



Left: Panelists at the CHARIS forum. Above: Participants get to know about mission trips.

Sharing about missionary experiences at forum and fair

By Lorna O'Hara

The biennial CHARIS Humanitarian Forum and Fair saw several speakers sharing their experiences of mission trips.

About 780 people attended the event titled, One Mission. Many Borders. Love Multiplied, which was held at the Catholic Junior College auditorium on May 30.

In his opening address, Archbishop William Goh said that "a man must experience poverty to know poverty".

There are two types of poor, continued the archbishop. The first includes "those suffering from disasters and those in war-torn countries", while the second, are called the "new poor".

This includes "those who are lonely. The abandoned. The home-bound. The 'new poor' are those suffering from depression," he said.

"The great danger is if you're well off, your contact with the poor is very limited. You are not in touch with life."

"Get out of your seat! Go out!" he said.

Archbishop Goh also warned parents that "by shielding children from the reality of life, they aren't in touch with their own inner poverty and the poverty taking place in real life".

"Those who are materially poor are often spiritually rich," he added. "It is easier to feed the poor but for the rich, it's all about making money. They are afraid to take risks."

Following his address, Caritas Internationalis' humanitarian director Suzanna Tkalec, and Mr Willie Cheng, chairperson of the disaster relief committee of CHARIS, took to the stage.

Mr Cheng asked Ms Tkalec several questions about Caritas Internationalis' (CI) operations.

Ms Tkalec said that CI focuses on doing everything that's needed in a humanitarian crisis.

Following their dialogue, Msgr Enrique Figaredo, Apostolic Prefect of Battambang, Cambodia, gave a presentation.

Msgr Figaredo shared that when he was in Madrid a few years ago, he saw a painting by Joaquin Sorolla called Sad Inheritance. The painting portrayed

18, carrying a child while four other children tugged at her sarong.

Since then, SiGN has been raising funds to support a kindergarten's daily operations there.

Mr Irving Teo, chairman of Project Micah, said that when he was in the southern Shan state in Myanmar, he saw young children helping their parents to carry materials for building roads.

He and several volunteers are

"I went home feeling disturbed," she added.

Her group helps to equip scavenger children and their families living at the Payatas dumpsite with basic reading and writing skills.

Ms Yenni Suryani, country manager, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Indonesia said that CRS Indonesia serves "the people in the poorest places" such as in

Ms Tkalec encouraged her to find a job and use her skills to support the operations of CI.

CatholicNews spoke to several participants who were first-timers who attended the forum for the first time.

Ms Marie Goh, 36, said that "I am no longer going to wait for everything to be fine and dandy before I want to make a difference".

Ms Michelle Tan, 23, said that Archbishop Goh's talk struck her the most when "he mentioned the joy of love, going out there and how fortunate we all are".

After the forum, participants attended Mass and later visited a fair comprising 23 booths mostly showcasing the various CHARIS affiliates and their overseas mission work.

Mass

Mass was celebrated by Msgr Figaredo, Msgr Philip Heng and Fr Colin Tan.

During the homily, Msgr Figaredo said, "God is teaching us to go out" and help the poor.

"Even for those who are in Religious orders, we are here to work for the kingdom of God", not for ourselves, he added.

He then urged the crowd that it was because of God's love that they would be drawn to help the poor.

While on mission trips or when helping the poor, Msgr Figaredo said, "We have to help with... our love. We have to share with gratitude."

Quoting Mother Teresa, Msgr Figaredo concluded by sharing that through our actions in doing good, we hope that "people touched by us would see the face of God". □

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Ms Sherlyn Khong, a founding member of mission group acts29



Ms Yenni Suryani, country manager, Catholic Relief Services, Indonesia



Fr Frederick D'Souza, executive director, Caritas India

John of the Cross helping naked, disabled children who were playing on the beach.

"I was touched by this painting. I see so much beauty and so much suffering," he said.

In order to love the poor, you have to be kind, Msgr Figaredo added.

Panel discussion

Five panelists shared their experiences on mission work and how their organisations help the poor.

Mr Alfred Goh, from the Church of St Francis Xavier's mission group, Sowers in God's Name (SiGN), travelled to Paitan in Sabah, Malaysia. There, he saw a young mother around the age of

providing education for children through play, music and dance.

Ms Sherlyn Khong from acts29 said that at 19, while on her first trip to the Payatas dumpsite in the Philippines, a poor teenage boy told her, "I never knew you rich people would come here to help us poor people."

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— Archbishop William Goh

Papua New Guinea and West Timor so that they would be better prepared during natural disasters.

Fr Frederick D'Souza, executive director, Caritas India, said that he hopes that Caritas India can stop "the culture of silence where they [the locals] are exploited" and create "a culture where locals have rights".

Question-and-answer session

Msgr Figaredo joined the panelists on stage during the question-and-answer session.

One 13-year-old female participant asked if she needed to have a job or experience in order to join CI.