



# OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

## CARITAS IN VERITATE AND ME

# How to act on the Pope's message

**“HANDS** up those who have read *Caritas in Veritate*?”

There were hardly any hands up among those who attended a recent talk on Catholic social teachings organised by Caritas Singapore. Most were deterred because they found the language and the subject too profound.

Several summaries and guides have been produced to help Catholics gain access to Pope Benedict XVI's latest encyclical. An easy-to-read guide which presents the main points in plain English is *A Reader's Guide to Caritas in Veritate* by Nick Wagner, available online at [www.teamrcia.com/bookstore/02-003nw](http://www.teamrcia.com/bookstore/02-003nw).

To appreciate the scholarly content and how it can apply to our daily lives, we need to step back and understand the purpose and nature of social encyclicals.

Encyclicals have their origin in circular letters sent to all churches of a particular area during the early days of the Christian Church. In today's context, a papal encyclical is a letter, usually on some aspect of Catholic doctrine, from the Pope and addressed to an audience as limited as the Catholic bishops of a particular area, or to a much wider group. For example, Pope Benedict's *Caritas in Veritate* is addressed to all Catholics and "all people of good will".

Several papal encyclicals deal with social matters such as poverty, wealth, economics, civil organisations and the role of the state. Starting with *Rerum Novarum (On Condition of Labour)* by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, these social encyclicals become a body of knowledge known as the Catholic social teachings. These teachings set out the principles upon which human life in modern society can flourish.

**Not economic development alone**  
*Caritas in Veritate* focuses on development, a subject of continuing debate among economists and policy makers in the secular world.

Traditionally, what distinguishes developed from developing nations has been based on economic criteria such as per capita GDP and industrialisation. The United Nations recently introduced a Human Development Index which combines economic measures with other measures such as life expectancy and education. The kingdom of Bhutan has championed measures of happiness and well-being as indicators of economic progress.

The Church has always taken a much deeper view of what constitutes authentic development. In 1967, Pope Paul VI said that development "cannot be restricted to economic growth alone... it must foster the development of each person and the whole person." (*Populorum Progressio, The Development of Nations, 14*). Pope Benedict defines development as the progress "from less human

*On Nov 1 this page presented a simplified summary of Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical, Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth). Today we look at how his message is relevant in our lives and what we can do to act on it.*



If you know someone who does not give his maid a day off, can you muster the courage to tell him to do the right thing? That would be one way to heed Pope Benedict XVI's message in his encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth).

conditions to those which are more human" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 8).

### Food for thought, and action

While social encyclicals are based on and build upon scriptures and the traditions of the Church, they seek to explain how our faith can be made relevant to modern times. *Caritas in Veritate*, for example, addresses the worldwide economic crisis.

Pope Benedict provides insights on the causes of the current economic problems and the moral principles on which a new global economy can be shaped. He shares that:

- Charity needs to be linked to truth.
- Progress is a vocation.
- Progress based on profit alone can create poverty.
- The economy must be subject to moral influences.
- The market, government and civil society all need to be concerned for the common good.
- Duties are as important as rights, and in fact, duties reinforce rights.
- We should be responsible stewards of the environment.
- There needs to be dialogue between faith and reason.
- The rights and dignity of migrants and workers must be safe-guarded.
- The UN needs to be reformed.
- Technology is not good if it distracts us from the deeper human values.
- There is hope but we have to trust in God.

While these ideas are intellectually stimulating, they are also more than abstract notions for deep thinkers and policy makers. The encyclical is meant for us to reflect upon and to integrate into our daily lives.

### Migrant workers in our midst

To do so, we should seek to understand the principles set out in the various areas covered by Pope Benedict and see how we can apply them in our own individual context and circum-

stances.

Take, for example, the subject of migrant workers.

Pope Benedict considers migration and migrant workers to be "a social phenomenon of epoch-making proportions". He highlights how these foreign workers make "a significant contribution to the economic development of the host country" and how they should not be treated "as a commodity or a mere workforce". Instead, he emphasises that "every migrant is a human person who, as such, possess fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance".

The Pope's take on foreign workers should resonate with us in Singapore. Even though we can justifiably be proud of our economic achievements, migrant workers stand out starkly as a group we need to pay more attention to.

The living and working conditions of foreign workers in Singapore leave much to be desired, and much has been said and written about this. Many are concerned enough to campaign for better conditions for them.

There was a 'Day Off Campaign' organised by three non-governmental organisations last year to encourage employers to give their maids at least one day off a month. It seems odd that maid employers, who get at least a day off a week from their jobs, need persuading to treat their own employees the same way.

