

## Workshop Presentation

Topic: Social Capital and Volunteering

### Church Volunteering – Volunteers with a Mission

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#### Abstract

The Catholic Cathedral is one of the 54 parishes of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. In this parish, there is a team of volunteers called the Cathedral Volunteers Group (CVG) established to provide caring services to the elderly and the sick and also to the under-privileged people. Other than representing the parish to show care and concern to the recipients of service, all CVG members at the same time have a mission of bearing witness to the love of Jesus Christ to all humanity. Detailed information about the commencement and operation of the CVG are given below.

#### Commencement

The CVG was started by the Parish Pastoral Council in 2001, the International Year of Volunteers. The primary objective was to remind fellow parishioners the need to follow Jesus' example of "..... the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve....." and through helping others, to build up a caring community. The response to this appeal was overwhelming with more than 100 parishioners joining the CVG as members.

#### Management and Development

The CVG is managed by a core group of 10 to 15 volunteers, which is responsible for the liaison, training and development of volunteers. Equal emphasis is laid on equipping the volunteers technically and spiritually. Training programme includes : talks given by SWD officials and experienced social workers from Hong Kong Caritas; annual retreats conducted by Catholic priests (for spiritual development); workshop for volunteers and AGM for volunteers where they can experience solidarity, review their past performance and share their working experience; spiritual direction is also given during monthly core group meetings. To look for new job opportunities is an on-going task of the Core Group. There is also an Award System to recognize the contribution of volunteers.

## Types of Volunteer Services

### Long-term services

(i) *Caritas Evergreen Home at High Street, Western District*

This Home for the Aged has about 150 elders and most of them require great care. Our volunteers pay visits to individual elders regularly and sometimes assist to arrange outdoor activities for the elderly, for example, to have tea in a restaurant. In addition, handiwork teaching sessions and Bible sharing sessions are held twice a month.

(ii) *Concordia of Fu Hong Society in Shatin*

This is a home for about 10 mentally handicapped children. Regular visit is made in the third Sunday afternoon of each month. During the visit we play games with them and sometimes bring them out to have tea in a restaurant.

(iii) *Victoria Prison at Central District*

Our female volunteers give visits to the female prison inmates in one Sunday morning of each month and have prayer meetings with them individually.

(iv) *Caritas Elderly Centre – Central District*

CVG has agreed to support the centre by sending members to assist activities organized by them, e.g. free medical check-up for the elderly, and in the delivery of free soups to the elderly in the region once a week.

(v) *Private tuitions given to children of parents newly arrived from China*

Free tuitions are given at the Caritas Community Centre in the Western District. During each evening of Monday, Wednesday and Friday of every week, there are three to five volunteer tutors serving about ten to fifteen children of age group from ten to sixteen. Totally there are about fifteen members participating this kind of service as tutors. There is a summer break for them during June to August each year.

(vi) *Regular visits to the elderly and the sick in the Mid-level District*

Members of CVG would pair up to visit individual elder and the sick at their homes once a month.

### Short-term services

(i) Supporting various activities organized by the Parish Pastoral Council e.g.

- special religious ceremonies, social gathering and celebrating functions;
- (ii) Organising free medical check-up for the elderly parishioners;
  - (iii) Paying visits to other elderly homes; and
  - (iv) Organising Christmas gatherings at hospitals.
  - (v) Assisting fund raising on Flag Days for different charitable organisations;
  - (vi) Counting the donated coins collected for UNICEF;
  - (vii) Supporting annual volunteering activities promoted by Social Welfare Department, e.g. knitting of scarfs, making of paper flowers, and knitting of lucky knots for the elderly; and
  - (viii) Assisting to promote educational exchange programme in China, e.g. organizing Children Summer Camp for a primary school in Tongguan.

## Reflections

### Helping and caring for others

CVG is the first volunteers group set up among all the parishes of the Catholic Diocese in Hong Kong. Unlike the lay groups and organisations of parishes, we aim to extend more volunteer services to the community. Our objective is to carry out the mission of Christians through volunteer services. Through these services, we hope to show our care and concern to the needy citizens and not only to our parishioners. We wish to bear witness to the love of Jesus Christ and to bring His Gospel to more people. Besides, we intend to share our experience with other parishes so that they would consider to form similar volunteers groups for the merits as mentioned below.

