Joint pastoral letter on Home Affairs' Ministry May 26 statement:

'Justice must be seen to be done' – Mgr Yong and his priests

Vincent Cheng
Ng Bee Long
Kevin de Souza
Tang Lay Lee

My DEAR People of God and well-wishing friends,
The peace of the risen Christ be with you always,
We have been going through a very difficult time, full of anxiety and anguish, not knowing what is happening in our Church and to our Church.
I thank you for all your prayers and the assurance that you are supporting me and the Church with your prayers, fasting and sacrifices. You have not prayed, fasted and sacrificed in vain.
I thank especially all those who went to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Church to participate in the special Mass offered for our detained brothers and sisters and their families, relatives and friends (May 27). You conducted yourself admirably. Nobody could find fault with your behaviour although many including myself went there with some trepidation and apprehension.
On that occasion I asked you to pray for me and my priests as we were to gather the following day to consider a serious matter that concerns the whole Church and to issue a statement. The meeting which could have divided and polarised our priests brought about a better understanding among ourselves and unified us as we produced the following statement:

We refer to the statement from the Ministry of Home Affairs (May 26) regarding the investigation into a "clandestine communist network" and the arrest and detention of 16 persons, May 21.

Four of the 16 are full-time workers in Church work. They are: Vincent Cheng Kim Chuan, Executive Secretary of the Archdiocesan Justice and Peace Commission. Ng Bee Leng, full-time staff of the Catholic Centre for Foreign Workers (formerly the Geylang Catholic Centre). Tang Lay Lee, full-time staff of the Young Christian Workers' Movement. Kevin Desmond De Souza, full-time staff of the Catholic Students' Society of the Singapore Polytechnic.

Among the 16, there are also 6 voluntary workers in some of our Catholic organisations. They are: Mah Lee Lin (Chai Chee Catholic Centre), Teo Soh Leng (Catholic Centre for Foreign Workers), Kenneth Tang, Tan Tsin Seng and their respective spouses, Jenny Chin Lai Ching and Low Yit Leng (Justice and Peace Commission).

We are greatly perturbed at the arrests and the Ministry's statement. We are also concerned for those detained and their respective families.

We have been informed by the Ministry of Home Affairs that none of the tee has been detained because of his/her work in Catholic organisations, but because of their "possible involvement in a clandestine communist network".

The Catholic Church is totally opposed to Marxism/Communism which is contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The Catholic Church, however, must continue its mission of spreading its teachings on matters pertaining to justice as they apply to social, economic and political issues.

These teachings of the Church are part of our mission and tradition and have worldwide application. They do not derive from any one system of theology.

We affirm our confidence in and continued support for all the Catholic organisations mentioned in the Ministry's statement.

To the best of our knowledge, the full-time workers have been fully committed to the work of the Catholic organisations in which they served.

The six voluntary workers have generously contributed their time and talents to specific work in the Catholic organisation with which they were associated.

We hope and pray that justice will be done and be seen to be done.

We also hope the detainees will be treated justly and humanely.

Archbishop Gregory Yong
Titular Roman Catholic, Archbishop of Singapore

Thank you once again for remaining calm, supportive, prayerful. We have been assured that we can count on your support whenever we need it.

God keep us all faithful to Jesus, his way of life.

Your appreciative archbishop and priests,

Archbishop Gregory Yong and his priests.
May 30, 1987

Mgr Stanley Fernandez dies

Mgr Stanley Fernandez, secretary of Archdiocese of Gregory Yong, died May 21 at 21 in Mt Alvernia Hospital after a short illness.

Mgr Fernandez who held various positions in the Archdiocese was priest secretary of the Bishops' Conference in Malacca, Singapore and Brunei was admitted to Mt Alvernia Hospital Mar 8 with a liver complaint.

A few hours after his death his remains were transferred to the chapel of the Good Shepherd Seminary at Maymount.

He has been at the helm of the seminary for many years.

During the next two days, many came to pay their last respects to Mgr Fernandez. Among those who came were members of the Inter-Religious Organisation.

Archbishop Gregory Yong and Archbishop Emeritus Dominic Vendelberg led 70 priests at the consolament funeral Mass May 23 at the Good Shepherd Cathedral.

In his 10-minute homily Mgr Yong said many Catholics here in Singapore and Malaysia will remember him as their spiritual guide in the pilgrimages they have made to Rome, Fatima and the Holy Land.