Recently, the appalling way in which migrant workers were transported by open lorries was in the news. After several accidents and deaths, public outrage and a year and a half of consultation and study, there are now safety measures to be phased in over the next three years.

There are other aspects of migrant workers' stay in Singapore, not least the cramped living conditions facing many. But the question is: What can I, as an individual, do about this? See the box, "Migrant Workers

and Me", for four practical suggestions.

The treatment of migrants is but only one issue highlighted by Pope Benedict. His 70-page encyclical makes observations and recommendations on many other issues such as the impact of technology, workers' rights, corporate responsibility, ethics, religious freedom and indifference, etc.

It is for each of us to take up the opportunity to discern and act on each of these issues in the way most relevant and practical for ourselves.

### GROUPS THAT HELP MIGRANTS

**Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI)**  
Website: [www.acmi.sg](http://www.acmi.sg)  
To volunteer: contact 6280 5424 or email: [general@acmi.sg](mailto:general@acmi.sg)

**Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (HOME)**  
Website: [www.home.org.sg](http://www.home.org.sg)  
To volunteer: contact 63489939 / 63338384 or email: [migrants.home@gmail.com](mailto:migrants.home@gmail.com)

**Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2)**  
Website: [www.twc2.org.sg](http://www.twc2.org.sg)  
To volunteer: contact [centre@twc2.org.sg](mailto:centre@twc2.org.sg)

### SOUP KITCHENS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE

**ACMI Soup Kitchen**  
Website: [www.acmi.sg](http://www.acmi.sg)  
Contact: Elizabeth Tan  
Tel: 6280 5424

**Trinity Soup Kitchen**  
Website: [www.trinitysoupkitchen.wordpress.com](http://www.trinitysoupkitchen.wordpress.com)  
Contact: Janice Pua  
Tel: 9189 3883

**Matthew 25 (Soup Kitchen)**  
Website: [www.nativitychurchsingapore.org](http://www.nativitychurchsingapore.org)  
Contact: Rosalind Lee  
Tel: 9826 1443

**Willing Hearts**  
Website: [www.willinghearts.org.sg](http://www.willinghearts.org.sg)  
Contact: Tony Tay  
Tel: 9690 2086

## MIGRANT WORKERS AND ME How you can do your part to help migrant workers

### 1. Understand the subject in our context.

Find out more about migrants. A good way is to check with the organisations focused on migrant workers (See list below). Seek, in particular, to understand how Catholic social teachings apply in the treatment of migrant workers. Of particular relevance are the Principle of the Dignity of the Human Person and the Principle of the Dignity of Work. A good reading reference is *Salt & Pepper: Readings on the Basic Principles of Catholic Social Teachings* (see Chapter 3, "We are foreigners on our way").

### 2. Treat foreign workers with dignity and respect.

With more than a million foreign workers in Singapore, we interact with them at one time or other. We should regard and accord them the dignity and respect as fellow human beings, made in the image of God.

The foreign workers we will most often come into contact with are maids in our homes and in the homes of our friends. The booklet, *Dignity in the Home: A Guide for Catholic Employers of Foreign Domestic Helpers*, published by the Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI), is an excellent guide to the practical aspects of how we can relate to foreign maids in areas such as communication, meals, accommodation, rest, compensation and personal development.

We may also come into contact with foreign migrant workers at hawker centres, on the road and at construction sites. When we do, do we see them as fellow workers contributing to the economy and the development of our country while earning a dignified living, or do we ignore them as people different from us?

### 3. Help with migrant causes

There are several charities and social organisations that support migrant causes. You can volunteer with or donate to these organisations. Migrant causes tend not to be as popular as other causes, so any aid you render will be appreciated.

The main Catholic charity helping migrant workers is ACMI. It has several programmes including a soup kitchen, training for foreign domestic helpers, case management for distressed foreign workers and befriending and counselling support.

There are a few other soup kitchens that cater to migrant workers. The two secular charities focused on migrant workers are HOME and TWC2 (see list).

### 4. Influence Others

Each of us has our own sphere of influence. We can and should influence those we can for the migrant cause. For example, you may know a relative or friend who does not give his maid a day off. Muster the courage to encourage that employer to treat the maid fairly.

If you are in contact with policy makers – Members of Parliament, civil servants, and others – do share with them your perspectives on migrant issues and the right treatment of foreign workers. You should encourage them to push for better legislation to protect the rights of foreign workers.