



**Caritas**  
SINGAPORE  
*God's Love in Action*

# Caritas in Mission

A quarterly newsletter by Caritas Singapore on the Catholic Church's social mission

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# The



# of Christmas





**Sr Wendy Ooi, FSP**



At the heart of our Christmas celebrations is the Incarnation, God who loves the world so much gives his only son who takes on flesh (cf Jn 3:16). Jesus, the new born babe lying in the manger with his adoring parents on each side is a joyous and peaceful scene recreated in nativity sets found in churches, homes and in some countries also in public venues. It is the first Christmas scene and also the first Holy Family scene.

Jesus, by becoming human, is born into a family and is blessed with two loving parents, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph. Nurtured by their love and guidance, Jesus grows and spends his formative years with them in Nazareth. It is through their love that he also experiences his heavenly Father's love.

Most of us too are born into a family and are brought up by parents or guardians. It is within the family that we also first experience God's love for us, as reflected by the love of our parents. As a family we can draw inspiration from the example of the Holy Family in living the virtues of faith, hope and love.

Mary and Joseph's faith-filled love led them to give priority to do God's will above everything else which at times involve sacrifice and letting go. This was first brought to the fore when Jesus at 12 years of age, goes "missing" for 3 days. On finding him at the temple, his parents chide him for causing them distress but Jesus replies, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49).

Mary and Joseph, just as many parents after them, realise through time that they do not own the life of their child but instead are "the first collaborators with God in the transmission of life and the faith" (Pope Benedict XVI).

Later, as an adult, Jesus is told that his family is waiting to talk to him but he states, "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Mt 12:50).

As followers of Jesus, we seek to carry out the will of God in our lives. In doing so and through our baptism, we become bonded in Christ as a family of faith and everyone becomes a brother and a sister.

As a family united in Christ we confidently call God "our" Father whose will can be summed up as loving God and one another. We are each called to be "caritas" or Christ's love and compassion to all we encounter. This is not always an easy feat as it usually entails sacrifice but it is in Christ that we participate in his love and he always provides the necessary graces (cf 2 Cor 12:19).

As we share in the hopes, problems and sufferings of those around us, beginning with our own families, where relationships may at times be in need of healing and reconciliation, we continue the incarnation of God's love in the world. Christmas then becomes a celebration not only for a day or a season but our way of life.

In this Christmas issue of *Caritas in Mission*, we see how three member organisations of Caritas Singapore incarnate God's love and compassion as they reach out, support and connect families together. May we draw inspiration from these stories of incarnating God's love today, knowing that each of us too are called to do God's will to incarnate his love and bring his light and hope to all amidst the darkness of life's struggles made worse for many during the current pandemic. Each time we do so, Christ is born again, in us.

A Blessed Christmas to all. ❀

**Be born in us,  
Incarnate Love.**

**Take our flesh and blood,  
and give us your humanity;  
take our eyes, and give us your vision;  
take our minds, and give us your pure thought;  
take our feet and set them in your path;  
take our hands,  
and fold them in your prayer;  
take our hearts  
and give them your will to love.  
Amen.**

*Caryll Houselander*





# The Gift of Family Love



Stock image

Navya\* was eight years old when she was placed in foster care due to domestic abuse.

Foster parents, Mdm Puganeswari and Mr Lakshmir, opened their home to Navya in June 2019. Together with their two biological children, they welcomed her with much excitement as she was their first foster child.

Mdm Puganeswari and Mr Lakshmir are attentive to Navya's needs and provide her a safe and nurturing environment. When Navya is upset or misses her biological family, she will turn to her foster mother for emotional support. Mdm Puganeswari is encouraging, and helps Navya put things into perspective on concerns about her biological family.

Navya joins her foster siblings in various activities such as riding a bicycle or scootering around the neighbourhood. During the recent Circuit Breaker, the foster family set aside time to relax and engage in activities like board games, colouring, and doing craft work together. Navya has also learnt some basic sewing and baking skills from Mdm Puganeswari!

