



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Yes, I Am My Brother's Keeper

Jason was driving home early one morning when he suddenly felt a thud and lost his grip on the steering wheel momentarily.

He managed to steady himself and peered in his rear mirror, spotting the culprit - a hole in the road. He knew that someone would get hurt eventually if no one did anything about it.

He pulled up to the side of the road, and called the traffic authority, explaining the seriousness of the situation. An emergency crew was soon on the way to fix the pothole.

Through his actions, Jason has shown the heart of social justice. He has modelled his behaviour on Jesus by responding in charity to the immediate concerns for food, shelter, clothing and care of the needy.

Living the Church's social mission also means responding in justice as advocates of better social policies, legislation and administration.

Christians are encouraged to engage each other and love one another despite their faults and idiosyncrasies and, at the same time, help shape the world into a better place. Christians present at every level of society are encouraged to establish an atmosphere of love and fellowship with all humanity.

We are called to serve "the least of these", to "hunger and thirst for justice," to be a "peacemaker" called by God to protect human life, to promote human dignity, to defend the poor and to seek the common good (Matthew 5:1-10; 25:31-46).

This mission of social justice belongs to all of us. It is an essential part of what it means to be a believer in the modern world. "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." (Gaudium et Spes - Church in the Modern World, 1)

And how can this vocation of social justice be realised by each of us in business and politics, factories and offices, in homes and schools and in all the events of daily life? The following are some examples of instances where social justice is already being practised.

In the business world

Such instances can be found in businesses where the welfare of the human person is considered first, even before profits for the company. And in others, where profits that are derived at the expense of the human dignity of the workers are considered unethical and are discouraged.

Business owners and managers who are aware of their Corporate Social Responsibilities to the people in the enterprise, society

How can we truly respond to the call for us to consider the well-being of our neighbour in every aspect of our daily life?

and to the environment are usually also those who ensure that everyone benefits from the company's success by being given just wages, sufficient to maintain a decent living.

Even in our personal investments, we can make the effort to find out more about the companies that we intend to invest in, whether they are adopting the social responsibilities of protecting life and caring for the common good of the human race.

In politics

In the political arena, social justice is practised by individuals, being aware of the current social issues

and using that awareness as an impetus to engage and to participate in helping resolve these issues of concern especially in the protection of the vulnerable, weak and the poor. And as a community, when Catholics become a voice in helping to shape a healthy society with respect for life, for different cultures, for religious freedom and for the dignity of the human person.

At the workplace

Social justice at the office is about creating an environment where the dignity of everyone is respected, individuals are treated fairly, and their rights are protected.

In turn, the individual takes pride in his work and gives of his best. He knows that whatever he is doing, he is participating in God's creative work, promoting the common good and trying to make the world a better place.

At home

In families, an early exposure to social justice is usually introduced by parents setting a good example in volunteer work and in giving to charity, so that the children may follow.

Setting a good example extends to building right relationships with others, especially with one's spouse and parents-in-law.

As a consumer

As individuals, we can promote social justice or injustice by the decisions that we make. We can choose not to be too concerned about status and to live more simply, consuming less.

We can purchase goods and services from companies that defend human life, treat workers fairly, protect creation, and respect other basic moral values.

In short, working for justice in everyday life is not easy. Those who try to live their faith in the world will encounter complex and sometimes difficult challenges.

But if we start by remembering Christ's command to love one another, like Jason, we can take a step in the right direction. As faithful disciples, we cannot but be our brother's keeper.

A helping hand for young married couples



Participants at the Couples Empowerment Programme take time out from their busy lives to refocus on their marriage and strengthen their relationship. Many emerge happier, experiencing greater harmony.

IN SINGAPORE'S high-pressure urban society, marriages can come unhinged if couples are not alert to the signs that they may need help.

The loving relationship that led to wedding bells can degenerate gradually into lacklustre partnerships where husbands and wives become emotionally detached and indifferent to one another.

Jobs get in the way. Having children adds new stresses. In-law issues may simmer and fester. Husbands and wives can pull apart, their sex lives may deteriorate, and arguments replace the sweet nothings of only a few years ago.

When marriages are stressed, many couples - including Catholics - regard divorce as a ready option.

The Couples Empowerment Programme developed under the auspices of the Family Life Society seeks to help couples focus anew on their vocation as spouses and parents.

It aims to empower them to strengthen their marriage through active listening, handling conflicts, appreciating differences, building intimacy, and allowing their spouses to influence them.

The skills imparted are as important for couples in happy marriages as they are for

those experiencing difficulties.

CEP aims to bring about change in participants. "We tell them that they cannot love their spouse and children without the willingness to change their attitude and behaviour, and that the only person that they can change is themselves," said Mrs Ying Thio, who with her husband, Bernard, co-ordinates the programme. "CEP also teaches life skills that help the couple to build a more emotionally intelligent marriage and family."

Couples who have participated in the programme are amazed at the changes they can make to their lives and their relationships if they choose to.

Many find the inspiration and courage to put the skills they learn into practice.

A participant who completed the programme described it like this: "Being a couple has its trials and challenges but if we stay united, we can support each other through the good and difficult times. Unity and love is very crucial to a successful relationship. It takes effort on both partners to work on their marriage."

Asked what makes running CEP most rewarding, Mrs Thio said: "It is seeing couples happier and more confident about their marriage and family."

About the Couples Empowerment Programme

What it is: CEP is a programme for young married couples facing multiple challenges juggling jobs, parenthood, dealing with in-laws, maintaining an intimate and loving relationship, and exercising parental authority balanced with a healthy respect for each child coping with a competitive education system.

The programme: Ten sessions are held over seven weekday nights and a weekend. Each session comprises Catholic Church teachings brought down to a practical level, as well as interesting and fun life skills developed by contemporary marriage psychologists and psychiatrists.

Where it is held: CEP is run at parish level and is currently on at the Church of St Vincent De Paul. A child-minding service is provided too. Participants pay \$180 per couple and \$20 per child.

For more information: Call Victor and Annabelle Ong at 9105-9921 Send an email: goto_cep@hotmail.com Visit: http://www.freewebs.com/cep_singapore/cc.htm

Who's Who at CEP Spiritual director: Father David Garcia, OP Co-ordinators: Bernard and Ying Thio Registration: Victor and Annabelle Ong