



**The Community of Charity and Social Services
[CCSS]
(Tu Đoàn Bác Ái Xã Hội)**

is a Society of Apostolic Life of the Roman Catholic Church founded by Most Reverend Paul Nguyen Thanh Hoan, Bishop of the Diocese of Phan Thiet, Vietnam. Members profess the Three Evangelical Counsels of Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience. Similar to Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity, members of the Community of Charity and Social Services also profess a fourth vow, that of serving the poor in charity.

The following are taken from our Constitutions:

GOAL OF THE COMMUNITY

CONSECRATED LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY

***LIFE OF BROTHERHOOD/
SISTERHOOD IN COMMUNITY***

THE COMMUNITY SERVES THE POOR

THE COMMUNITY PROCLAIMS THE GOSPEL



GOAL OF THE COMMUNITY

“For the love of Christ compels us...” (2 Cor. 5:14)

1. The ultimate Love of Christ, the Love of God Himself, is endless space that covers all creation, which illumines the hearts of mankind. Yet this love also demands something special from mankind, from each person. The amazing spiritual experience of Saint Paul speaks to us: “...that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:15). Saint Francis Xavier asserts: “God is the God of the hearts of mankind.” We are created to love Him and to live with Him forever.

Saint Paul recognized the gentle compulsion and strong love that compelled him to dedicate his whole life to respond to “...the love of Christ that compels us...” (2 Cor. 5:14).

God loves me, reserves his heart for me, like a shepherd who gathers his flock together in the wilderness in order to find his lost sheep in the night. Such love is truly an invitation that is profoundly touching, a waiting moment of God the Father, an endless space that allows me to respond within whatever circumstance, place, or time. “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4-5).

Therefore, the goal of the Community of Charity and Social Services is the love of Christ itself. Such love is the model, the light that illumines our entire life, the strength for all of our activities, thoughts, words, and actions. Such love is the ultimate model and goal for the hope of the hearts of the young, ripe fruit for the aged, and the unending song for our entire pilgrimage, until we meet Him in heaven. “... It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” (Gal. 2:20).

2. The goal of charity will be purified by the Gospel of Christ, which is the Gospel of love. The unswerving filial fidelity gives glory to God the Father through “the Beloved Son” (Matt. 3:17). His words and actions, His humble attitude of service, His kindness, His merciful forgiveness of sinners, His respectful compassion toward the poor, disabled, uneducated, outcasts are the most invaluable lessons for all the members of the Community of Charity and Social Services.

3. The death of Jesus on the cross has embraced all the sufferings of humanity and is the mystery of salvation that brings humanity to a new heaven and a new earth. Such is the symbol of the ideal and profound love of God. Members of the Community of Charity and Social Services always focus all their actions of selfless dedication on the goal of spreading the Gospel of Salvation to all mankind.

4. The goal of charity is inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit, which is the spiritual strength that nourishes and leads all the actions of the Community. Therefore, members of the community always thirst to receive the Holy Spirit daily.

The Spirit gives life (Jn. 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6), and this same Spirit came upon Jesus on the first day of his public ministry (Lk. 4:18). This is the mission of love.

Upon the cross prior to expiring, Jesus commended His Spirit to God the Father so that the Spirit could be given to the disciples to become witnesses of Christ's life and resurrection in an enriching way (Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 11). During Pentecost, Christ gave the Spirit to the disciples, which led them on their way of spreading the Gospel to all corners of the world.

The Holy Spirit enables the community to unite and to dedicate their lives for the service of their brothers and sisters. The Spirit heals and saves. The Spirit is the source of strength for all activities, as well as for the creation of the community so that its members may recognize all people as brothers and sisters, and to assist them unconditionally, especially in its mission to proclaim the Gospel.

5. The mission of the community is like the mission of the Church, which has its source in Christ: "As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world" (Jn. 17:18).

Therefore, the community renders its service after the example of Christ: "...To bring glad tidings to the poor..." (Lk. 4:14-21) and to embrace the proclamation of the Gospel and the developments of humanity as two objectives that go hand in hand (TD LOAN BAO TIN MUNG 25, 31....on Proclamation of the Gospel, 25:31), in the spirit of unity with all the people

of God who are longing to serve humanity, especially the poor, the disabled, the worried, the forgotten.

To execute this call the community will always commit its obedience to the leadership of its local Bishop.

6. The community carries out its activities under the patronage of Blessed Mother Mary who cooperated with Christ in God's plan of salvation and who led the Church to receive the Holy Spirit, which initiated the plan to spread the Gospel to all parts of the world.

We entrust our goal of love to Mary our Mother so that through her example of faith, hope, and charity she may enlighten and support us in our journey with her to proclaim the Gospel of salvation of Christ.

