



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Why we need to support Catholic charities

We are called as individual Catholics to share what we have with those in greater need. As a Church, we are called to organise that giving.

LOOK around at every major religion in the world and you'll find that charitable work is an important feature in them all. In Singapore, we are lucky to see a wide variety of charitable works run by Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians.

Regardless of one's religious beliefs, the act of donating money or giving time and energy to a charitable cause is often hailed as something laudable.

What about us as Catholics? Do our social teachings have something special to say about giving money, time or talent to charitable causes? First, though, it might be helpful to see what charitable giving is not.

Charitable giving is not about gaining publicity or personal credit. We are reminded of Jesus' words: "So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win human admiration" (Matthew 6:2).

Nor is charitable giving a means to compensate for wrongdoing, a way to help us to "score points for heaven"!

Most importantly, charitable giving is not a way to escape from our responsibility for the well-being of others the whole year long. It is not an outlet for busy people to demonstrate their generosity while not caring about how their actions and behaviour impact others the rest of the year.

What, then, is charitable giving about?

It is something that must be seen in the context of the Christian idea of community, solidarity and justice. In Scripture, we see the early disciples being "one in heart and soul": "None of their members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from the sale of them, to present it to the apostles; it was then distributed to any who might be in need" (Acts 4:34).

What a beautiful description of a community! They really lived as one family. Each member of the early Christian community saw the needs of others as his or her very own. Sharing their resources was not just an optional extra for the early Christians; it was a response that flowed naturally from their baptism into the One People of God. So from the early Christians we see that charitable giving starts with a common vision that we are all really One Family, responsible for one another.

Unfortunately today we see a great imbalance in the possession and enjoyment of the earth's resources. The Church reminds us that God intended for all the world's resources to be enjoyed by everyone. This is the principle of the "Universal



Each of us is called to give in the best way we can. You can support a Catholic charity by making a donation, or by sharing your time, talent and energy.

Destination of Goods". St Gregory the Great even points out that: "When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice".

Every Lent, Catholics in Singapore have an avenue to share our resources with those in need through the Charities Week collection. Proceeds go to organisations serving the needy in the name of the Church. This is a good way of showing our solidarity with the less fortunate.

But is there any special significance to channelling our resources, time and talent through Catholic charitable organisations?

Yes, there is. In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* ("God is Love"), Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that as a community of disciples

proclaiming the Gospel of Love in a broken world, the Church also needs to have organised charitable works that Christians undertake as one body in the name of Christ.

"For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being." (*Deus Caritas Est*, 25a).

So even though each of us can give individually to other religious or secular charitable organisations (and this is an important sign of our solidarity with them), there is a special significance in supporting Catholic charities.

Catholic charities represent the organised charitable works of the Church. For these to be truly carried out by "one body in the name of Christ", then all of us must be a part of it. The works are not just left to

the staff, volunteers and spiritual directors.

How to do this when we cannot all be working full-time in these charities?

Each of us is called to give in the best way we can. Supporting the work of these organisations with money is one way. We can also give our time and energy in a way that is best in line with our vocation, whether as a married person, single, young student, and so on.

More importantly, we need to take an active interest in what Catholic charities are doing. We need to know more about the people they serve, how they are served and be deeply concerned about the issues affecting them.

We need to be interested in finding out whether resources are put to the best possible use. And we need to help

ensure the effectiveness of these organisations for that is the responsibility of all of us collectively; not just those running the organisations.

In Singapore, our Catholic social organisations serve a wide range of needs, from helping the poor, the sick and the aged, to championing the causes of refugees and migrants. The Church's social action work also includes those in which not many other organisations are involved. As part of her tradition, the Church has always had a preferential option for the poor, serving those most neglected by society and this is something we can be proud of.

The Charities Week programme is an important channel for us to act as One Body by supporting the Church's social organisations. In giving with our whole heart, we pray that we might also be open to how else God is moving us to respond.

CHARITIES WEEK

How we can support Catholic charities

Charities Week is the Archdiocese's annual fundraising campaign for the poor and needy.

LENT is a time for Catholics to reflect on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and to focus on charitable deeds to help us draw closer to God.

In his Lenten message, Archbishop Nicholas Chia challenges Catholics to take time to re-examine their treasures in life and to share their gifts and talents by helping those in need, especially in these troubled and difficult times.

Every year, the Archdiocese conducts its major fundraising campaign during Lent in support of the poor and needy in the community. Charities Week 2009 began on March 7 and is led by Caritas Singapore Community Council.

Caritas Singapore has 17

member organisations serving a wide spectrum of needs which include the poor and destitute, the marginalised, families, migrant workers and those displaced by crisis. Collectively, these organisations reach out to more than 40,000 beneficiaries of all races, languages and religions.

Many more are expected to seek help in view of the deteriorating economic situation. With the growing number of jobless and new poor, Catholic charities are challenged to respond to greater and possibly new needs.

"We are seeing an increased demand for help and services. When jobs are cut, it poses many forms of challenges to the individual and



Lenten Envelope

everyone in the family. We hope to reach out and extend our services to more people and their families," said Christian Choo, executive director of Morning Star Community Services, whose programmes and services are supported by the Lenten donations.

Morning Star is among many organisations that receive grants from the common chest of funds set up by Caritas Singapore. Other organisations that benefit include the Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and

Itinerant People, Catholic Welfare Services; Family Life Society, Marine Parade Family Service Centre, Catholic AIDS Response Effort and Roman Catholic Prison Ministry.

Your generous donations during Charities Week 2009 will go towards this Catholic chest to fund all these Catholic charities. This year, donors will enjoy a higher tax deduction of 250 per cent (compared to last year's 200 per cent) for their donations.