Archbishop Yong also referred to Mgr Fernandez as much beloved by the Good Shepherd Sisters, because he was their faithful, serviceful and obliging chaplain for over so many years.

"We will miss his serviceful presence", Archbishop Yong said. "But we are gratified by the fact that he has gone to a better place to enjoy a better life in the midst of people Mgr Fernandez had admired, honoured and spoken well of here on earth."

Born in 1927, Mgr Fernandez was ordained priest in 1953 in the College General, the major seminary of Punggol. Prior to his ordination he spent a few months in St Louis church, Taiping gaining pastoral experience in pastoral training.

As a seminarian he was also on the staff of the Catholic News. He went through the terrible years of the Japanese-occupied Bahau with other seminarians and was happy to have survived.

* Continued on page 3
CORD helped groups cope with problems

CORD is not a "united front to further the Marxist conspiracy". The idea for CORD was initiated in 1983 when lay apostolate groups at the Catholic Welfare Services building in Waterloo Street were asked to shift from the third to the ninth floor. The groups got together to discuss problems that could arise from the shift, like the lack of office space.

This experience helped the groups involved to realise the need for an informal meeting to discuss their problems and to identify common areas of operation. CORD comprises representatives from the Justice and Peace Commission, Catholic Students' Society (Singapore Polytechnic), Student Christian Movement of Singapore (SCMS), Greyfriars Convent School, Young Christian Workers' Movement, Young Christian Students' Movement, and Catholic Family Movement, and the Joyful Vanguard Movement.

CORD was invited to join CORD because it is an ecumenical movement which includes Christian of all denominations and Catholics in its activities. All eight groups shared common problems and concerns like wanting to relate faith to life. There were also possibilities for the groups to work collectively in seeking solutions to common problems like the lack of information on Church and society.

The groups that had stressed that the co-ordination be informal and that it was not a question of a structure. All of the groups in CORD are autonomous organisations and CORD does not in any way infringe on this freedom.

The objectives of CORD are:

- To promote understanding and co-operation among representatives
- Exchange experiences and identify common areas of work
- Constructively work for a "formation and witnessing" of CORD's means to build up mutual understanding and support.

CORD's objectives are to promote religion and development through our commitment to the Gospel, the Bible and the teachings of the Church.

Sozua were asked by CORD representatives to assist in the co-ordination and the work was to co-ordinate the dates and times of the meetings, which were held twice in two months.

CORD is not controlled by any individual. The agenda of the meetings are on a rotation basis. Vincent Cheng and Kevin de Souza have been responsible for proposing their ideas to the others in CORD. All representatives contributed to the discussion based on their experiences in the individual movements.

The representatives of the CORD are aware that the objectives of the CORD is to promote religion and development through our commitment to the Gospel, the Bible and the teachings of the Church.

The commission firmly believes that it has not been manipulated or misled by anyone or by any one form of ideology.

Commission promotes justice and peace

In which the Commission was involved in the action of CORD (Coalition of organisations for Religion and Development) which brought about the formation of lay apostolate groups. This is in response to the Vatican II Document of Apostolic Letter.

"Catholics are to be keen on collaborating with all genuine people of good will in the promotion of all that is true, just, holy, all that is worthy of love. They are to enter into dialogue with them, approaching them with understanding and courtesy, and to search for means of improving the cooperation among institutions along the lines of the Gospel."

Among the signs of the times, particularly worthy of note is the ever growing and indispensable sense of solidarity of all peoples. It is the task of the lay apostolate to take pains in developing this sense and transforming it into a really effective and fruitful union." (19)

The name CORD was chosen, as a cord symbolically represents a string binding all the groups together in a very effective manner.

The Commission provides resources to all Church groups and lay apostolate organisations. One such co-ordinating activity is...

Rechrours

- In all 0N request
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THe Catholic Centre for Foreign Workers (formerly known as the Ceylang Catholic Centre) was opened in October 1980 with the objective of making the Church present among sectors of the population that have no contact with her.

A great number of foreign workers, especially Malaya, were staying in the neighbourhood in Ceylang, where the Centre was first set up. Many of the foreign workers were young and single.

Among the first volunteers were Teo Soh Leng and Tan Teo Seng. Although they were not Catholic, they were prepared to work at building up a little more solidarity, justice and love for these foreign workers.