Saint Joseph, protected the family of Nazareth, nurturing and guiding Jesus until he reached adulthood. The Community of Charity and Social Services embraces St. Joseph as our spiritual father to protect the community and to teach all members of the community to become disciples of Christ.

CONSECRATED LIFE





1. The Community of Charity and Social Services unites its brotherly/sisterly love to serve with daily prayers, including:

-Uniting our daily sacrifices with the Sacrifice of the Mass by consecrating our life daily as offering love.

-Uniting our ministries with Christ in the Eucharist like the bread that is shared with humanity through our daily acts of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

-Uniting our time of ministry and rest to examine our actions with our goal illumined by the light of the Gospel, as the disciples once gathered around Jesus after days of service. Members of the Community of Charity and Social Services attend a monthly retreat together.

-Uniting ourselves with the Rosary as a prayer taught by Mary our Mother, a prayer that enlightens our life of ministry in the mystery of love, and brings about the successes of the services of the community under the gentle patronage of our Mother.

2. The following are the virtues of the Gospel that are needed for purification of ourselves and bring about the success of our apostolic activities.

The virtue of Christian Charity:

This is the leading virtue and the mother of all virtues which each member of the community chooses to be his/her goal in life. Members will purify this virtue with trust and devotion, focusing their entire attention on constructing their life according to the image of Christ who is full of love and compassion.

Therefore, members of the Community of Charity and Social Services purify their hearts with the full human traits of Christ, demonstrating the following qualities:

2.1 To respect human dignity

Each person is an individual and is inviolable, because he/she is the image of God. With the call to become children of God, individuals will also share in the glory of Christ. Therefore, we must avoid all attitudes, actions, and words that may offend others. Each person has the freedom to live one's life with God's grace, with rationality and wisdom that seek the truth, with a good conscience that leans toward goodness, and with a thirst for endless happiness. Thus, we must respect the freedom of individuals, so that they can perfect themselves.

Other persons can only assist them and provide them with counseling without forcing their own decisions on them.

2.2 To be sympathetic and tolerant

a. We must be sympathetic toward the circumstances of each person. We must not force any conditions, even spirituality, upon others without paying attention to each person's situation.

b. We must be tolerant toward those who offend us or who act wrongly, “...Learn from the Father who is compassionate”; learn from Jesus who is “... meek and humble of heart...” (Matt. 11:29).

2.3 To manifest a special love toward the poor, the hungry, the naked, those who are sick, those who have no means to live their lives with human dignity, and those who are outcasts because they are useless to society or because life’s circumstances force them to be less fortunate.

2.4 To eradicate from society all forms of inhumane treatments: domestic violence, abortion, addiction to drugs... Yet always show respect toward those trapped in these situations.

2.5 To support a society of brotherhood, being sensitive toward those afflicted by disasters and whose lives are threatened. When necessary we must assist those victims who need our help.

Today, the environment of the earth is being destroyed to the point of severely threatening the life of humankind. Therefore, we must cooperate with society to protect the environment and to assist those in impoverished areas secure clean water.

We must support the development of the wholeness of the human person in accord with the social teachings of the Church.

To fully carry out the virtue of charity, members of the Community of Charity and Social Services must enrich themselves with the following virtues for their spiritual lives:

Three Evangelical Counsels

2.3 Spirit of Poverty:

Christ lived His life in the spirit of poverty, because of His love for humanity, so as to forget their sins, and did not hesitate to offer His power and strength to the point of sacrificing His own life to save them.

He also lived a life of real poverty, poor in material things so as to share in the life of those who are filled with sufferings on earth.

Members of the Community of Charity and Social Services must form themselves in accord with the two means of poverty after the example of Christ: to be poor in spirit and in material things.

Poverty in spirit brings about the spirit of abandonment of one's life to the Father. We must live so as to serve all people with love and without conditions, with an attitude of humility, with the spirit of joy and gentleness. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3).

Poverty in material things goes hand in hand with poverty in spirit, which means not to wish to be wealthy in accumulating money, since we have abandoned our life to God. On the other hand, we must maintain moderate lives with sufficient means to serve. We must adapt to the struggles of the poor whom we serve. "Blessed are you who are poor..." (Lk. 6:20).

2.7 Chastity and Celibacy

In order to love God perfectly and to serve humanity wholeheartedly, members of the Community of Charity and Social Services freely choose to embrace celibacy and chastity so that our hearts can easily be lifted up to the "transcendental love" of Christ and to live our life of mystical union with Him perpetually.

To choose to embrace a life of temperance does not mean to look down on all that belongs to the body, but is an act of consecration in the name of love.

2.8 Spirit of Obedience

Jesus Christ has come into the world in a spirit of ultimate obedience, obedient to death, death on the cross. As in the initial aspiration, "I come to do your will, O God" (Heb. 10:7).