With quality time and affection from her foster family, Navya is opening up to the people around her. Now she knows she can turn to her foster parents in times of need. Her foster mother assures Navya with hugs and words of affirmation, and her foster father plays, and engages in conversation with her.

With coaching and guidance from her foster family, Navya is motivated in her school work. She garnered the Good Progress Award by her school in 2019 and continues to excel in her studies!

Navya is respectful towards people around her, and has grown into a delightful, well-mannered girl.

Through this fostering experience, Mdm Puganeswari and her family have seen how they are able to make a difference and touch the lives of children who require a safe and loving home.



\*Not her real name





# Every Child Deserves an Education



Farah\* and Sarah\* are sisters in Canossa Catholic Primary School (CCPS). They are excellent students from a healthy family with supportive parents. They do well academically, display strong moral values, and are very well-mannered. Farah, in Primary 6, is a School Prefect who shows great responsibility in all she does. Sarah, in Primary 3, is a disciplined and focused student in class.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, their family was not spared. As shop owners, their parents had to shut down their business during the Circuit Breaker. With their means of income suddenly cut, financial difficulties set in. As both Farah and Sarah are not Singapore Citizens, they faced higher school fees, and had arrears amounting to about \$7,500.

The two sisters were at risk of dropping out of school. Having ran out of options, CCPS reached out to Canossaville for help for the sisters. Thanks to benefactors and donors, Canossaville was able to help Farah and Sarah with their school fees. Their family was also a beneficiary of Canossaville's food distribution to vulnerable families during COVID-19.

At the start of the Circuit Breaker, Canossaville was alerted to the plight of many families in their care. Many breadwinners of vulnerable families, who held manual labour jobs, were not able to work during that period of time. With schools closed, children who would usually have their meals in school were now additional mouths to feed at home. With these families living from hand to mouth



even before COVID-19, they were unable to cope with both a loss of income and additional expenses. And then, there were new cases, such as Farah and Sarah's family as well.

This year, Canossaville organised four food distributions consisting of basic necessities, food, and supermarket vouchers for families in need to tide them through this difficult period.



\*Not their real name



# Embarking on the Digital Journey and e-Reuniting with Son



"I am so happy that I can video call my son who works in Canada now! I have not seen him for a long time." 81-year-old stay-alone senior, Mdm Wong exclaimed excitedly to Montfort Care's social work staff.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, most senior activities came to a halt. Many stay-alone seniors like Mdm Wong used to gather and participate in activities such as brain gym, paper quilling and exercises like the GoodLife! Workout organised by Montfort Care. The loss of these simple gatherings and activities impacted them significantly as they looked forward to the social interaction and meaningful engagement with their peers that came with each session.

To continue engaging seniors, especially those who are staying alone, the team in Montfort Care introduced more online activities. The team identified two challenges – seniors' lack of digital literacy and fear to embark on the digital learning journey. And so, Montfort Care introduced the "E-Seniors" programme to ensure that seniors are not left behind.

Mainly targeting seniors in their 60s, the programme guides seniors on how to use common social media platforms, and to be

better equipped to interact through digital means. The Montfort Care team conducted one-on-one or group training sessions for the seniors. For seniors with mobility issues, the staff made home visits while observing the safety distancing measures.

During training sessions, staff go through a step-by-step guide on how to use platforms like WhatsApp, QR Code scanning, YouTube, Facebook Live, and also how to attend Zoom e-learning sessions. Each senior was also given booklet guides to help them with downloading apps, setting up and using it.

With Montfort Care running online activities on Facebook Live on fall prevention, art and craft, and cooking demonstrations, it was a delight to know that many of the seniors were online too! They were also able to attend e-activities on Zoom, and are now adept with WhatsApp voice and video calls, and text messaging to stay connected. Social workers at Montfort Care also do regular check-ins with the seniors via WhatsApp.

This digital journey is the beginning of a life-changing learning expedition for seniors. The virtual senior-centric activities pioneered by Montfort Care will help them



stay meaningfully engaged with their family, friends, and the community.







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The Advent  
Fundraiser ends on  
31 December 2020



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