



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Why do we do charity?

The difference between Catholics and non-Catholics in charitable giving goes beyond the numbers and the level of involvement, to the very reason why we do it.

MOST of us give to charity in one form or another. It could be time, money or even a part of ourselves when we donate blood or a kidney.

In terms of time, a National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) survey shows that 17 per cent of Singaporeans are volunteers. The recent Catholic census indicates that 22 per cent of Catholics volunteer in a parish.

In terms of money, the NVPC found that 91 per cent of Singaporeans give in all forms of donations, including flag days. The average donation is about \$300 per annum.

But why do we give to charity?

The top reasons for volunteering and donating in Singapore are shown in the charts below and are consistent with survey findings done elsewhere.

As we can see, most of the articulated reasons hark largely to the interests of the individual - what we can obtain from the giving experience. This could be "the opportunity to meet and know more people" or satisfying our feelings of compassion and gratitude by giving back to society. These reasons are valid and human.

But for us Catholics, the reasons for being charitable should transcend our personal needs in a secular world. We should be charitable simply because that is the commandment of Jesus Christ.

Jesus calls us to "love one another as I have loved you." (*John 15:12*) and reminds us that "what you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me" (*Matthew 25:40*).

Our obedience to His call will show in our willingness to follow Him to do what He asks of us, to do His will. To determine if we are doing charitable work for ourselves or for Jesus, we could ask ourselves questions such as:

- Do we do our charity work mainly because we are expecting something in return?
- Are we doing it for His glory or our own glory?
- Will we go to where help is really needed, even if it means going where we do not want to go?
- Will we help someone who has been mean and cruel to us previously, but needs help now?

When we are obedient to the call of Jesus and centre our work on Him, we start to:

■ Bring the love of Jesus with us

We are able to see the world as Jesus does, a world where love, not selfishness, is the most important value. This spirit of solidarity is not just a temporary reaction of feeling sorry for another fellow human being but a genuine concern for the long-term welfare of that person. We do not merely give him a fish to eat for the day, but help him to fish and feed himself.

■ See Jesus in our brothers and sisters

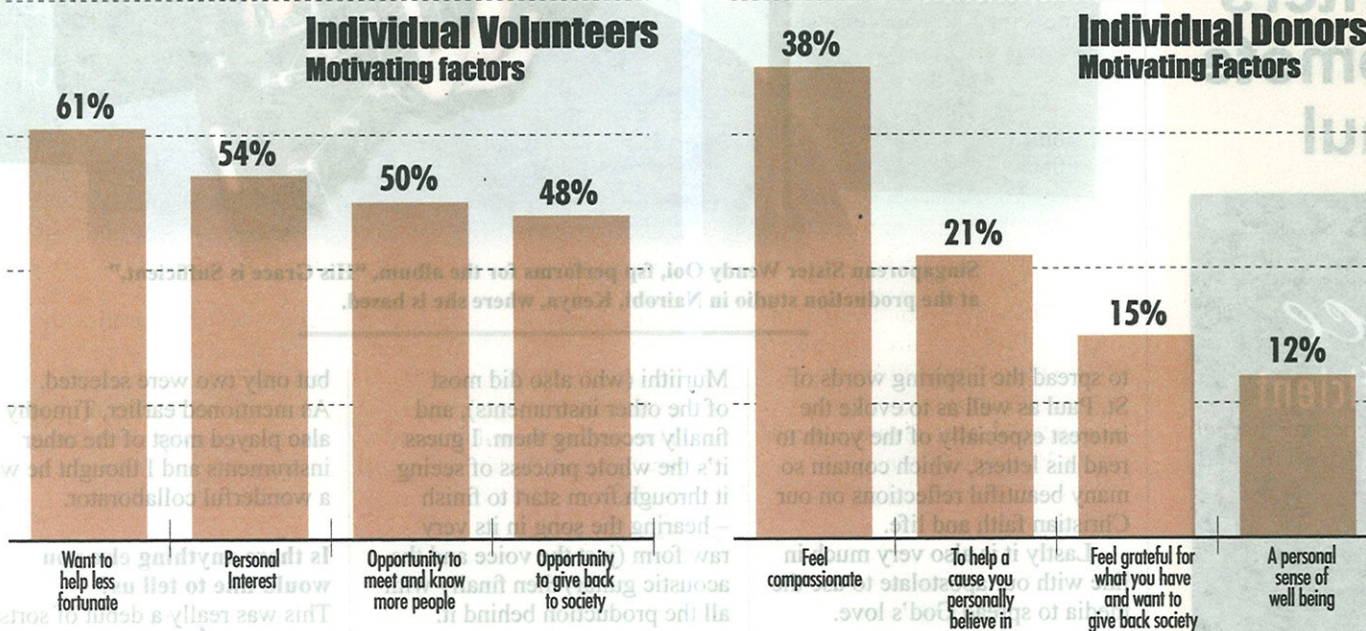
When we help others, we are actually helping Jesus fulfil His mission on earth: "He has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted... to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free..." (*Luke 4:18-19*). Everyone is equally worthy of our help.

