



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

This Advent, help to build Agape Village

Singapore's resident population reached 5.3 million by the end of June this year.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Manpower last year, at least 105,000 households with an estimated 387,000 family members, about seven per cent of the population, worry about how to pay rent and where to get their next meal. They earn an average \$1,500 a month.

While poverty is not greatly visible in Singapore – which does not have large numbers of homeless persons in its streets, for example – another, probably under-appreciated fact is that many people living at the margins of society face problems that are inter-connected.

One such person is a 57-year-old divorcee who takes care of her son's three young children as their guardian. She cares for them herself as she cannot afford childcare. Her 36-year old son is in prison for drug offences and is certified unfit to work, having previously suffered a stroke, she said. The children's mother has also been in prison for drugs.

The woman said her daughter-in-law has a drug habit and is always on the run, trying to avoid being caught. The older woman blames her daughter-in-law for influencing her son in his drug-taking.

The divorcee who has arthritis and diabetes receives some charitable assistance. She also has a daughter who cannot help as she, her husband and two children are also in a low-income household.

"Living alone is not easy with no support from family and friends, no income. Right now I am even afraid to spend \$10 on myself," the woman said. "My family members want me to dump these children with social welfare. How can I do that?"

Another woman, who is wheelchair-bound, says she is estranged from one daughter and her other daughter is a single mother who cannot afford to support herself and her two sons.

The woman receives some assistance from government-linked and Catholic organisations. But it is still a struggle to survive on donations such as rice and canned food, and less than \$300 in cash, every month. She lives with a friend who took



Individuals and families in need will be able to receive integrated help at Agape Village through the resources and services of Caritas Singapore's 23 member organisations, said Janet Ang, chairperson of the project's steering committee.

her in, and has no permanent home.

"I wanted to admit myself in an old folk's home but couldn't afford the fees," said the woman, who also has heart problems and diabetes.

Janet Ang, chairperson of the Agape Village Steering Committee, said: "When Agape Village opens, these families will be able to get access to integrated help through the resources and services of the 23 member organisations of Caritas Singapore. In every step, we will partner and journey with them, to escape the poverty cycle. We seek your support, donations and prayers to build Agape Village."

Agape Village, a one-stop social services hub for poor and marginalised persons, is being built at Lorong 8, Toa Payoh and is scheduled to be completed by mid 2015.

Agape is a Greek word that means selfless, unconditional love, and Agape Village seeks to provide help and support, regardless of race and religion for the physically disadvantaged, the poor, families in crisis,

The Catholic Church is building a one-stop social services hub to provide help and support to the physically disadvantaged, the poor, families in crisis, job-seekers, youth at risk, ex-prisoners, migrant workers and the intellectually challenged, regardless of race or religion. It needs to raise \$8 million more to hit the project's \$15 million fundraising target.

job-seekers, youth at risk, ex-prisoners, migrant workers and the intellectually challenged, among others. Its services include counselling, skills training and social enterprises.

The project will cost \$15 million and this Advent, Caritas Singapore is launching a fundraising campaign that will

run from Nov 30 until January 2014 in all parishes in Singapore.

The Agape Village donation brochures will be distributed in parishes over the weekends of Nov 30-Dec 1. You can send your donations via cheque or GIRO forms using the self-addressed envelopes provided. Online donations are also welcome, via SGGIVES at www.sggives.org/caritas (select "Agape Village - A Caritas Project" to donate).

Since fundraising began last Advent, \$7 million has been raised. That means another \$8 million is needed for the building fund, said Gordon Pinto, general manager of Agape Village.

The Agape Village team stresses the village has an "all hands on deck" approach, and it is hoped that Catholics and other persons of good will can donate, volunteer or contribute in any way they can, in large ways or small.

The ground-breaking ceremony and blessing of the project site was held on Sept 5 with Minister for Social and Family Development, Mr Chan



This Advent, show your love to those in need and the marginalised by making a donation to build Agape Village, our village of Love.

How to donate:

- Collect the brochures that will be distributed in the parishes in the weekend of Nov 30-Dec 1 and send your donation via cheque or GIRO using the self-addressed envelopes enclosed.

- Donate online via SGGIVES at www.sggives.org/caritas (select "Agape Village - A Caritas Project").

Some of the Caritas Singapore member organisations which will be operating at Agape Village include Catholic Welfare Services, Family Life Society, Abilities Beyond Limitations and Expectations (ABLE), Archdiocesan Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (ACMI), Boys' Town Singapore, Clarity Singapore, Morning Star Community Services, Roman Catholic Prison Ministry, Marine Parade Family Service Centre (Montfort Care), Faith and Light Community, Society of St Vincent de Paul, Catholic Lawyers Guild and Catholic Nurses Guild.

Chun Sing, as the guest of honour. On Oct 24, before work commenced, Vicar General Monsignor Ambrose Vaz blessed the construction workers.

In describing Agape Village as "a call to action, but more than that ... a call to live our faith in action", Archbishop William Goh said in a speech at the ground-breaking ceremony: "All of us who are called to Agape Village are here to serve our brothers and sisters in need. We stand in solidarity with them. We identify with them. This is not a centre for the poor but rather a centre of the poor. We partner the poor in addressing the many challenges that we face together as a society – destroyed marriages, broken families, unbridled addictions, unequal opportunities, social discriminations.

"We give not because we have more but rather because what we possess is not ours, this rightly belongs to our brothers and sisters too. The blessings that we have received from God are never meant for ourselves alone. We are stewards of God's graces and blessings for others."