
SOLIDARITY AS A KEY FOR BETTER ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE MACAU DIOCESE AND OTHER LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

团结是促进经济和社会正义的关键：
澳门教区及其他当地组织的贡献

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Until now, during his pontificate Pope Francis has written three encyclicals: *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), *Laudato Si'* (2015), and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020). The central themes of each are: “We are all missionaries” in *Evangelii Gaudium*; “Man as a part of Natural Environment” in *Laudato Si'*; and “Fraternity and Solidarity” in *Fratelli Tutti*.

Searching for the underlying message of these three encyclicals, we realize that they convey the “Way” (*El Camino*, in Spanish) Pope Francis has chosen to show us guiding our own mission in life: achieving happiness in the context of Catholic Church teachings, contributing to the society’s well-being. In what follows I will address three questions about the way the teachings of the three encyclicals are followed in Macau on a daily basis.

First question is: How does the social and pastoral work of the Macau Diocese contribute to improving the Macau people's solidarity? (*Evangelii Gaudium*).

Nowadays the Macau Diocese has nine parishes, fourteen pastoral services (related to youth, the elderly, migrants and others), several religious orders and congregations, eighteen

social assistance services, the Saint Joseph University and catholic schools, two predominant communication and press organizations (Media Diocesan Center and *O Clarim* – Macau Catholic Weekly), eighteen lay associations, eight diocesan commissions, the Catholic Movement for Family, the Arts and Cultural Center, and the Macau Catholic Culture Association. In their own way, all these entities provide services on a daily basis to all of society (not only for Catholic people). The main goal is to improve people's quality of life.

The social activity of the Macau Diocese is not possible without the contribution of private companies – some of them highly subsidized by the Macau Government – and people's action.

There are several examples of companies that give a big contribution to improve the people's quality of life: the Macau six casino operators (SJM, Melco, Galaxy, MGM, Sands China and Wynn), CEM (energy supplier), CTM (communications), Macao Water (water supplier), Kiang Wu Hospital, local universities, *Ou Mun Newspaper* and lawyers' companies. CEM has ambassadors that organize social activities to help people in need. Kiang Wu Hospital has a foundation that provides free health care, food, clothes, and others. Local universities offer scholarships. *Ou Mun Newspaper* held the "Walk for a Million" – the biggest annual fund raising activity in Macau; and, some lawyers' companies work *pro bono*.

In terms of people's action, there are thousands of local associations and several groups and individual philanthropic initiatives held by different organizations. In the Macau streets, it is very easy to find public infrastructures sponsored by the Lions Club or the Rotary International.

On a daily basis, the Diocese of Macau, along with private companies and people's action contribute to improving the Macau people's quality of life. Sometimes they work together

on solidarity events, organised by professional staff and volunteers. For example, on the 9th of October 2020, *O Clarim* newspaper (owned by the Diocese of Macau) published an interview with Nelson António, the Macau Catholic Scouts Group General Chief. At the same time, Nelson António works for CEM (the Macau energy supplier).

The second question is : Will the Macau Government keep supporting firms and sectors with low profit margins in order to protect thousands of jobs? (*Laudato Si'*).

The encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* (2015) not only mentions the way human beings should be integrated into Nature but also how they should live in society and deal with the economy and financial issues. One of the main ideas of *Laudato Si'* is that the economy should not be based only on calculations of profit. "Is it realistic to hope that those who are obsessed with maximizing profits will stop to reflect on the environmental damage which they will leave behind for future generations" (*Laudato Si'*, 2015, no. 189). Recently, the Macau economy has become highly dependent on gaming. To diversify the economy and keep the unemployment rate very low, the Macau Government subsidizes other sectors (even if they are not profitable) related to Culture, Sports, MICE (conferences, seminars, forums, exhibitions, etc.), Philanthropy, Health Rehabilitation and Environment.

There are several examples of entities subsidized by the Macau Government: Culture: AFA (Art For All), Ox Warehouse; Sports: various sports clubs; Philanthropic: *Caritas* Macau, Macau Red Cross, Macau Holy House of Mercy, Lions, Rotary; Health Rehabilitation: ARTM (drug abuse, prevention and treatment); Environment: ANIMA, MASDAW (animal care and protection). Almost all Macau NGOs have professionals and volunteers specialized in

several areas. That is only possible because the Macau Government supports their activities with funds and expertise. The Macau NGOs help local government to deal with social problems that affect thousands of Macau residents and non-residents employed here, and give professional formation to hundreds of workers.

In a certain way, national economies need not be focused only on developing the for-profit sector. Nowadays lots of big companies around the world are in the red, their workers are getting fired, and the countries are facing new social problems. One of the solutions to address the current situation is to create a platform of cooperation organised by national and local governments, NGOs and private companies. The Catholic Church could have an essential role in this kind of social platform. “Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds” (*Laudato Si'*, 2015, no. 219).

The third question is: How does the Diocese of Macau, *Caritas*, Holy House of Mercy, Red Cross and other organizations work together to assist all people in need, specifically in periods like the current crisis? (*Fratelli Tutti*)

Recently, the Diocese of Macau, *Caritas*, Holy House of Mercy, the Red Cross and other organizations have signed several protocols. The following are the protocols signed in the past few months, mainly to face Covid-19:

- 1- *Caritas* Macau – *Caritas* Portugal – *Caritas* from other countries (collecting funds for masks, gloves and antiseptic gel);
- 2- *Caritas* Macau – Macau Holy House of Mercy (housing for non-resident workers and fundraising for Chinese mainland workers);
- 3- *Caritas* Macau – Macau Catholic Scouts Group (annual food collection);

4- *Caritas* Macau – Macau six gaming operators, banks, public services concessionaries (CEM, CTM and Macao Water) and local associations (money donations for *Caritas* Macau);

5- Macau Red Cross – Macau Government Health Bureau (Covid-19 exams);

6- Macau Red Cross – local associations as *Tong Sin Tong* (masks to send to Inner China);

7- Macau Red Cross – Macau Government (medical assistance in Cultural and Sports events);

8- Macau Red Cross – Macau Banks (installation of defibrillators near ATM machines);

9- Macau Holy House of Mercy – Government Welfare Bureau (opening and managing a kindergarten, an elderly house, a rehabilitation centre for blind persons and a social shop that already helped almost 28 thousand families).

If Macau society keeps working as it has until now, it can achieve a new paradigm of the economy in the short term. In a certain way, the Chinese Special Administrative Region is already at a new level in terms of social welfare. The Macau Government, public and private companies, NGO's and associations give their contribution to the society in different areas, employing manpower and helping the people in need. All together help to protect the Family as an institution and to guarantee a better future for the young generation.

Pope Francis wrote: “The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity

still has the ability to work together in building our common home. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest. Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded" (*Laudato Si'*, 2015, no. 13).



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