### Services extended from parish to community

In respect of provision of volunteer services, CVG managed to serve some charitable organizations not only within the parish, e.g. Caritas Elderly Centre in Central, Caritas Evergreen Home and Caritas Community Centre in Western District, but also outside the parish, e.g. Concordia of Fu Hong Society in Shatin. Our services have also been extended successfully to the community and even outside Hong Kong e.g. to offer private tuitions to children of parents newly arrived from China, to sell flags on Flag Days, to organize Children Summer Camp for a primary school in Tongguan.

### Evangelization

For evangelization purpose, our female volunteers pay regular visits to the female prison inmates in Victoria Prison monthly and spread the Gospel to them. In another long-term service to Caritas Evergreen Home, we hold two spiritual sessions in each month with the elders and sharing the Bible with them. CVG has achieved another way of evangelization through recruiting some new members who are non-Christians. Most of them are friends or relatives of our members and are invited to participate our services. In this connection, our parish priest has given special permission in recruiting members not limited to Christians thus enabling us to spread the Gospel to them more closely through our services by showing care and love to others.

## Parish Social Concern Group Vs CVG

Normally, there is a Social Concern Group (SCG) for nearly all parishes of the Catholic Diocese. This SCG is responsible for the co-ordination and organisation of parish activities in order to care for and provide assistance to the poor and aged or less privileged people in our community. When we set up CVG, we thought there might be an overlapping of responsibilities and scope of work with the SCG. But now we can see a big difference between these two groups as shown in the table below.

	Parish Social Concern Group	Cathedral Volunteers Group
(i) composition of members	a committee of 8 to 10 parishioners	about 100 volunteers with a core group of 10 to 15 members responsible for overall management and administration
(ii) key responsibilities	co-ordination and organisation of parish activities concerning the caring of the less privileged members of the community normally on one-off basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• liaison, training and development of volunteers by the core group</li> <li>• delivery of volunteer services to charitable organizations and needy people</li> <li>• organising visits and providing caring services to the elderly, the sick and under-privileged people</li> </ul>
(iii) key areas of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• talks on topics concerning the community at large</li> <li>• irregular visits and short-term volunteer services to the concerned groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• training programmes and workshops for the volunteers</li> <li>• spiritual formation for the members</li> <li>• both long-term and short-term services to the concerned groups and charitable organizations.</li> </ul>
(iv) support of activities and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appeal for support from all parishioners of the parish</li> <li>• joint events with other lay groups / organizations of the parish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• direct support from CVG members</li> <li>• joint events with other lay groups / organizations</li> <li>• appeal for support from all parishioners of the parish and volunteers from other territories</li> </ul>

In brief, the big difference is that the SCG plays the prophetic role, focusing on the

study and research of certain social problems while CVG emphasizes on the delivery of volunteer services to the needy people either in small groups or individually, playing the servant role. In view that there are still some overlapping activities, we have invited key members of SCG to join the core group of CVG for a joint effort in the planning and organizing activities for the parish.

## Promotion of active participation of parishioners

During the initial stage, another concern on the set-up of CVG was human resource problem. There was a need to invite committed parishioners from certain lay associations to shoulder up this additional group as the core group members. However after operation for a few years, we managed to recruit many new members as the core group members and some of them were enthusiastic enough to join other lay groups and organizations of the parish in addition to CVG. So in the long run, the establishment of volunteers group would attract more new volunteers for the parish and as a result of becoming part of the whole volunteering network in the territory, we may see the opportunity of consolidating our experiences and expanding the scope of our voluntary service to a new horizon.

## Conclusion

The CVG is now in its 5<sup>th</sup> years operation. Clearly it is still in the infantile stage and there is a lot to learn before growing into maturity. We envisage that with the ageing population, the demand for voluntary service will continue to increase unabatedly. There is therefore a clear need to step up recruitment (and also training) programmes and adopt a more active approach to look for new job-opportunities for our volunteers. The present Regional Conference is indeed an ideal venue to broaden our outlook on the different issues on volunteering and a good chance to learn from the experiences of other well-established volunteer bodies both in Hong Kong and overseas. We are hopeful that the Regional Conference will raise the awareness of volunteerism in the area of church volunteering as a whole.