■ Be witnesses of our faith to others

How we behave as Catholics in our service to others will lead others to conclude what being a Catholic is all about. We may not know it, but our actions sometimes speak louder than our words, especially in bearing witness to our faith.

Mother Teresa was a paragon of giving. She gave all of herself and more to the poorest of the poor in Calcutta. She once said: "When a poor person dies of hunger, it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give the person what he or she needed. It has happened because we did not recognise Christ when once more he appeared under the guise of pain, identified with man suffering from the cold, dying of hunger, when He came in a lonely human being, in a lost child, in search of a home."

What this means is that helping those in need is not an option for us Catholics. It is our calling.



SOURCE: THE STATE OF GIVING (NATIONAL VOLUNTEER & PHILANTHROPY CENTRE, 2005)

Member organisation: Faith & Light Singapore A special group, for special families

MAGDELENE Yip did not know what to expect when she took her intellectually disabled son Sebastian to the Faith & Light Community meeting at the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in 2002.

She did not have to worry. "We discovered that through sharing our pains and difficulties with other parents in the community, we found acceptance and were not so lonely in our children's world of disabilities," she recalls. "Sebastian was happy. He was comfortable and accepted by the people who came. The friendship that he has in Faith & Light helped him to grow in love."

Today, Sebastian is 18 and his mum is national coordinator of the Faith & Light communities in Singapore. From the first group set up in Siglap in 2001, there are now three, the others at Blessed Sacrament Church and the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Faith & Light communities welcome parents of children with intellectual disabilities that keep them out of mainstream schools and society, including autism, Down Syndrome and cerebral palsy. Also welcome are friends and volunteers.

The International Association of Faith & Light was set up in 1971. Although Catholic-based, it welcomes people of all faiths, ages and abilities. Its history goes back to the story of a French couple,



Camille and Gerard Profit, and the ostracism they faced when they took their two disabled children on pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1968. Hotels and inns rejected them, and even fellow pilgrims stared rudely at them.

When they returned home, they told their friends, Marie-Helene Matthieu and Jean Vamier, about their painful pilgrimage and from that unhappy experience was born the Faith & Light movement. It brought together families with intellectually disabled children, organising fellowship and support meetings as well as pilgrimages to Lourdes and elsewhere.

In Singapore, the Faith & Light communities have also been making a difference.

Recalling her experience of taking her son to meetings, Ms Yip said: "I was no



longer embarrassed by Sebastian's behaviour. The friendship and acceptance from the community helped me to see the beauty in him and to realise that he too is a Gift from God.

"I began to focus less on the burden, and so did my husband. Faith & Light did not bring us any cure or solutions for Sebastian's disabilities, but friendship and peace."

At the three parishes, members meet once a month to share the Word of God and pray, sing, dance, play games and have something to eat. They also attend Mass together and organise holiday camps and picnics, and go on pilgrimages.

"Our families value most the friendship and acceptance of our special children. Many of the parents are happy to see their

CAN YOU HELP?

Faith & Light welcomes families who have children with intellectual disabilities and also needs friends and volunteers who will join and help out at various activities. You can help by:

- Joining one of the Faith & Light communities.
- Spreading the news about Faith & Light to a family member or anyone you know with children who are intellectually disabled.
- Starting a Faith & Light community in your parish.

WHO TO CONTACT

National Chaplain: Father Frans de Ridder
National Coordinator: Magdelene Yip
Tel: 96215183
Email: mag842@hotmail.com
Community leader, OLPs: Alaric Wang
Tel: 96399660
Community leader, Blessed Sacrament Church: Gerry Szeto
Tel: 91817763
Community leader, IHM: Josephine Lim
96478591

children open up to others and gain the self confidence to express themselves," said Ms Yip.

Forty years after Camille and Gerard Profit faced hurdles on their pilgrimage, families with disabled children everywhere still face painful situations and fear rejection in society.

"We hope to reach out to more families who have children, brothers or sisters with intellectual disabilities. Many spend most of their time at home, especially the adults who no longer go to school," said Ms Yip. "They need to be integrated into society and Church, to be accepted and recognised as a Gift of God and a Child of God."