



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

The joy of living simply

Can we live more with less? In this final article in the series on money and Catholic Social Teachings, we examine what our faith teaches about "being and not having".

We live in an affluent society. Each day, we are presented with numerous choices of how to spend our money - exotic holidays, the latest electronic gadgets, makeovers and more.

Even with the economic downturn, it seems that Singaporeans are still living it up, albeit with a focus on getting value ("Singaporeans are still spending", The Straits Times, March 18, 2009).

The previous articles in this series have made clear that there is nothing wrong with owning material things; it is our attitude towards them that counts.

What we must guard against is obsession with acquiring and having

material things. We risk being drawn in by the "deceitfulness of wealth" (Mark 4:19), seeking fulfilment in things that are temporal rather than in God Himself.

The life of Jesus is one of simplicity. When a scribe wanted to follow Jesus, this is what Jesus said: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to rest his head" (Matthew 8:19-20). Jesus showed that living a life of Christian mission calls for fewer possessions and greater focus on doing God's work.

As Catholics, we are asked to live simply. A simple lifestyle can free us from the dangers of being owned by material possessions. It is a way of living

in solidarity with the poor. It gives us the freedom to do what God requires of us.

Living simply is often taken to mean living with less. To some extent that is true. In the early Church, people lived in communities where members with different skills worked together, supporting one another as parts of one body. The Church has a strong tradition of evangelical poverty that many religious and lay people still live out today.

However, living simply does not mean living in poverty. Material poverty and simple living are both economic conditions, but poverty is involuntary whereas simple living is a choice.

Pope Paul VI is clear that poverty is a

degradation of the human condition and as such is a sin against God (Populorum Progressio 21).

Pope Benedict XVI in his 2009 World Peace Day message said that poverty which "impedes people and families from living according to their dignity" must be fought. He expressed the hope that there will be a new economic model that will establish a "virtuous circle" of living simply and fighting poverty.

Because material poverty and simple living are economic conditions that have to do with how resources are distributed in society, choosing a simple lifestyle over a lifestyle of excess can indirectly affect those who live in poverty.

For example, a simple lifestyle makes more resources available to others in the world. Experts say there is enough food for everyone in this world. Yet 12 per cent of the world's population is starving because of human behaviours like over-consumption by the developed world.

When we live simply, we may live with less, but we do not do so in a state of destitution. Instead, we live knowing what is enough and sufficient. It is not giving in to the temptation to hoard, to acquire for status, or simply because we have the means. It is an attitude of being, not having.

Living simply is also about buying right. Our individual purchase decisions have consequences on the economic system and the environment. If we buy products made by people living in poverty in remote areas of poor countries, we are supporting the economic opportunity for people marginalised in the global economy. If we buy sustainable products, we are protecting the environment.

So living simply is not only about living with less, but living right. It is about living sustainably, having a reverence for the earth, and finding space for the more valuable things in life, beyond the material.

The evangelical Christian writer Jim Wallis has said that a budget is a moral document that tells us what and who are the most important to us, whether as a family, Church, or nation. Likewise a calendar determines for us who and what is important in our lives. Living simply is about spending time and money on the right things.

Recently, the theologian Tina Beattie interpreted living simply as a life of grace. A life of grace is about seeking fulfilment within ourselves and in our relationships with others. It means going beyond transactions, into full relationships and into recognising our interdependence.

Instead of seeking happiness in possessions, we find happiness and joy in our relationships with others. We try to be conscious of how our decisions affect others in the global community. Concern for the common good guides our decisions, not just our own interests.

And we trust that when we live in love, God will provide us with what we need.

Fellowship for medical community



Catholics in the medical community come together with their chaplain, Fr Colin Tan, SJ, to pray, reflect on issues and find ways to serve the community in Singapore and elsewhere.

THE Catholic Medical Guild sees itself as a voice and reference point for Catholic doctors, dentists and medical students in Singapore.

It offers fellowship to Catholics in the medical community, promoting the practice of ethical medicine and science and helping members to fulfil their vocation in the service of society.

As part of its commitment to encouraging the practice of ethical medicine, the guild will hold a bioethics conference on End of Life issues in November.

Every month, the guild offers a Mass as a community. Bible sharing is also conducted weekly, creating an environment for members to share, reflect on work and study and make new friends, while also becoming more familiar with scripture.

In a similar spirit, the guild website includes a section where doctors and medical

students are encouraged to share their moments of grace as well as their struggles in a community blog.

The guild also facilitates regular volunteer programmes at nursing homes and free clinics based at the Church of St Anthony and the Church of the Risen Christ.

Guild members provide medical cover at events, give talks, run health screenings and take part in weekend missions to the Riau islands.

Recently, the guild collaborated with the Archdiocesan Crisis Coordination Team and the Catholic Nurses Guild to conduct a talk for priests on H1N1 and precautionary measures for the Church. The event included a health screening, mask fitting and flu vaccination for participants.

Fellowship events like a retreat in mid-September and Christmas get-together are also in the works.

About the Catholic Medical Guild

What it is: The Catholic Medical Guild aims to integrate life, faith and work, building a vibrant Catholic community among doctors, dentists and medical students in Singapore.

Can you help: The guild invites medical students, doctors and dentists to get involved in its activities and especially to join in prayer and fellowship. Volunteers who would like to offer their help at events or free clinics can contact Gilbert Yeo at gilbert_yeo@yahoo.com, while Angela Chow at angelalchow@yahoo.com has information on the guild medical missions to Karimun.

Those interested can log on to <http://www.cmg.org.sg/join-us/>, where new and existing members can enter or update their particulars and stay up to date on new events and opportunities.

For additional information on volunteering opportunities and upcoming events, questions can be sent to: missions@cmg.org.sg, events@cmg.org.sg, admin@cmg.org.sg



Who's Who at the Catholic Medical Guild

Master	Sally Ho
Deputy Master	Gabriel Seow
Immediate Past Master	John Hui
Chaplain	Fr Colin Tan, SJ
Honorary Secretary	John Chuah
Honorary Treasurer	John Rozario
Council members (Elected)	Ian Mathews Leonard Loh Angela Chow Victor Loh Darren Leong Claire Chua
Council members (Co-opted)	Cosmas Chen Gilbert Yeo Daniel Chor Mavis Ang