Goodwill

They were, therefore, doing the work of the Church. We believe that Jesus Christ is made present whenever and wherever men and women of goodwill are working for the values of the kingdom such as solidarity, justice, love for and with the poor and underprivileged.

Both Soh Leng and Tee Seng were involved in conducting classes (English and music), organizing social functions and outdoor activities. Sessions were also organised for the young workers to learn about the Labour Laws in Singapore so that they could better protect their environment. However, Soh Leng discontinued her services in 1982, while Tan Teo Seng continued his work.

involved in the Ceylang Catholic Centre, Kenneth Tanong taught an English class once a week for four months in 1983.

During this time Fr G. Aroracena was involved in prison work with a team of volunteers. The group also tried to extend their concern to prisoners who were coming out of prison.

Occasionally, ex-prisoners were housed at the Centre.

In 1981, a “Crisis Centre” was set up at the Centre by a group of volunteers with the objective of helping and housing people in trouble who had nowhere to go at night. This programme stopped in 1984.

In 1984, the whole prison programme was shifted to Chai Chee Catholic Centre and a half-way house was established there for ex-prisoners and drug addicts under the responsibility of Fr Aroracena.

Half-way house

Towards the middle of 1984, a new programme was started at the Centre, housing for ex-prisoners as well as a centre for counselling, information and legal aid, whenever necessary. Lawyer Soh Leng was also involved as a volunteer in her professional capacity at the express request of Fr Aroracena; to represent male prisoners in most of their action.

By December 1984, the workload was so heavy that the Centre had to engage another full-time worker, Ng Bee Lee, who is employed by the Catholic Welfare Services.

In February 1987, the Centre, which by then had an average of 10 to 15 male youths, was able to afford the exercise of a part-time worker. After a year, the Centre was able to persuade the Catholic Welfare Services to make a full-time worker, and take over the Centre.

The Centre, therefore, managed to buy the building at 72 Jurong East Street, and move into the new premises at the end of 1988.

Centre makes Church present among foreign workers

The Centre has decided to revive the programme for Malaysian workers with a new group of volunteers. Mah Lee Lim was one of them.

The Centre was to carry out the Chai Chee Catholic Centre as the half-way house was transferred to another place under the responsibility of another priest.

Mah Lee Lim was involved in the Catholic Centre briefly, to organise recreational activities for the various domestic workers who were meeting in Ceylang.

Legal aid

The domestic workers’ programme is to provide foreign workers with counselling problems they face with employers: legal aid and general counselling; information and help with immigration and Labour Ministry procedures; and wherever necessary.

The Centre also functions as a community centre for domestic workers. The Centre also helps them to make a report for one reason or another.

The Centre has assisted the Ministry of Labour to adjust a number of Portuguese workers, who, otherwise, could have been very detrimental to the international image of Singapore as well as the Ministry unintentionally making it practically impossible for a foreign worker to seek redress.

The existence of the Centre shows that Singapore, while having to control her population of foreign workers, is also concerned about their human and social needs.

The Centre has asked the foreign workers to ask for advice on their situation or seek information or just vent their frustrations. They believe that by listening to them, they avoid many conflicts and disruptions in the families that are employing them.

Sometimes, however, by the time it reaches us, the damage to the relationship is beyond repair. The Centre tries to help in that situation to terminate the contract as fast as possible by mediation or an offer to transfer to another employer.

This work of the Centre and programme is vital to deal with the cases that come to us. At no time did any of the volunteers or full-time staff of the Centre have the possibility of doing, at the Centre, anything otherwise than what they were supposed to do in accordance with the objectives of the Centre.

Daily Contact

If Ng Bee Lee was to explain labour problems, how was she to do it? The answer was simple: in English. The Centre has been providing an English course for the Centre is available to anybody for investigation. She was involved in facilitating the meetings of a group of foreign domestic workers at the Centre on Sundays.

She attended these meetings when the group started functioning by itself early this year. That is not the behaviour of an agitator.

She also represented the Centre at the Coalition of Organisations for Religion and Development at the Ministry of Labour. The Centre caters to the needs of foreign workers. If all the people mentioned above were keen on getting into the political scene the common sense would suggest that involvement with foreign workers would not be the best way to build up a power base.

