



Newsletter – June 2022

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Covid-19 in Singapore Overcoming the Challenges in the Endemic Situation

SEE

“...what is important in our reflection is to discern in what sense the new normal is good for us as an individual, community or society.” These are the words of Father Dominique in his reflection on 1 May 2022, International Labour Day and the Feast Day of St Joseph the Worker. For nearly 2 years, the world was stricken with the corona virus pandemic. Now countries have learnt to live with it.

Yes, the covid-19 situation is now endemic in nature in Singapore and most other countries. For example, in Singapore, wearing a mask outdoors is optional and many restrictions including a ban on travelling overseas or even to Malaysia has now been lifted. Due to the pandemic, our personal life, family life, social life as well as jobs and the Church have been greatly affected, sometimes a complete makeover. Father Dominique further added that “What makes the new normal a challenge is partly the fact that it forces us to change our habits...” He cautioned that “But the difficulty of changing does not mean that this change is bad in itself. On the contrary, sometimes these changes can be good for us.”

On 1 May 2022, a fine Sunday morning, at St Francis Xavier Major Seminary, the Christian Family and Social Movement of Singapore gathered about 30 members to celebrate International Labour Day and the Feast of St Joseph the Worker. While honouring St Joseph and the many lives that were sacrificed to make the 8 hours a day work schedule possible (and 8 hours of rest and 8 hours of personal development), much time was also spent by members in contemplating and discussing the effects of the covid-19 pandemic and the present endemic situation now known as the new normal primarily in Singapore.

For example, some members shared that the pandemic and the circuit-breaker helped in bringing families closer together. The pandemic provided a time for healing broken relationships and finding ways to get along with each other. It brought an opportunity for us to get closer to our own family members. At the same time, unfortunately many family ties became strained and some families broke up. At present, work-life balance has become blurred as we transform our homes into workplaces. There is no longer a clear office hours versus after office hours differentiation. On top of these challenges, in the new normal mental wellness and mental health issues have quickly caught the

attention of the various government agencies that then assiduously plan programmes to deal with these issues.

In this endemic world, a new economy known as the Gig Economy has gained strong foothold in Singapore. Gig workers generally operate independently under some basic simple contracts. They work more or less as informal workers in food delivery services, despatch riders, grab drivers, front-line staff, etc. Their working hours and conditions are flexible. Legal classification of gig workers is still being debated in many countries including Singapore. Many employers classify them as “independent contractors”. At the same time, labour organizations and non-governmental bodies are lobbying to classify them as “employees”. Why? This is because they need to have the bargaining rights to a basic minimum wage, over-time pay, sick leave, medical claims, Central Provident Fund contributions, etc.

Members also shared on the reality of how many sacrifices migrant workers make during this time. These workers show courage and fortitude by continuing to work even though they are far away from their loved ones. The last 2 years of the pandemic amplified not only their plight and dilemmas but also showed their stoic nature as workers. Now with the lifting of the covid-19 restrictions on travelling, these migrant workers relish the opportunities given to them to visit their loved ones back home.

Construction, Shipyard and Product Manufacturing sector staff have done their best with the limited manpower to keep their companies afloat. Industries like the semiconductor industry benefited during the last 2 years due to the increased demand for their products (a natural but unexpected consequence of increased use of digital services, mobile phones, computers and computer-related products). Pharmaceutical companies jumped to prominence as effective drugs were needed to vaccinate people and to treat covid patients. Now this medicine-related industry is poised to aid governments in keeping the covid cases as low as possible, effectively increasing their profit margin.

Before we conclude, let us examine briefly our faith journey, as individuals, our families and our Church. We are still fearful of the unexpected. Why? What has happened to our faith in God? As at the date of writing this article, no booking is required by all the Catholic Churches in Singapore for attending weekday and weekend masses. Capacities in these churches have been increased so that more Catholics can attend masses. Yet many are too comfortable with online masses and have either ignored or neglected to receive the Holy Communion. Here too, some members voiced out their views that generally now there is less reverence for God. But not all is lost. Many Catholics and non-Catholics have, at the same time, got closer to God and developed their spiritual lives and thus also maintain strong family relationships.

In conclusion, as Father Dominique said, we need to examine the change brought by the endemic situation now, i.e. to determine whether the change is good or bad for us. If good, embrace it. If bad, we should try to figure out “how to change it or lessen its effects.” He reminded the participants that the 2 questions we need to ask is “Is there a respect for human dignity? Is it contrary to the Gospel and the Social Doctrines of the Church?”

Article by Gabriel

Causes and Consequences

1. What are the causes and consequences of ignoring the rights of workers?
2. What are the causes of our resistance to changes brought by the endemic situation in Singapore? What will be the non-legal consequences if we do not embrace the changes?

JUDGE

1. What would Jesus advise us when we encounter the challenges in the endemic situation?
2. What do the Gospel and the Social Doctrines of the Church say in the above reality.
3. Do you think the saints faced similar challenges during their time? How did they overcome it? [Remember that there had been many dire situations in the past like the covid-19 pandemic].

ACT

1. What must I do during the challenges in the above reality?
2. How do I help those around me in facing the challenges?
3. As a Movement, how can we aid our members and our neighbours in the above reality? Are we doing anything now to facilitate their needs?

ANNOUNCEMENT

CFSM Singapore is planning an outing to St John's Island on Saturday 4 June 2022.

All members and their families are welcome to join this outing.

Your base group leader will provide you the further details in due course.