a conversation with them.

Clarity Singapore sharing on the organisation’s approach to partner the poor.

Montfort Care shared on their research on homelessness in Singapore and their various organisation’s programmes.

Archdiocesan Commission for The pastoral care of Migrants and Itinerant Persons sharing on their programmes.
The invitation to Action

Bernadette Lau, Executive Director of Caritas Singapore sharing on avenues for post-conference engagement.

Janet Ang, Chair of Agape Village Steering Committee updating all on the Agape Village project.
The Exhibition on the affiliates of Caritas Singapore – their work and their invitation for volunteers.
Comments from participants at the end of the conference:

- Well Balanced, practical topics (Edmund Song)
- Smoothly delivered, volunteers were exemplary. I appreciate the personal stories shared and the inclusion of cliff sociological and the theological perspectives. (Maureen Tan)
- Spiritually it has reinforced the meaning of work I am currently doing. On a more practical level it has brought to my attention the various resources available to my ministry. Personally I have been touched by the amount of good work currently being done. (Vincent)
- The Analysis by Prof Irene Ng – A good and insightful analysis of the poor and some form of information of how much funding from local as compared with foreign governments. Archbishop Goh’s speech was inspiring: humble yet hit right on the spot about our mission. (Jessica Lee)
- Yes. It inspires me to look out for Jesus in the poor (Roy Teo)
- More aware of the poverty in Singapore & what and how the catholic church has done and is doing to help & empower the poor (Lucy Goh)
- Yes it created a lot more awareness regarding poverty in Singapore. The breakout session (the marginalised affected me the most emotionally. But I enjoyed the theological reflection on Evangelii Gaudium & personal sharing by Bishop Isao greatly as well. It was very enlightening and touching.