Their status in Singapore does not allow them the freedom they can be repatriated at any time. Besides, being on probation in Singapore temporarily, their interest in the local scene is limited.

If the alleged aim was simply to stir up trouble, how was it done and what are the legal procedures? If our procedures are very set and we are in daily contact with the Ministry of Labour, there are no grounds to suggest that the Centre, in some way, is manipulated by anybody.

If all those were to be the result of a conspiracy, the Centre has been operated by a group of workers keen to seize power in Singapore, it would have been at best a very futile, inefficient and unproductive exercise.

Vincent Cheng worked full-time at the Centre from June 1982 to June 1983, to co-ordinate the volunteers and the different activities. He stopped all activities at the Centre in 1984 because of his involvement with the Justice and Peace Commission.

William Yap was never many problems. Vincent Cheng was involved at the beginning of the programme as a volunteer. By this time, due to a lack of volunteers, the programme for Malaysian workers was gradually reduced to one English night class.

The Ceylang Catholic Centre became a refuge for domestic workers as well as a centre for counselling, information and legal aid, whenever necessary. Lawyer Soh Leng was also involved as a volunteer in her professional capacity at the express request of Fr Aroracena; to represent male prisoners in most of their action. By December 1984, the workload was so heavy that the Centre had to engage another full-time worker, Ng Bee Lee, who is employed by the Catholic Welfare Services.

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Catholic organisations

IN A Ministry of Home Affairs statement, March 26, in conjunction with the arrests of the 16 people by the Internal Security Department, a lay organisation of the Catholic Church were named as being part of the recent announcement of Organisations for Religion and Development (CORID).

This organisation was accused of having a "front to further the Manist conspiracy". We give a short account of each of the organisations involved. The information is taken from a publication "Manist Road - Catholic Lay Apostolate Commission of Singapore".

Catholic Students' Society of Singapore Polytechnic (CSS-SP)

The CSS-SP was formed to help Catholic students live a meaningful Christian life during their years at the Polytechnic.

The CSS-SP concentrates on traditional Church activities like Masses, prayer meetings, rosary devotion, talks on faith and social gatherings to foster...

They reflect on their values and aspirations in their working and living situations in the light of universal human and Christian values and plan how they can live up to the demands of these values. They take individual and collective actions in accordance with these plans.

They also meet for leadership training and faith formation in study camp, training sessions and other activities. The emphasis of the group is to foster among their members an active concern for their fellow workers which is expressed especially in their response to unjust situations in their workplaces.

Another area for CSS is to strengthen its links with the students' union. Over the past months, CSS has worked together with the students' union to take up joint action on issues facing students, eg. raising of tuition fees.

YCW provides the following services and activities:

- legal counselling and basic labour rights education;
- tuition in the English language;
- library services;
- singing and indoor recreational activities;
- informal sessions for sharing of work and other problems and experiences.

The emphasis of the Centre is spread of the 12-hour shift system.

In 1984, the YCW studied the major changes made by the Employment (Amendment) Act 1984. It produced a bulletin for circulation to its members. The bulletin covered the implications of these changes, for example the relaxation of the limit to long hours of work and the lifting of the restrictions on night work and of the ban on underground work for women workers.

In 1985/86, the YCW studied the effects of mass lay workers and published a booklet for private circulation to church members. It concluded with the YCW 1986 Labour Day Celebration on the theme: "We have the right to and we want to work".

In 1987, the YCW carried out a month-long programme of reflection and activities culminating in a celebration gathering on Labour Day. The theme of this year: "We want to work for a world where the identity of the family life and the role that the church plays in society.

The Joyful Vanguard

The Joyful Vanguard has its roots in a French movement which started in 1968. It was named to enable children to be actively involved in building God's Kingdom. The movement wishes to:

- enable children to blossom into men and women who really have a heart for others;
- help children become more aware of the joy, happiness, friendship, generosity they bear within themselves and that they may share it with others;
- help children whenever they are in need of help in any situation, in which they are by themselves;
- help children serve the family they belong to with love and grace in total dedication to God.

To help them do this, groups of children are formed in schools or parishes to share among themselves events that mark their lives and to celebrate with others.

There are also annual camps, a rally and activities at a national level.

The persons who accompany the children during their meetings are youth or adult promoters. Their role is to support and encourage the children to articulate their vision of the world, their problems, needs and desires and to change them to act accordingly.

The Vatian Chonset