He was conscious of this obedience as a fundamental way of life that cannot be reduced under any pressure or circumstance. "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work" (Jn. 4:34).

To freely enter the community, to choose the objective of the community, and to accept the life of the community, are all signs of God's providence over our lives in His love. Obedience in the community is obedience to the will of God. Members must wholeheartedly carry out the spirit and constitution of the community in order to build a strong community and to embrace until the end the love of Christ as our objective.

Of course, when a member of the community is chosen to lead the community, let us see him/her as a representative to carry out the will of God. Yet, in the love of Christ, to be in a position of authority means to serve rather than to oppress; hence, when one has to exercise this authority, there needs to be dialogue, communication, and reconciliation with one another. A person who accepts this responsibility is to accept it with all the spirit of responsibility and creativity.

The spirit of service is our daily sacrifice, a Mass of our life being offered to God, our sincere heart that transforms our life into a hymn of praise and glorifying God. The vow of obedience is an awesome virtue of worship, imitating Christ who was obedient to death, death on a cross (Phil. 2:8).

2.9 Spirit of Detachment

All the members will learn from the spirit of detachment of Christ as he has taught us with these words: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Mk. 8:34; Matt. 16:24; Lk. 9:23).

The act of denying oneself comes from His love, since Christ wanted to live for the will of God the Father so as to save humanity. Members of the Community of Charity and Social Services live the Gospel in imitation of Christ who is journeying with us, and we are ready to receive His instructions. We read the Gospel each day in order to pray over it and to act on it.

2.10 Spirit of Service

To serve is the goal of Christ's saving life. "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45).

Members of the Community of Charity and Social Services will create for themselves a spirit of dedicated service with fruitful results, as they act as humble servants and conduct themselves as loving people unconditionally, especially toward the poor, those afflicted with illnesses, and those who are the outcasts of society. "When you have done all you have been commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.'" (Lk. 7:10).

LIFE OF BROTHERHOOD/ SISTERHOOD IN COMMUNITY





1. To carry out the love of Christ, which is the objective of communal life and our life of service, the Community of Charity and Social Services determines its own charism as an extended spiritual family, and looks upon each other as brothers and sisters, as Jesus has confirmed, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it” (Lk. 8:21).

2. It is the Word of God and God’s will that are summarized in Christ’s love lived out in his entire life, even to death on a cross.

Before He died, Jesus knelt down and washed his disciples’ feet, teaching them: “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 15:12) as a way of serving one another.

3. The love of the community foremost is carried out in the spirit of unity, to become one as Jesus prayed for his disciples: “... So that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you” (Jn. 17:21).

4. This unity requires that all members wholeheartedly embrace brotherly charity, united to build the community, and to avoid all divisions and frictions. We must shun all attitudes and behaviors that can cause each other injury. We must always exercise charity in unity.

5. This unity is to be executed in a spirit of observance of the rules, to obey the rules that govern our daily lives, the hours designated for prayers, meals, work, study, rest, etc. accordingly.

6. This unity does not deny our differences in our local upbringing, our character, our natural skills, our health, or our educational background. All of us are to be united in one common goal and are to accept each other with our own weaknesses. Whoever falls often needs our greater love (Lk. 6:28).

7. This unity is carried out in the spirit of love and in the sharing of our responsibilities. Each person, according to his/her ability, is responsible for the tasks given by the community in a spirit of unconditional service. No one is to view his/her position as an opportunity to glorify oneself. Responsibility accompanies authority, and they are means to express our love in unity.

8. The spirit of united love seeks to foster an honest and open disposition of the members to trust one another and to avoid suspecting the intentions of each member. If a member creates misunderstanding, there needs to be dialogue and communication in order to understand each other more and to be forgiving when misunderstandings arise. We must avoid all loud verbal arguing and words that lead to division, which can destroy the dignity and reputation of one another. We must avoid at all cost attitudes of revenge, jealousy, and despising each other.

9. This unity also requires us to protect and look after one another and to avoid telling others of our communal internal affairs. We eat from the same tree; we must protect that same tree. When others outside the community give negative criticism, we must accept it humbly and inform one another in the community so that we may avoid harmful perceptions from others.

10. The grace of the Holy Spirit is the source of brotherly/sisterly love which compels us to pray for one another, especially to pray for those whom

we are naturally not drawn to. The Holy Spirit comes to us in prayer and is our first gift when we pray (Lk. 11:13).

11. The first Thursday of each month will be dedicated to praying for the community, for all the priests and religious men and women in the diocese and for our benefactors throughout the world. There will be a Mass and one-hour Holy Hour in the evening for these intentions. Everyone is encouraged to attend.

12. To live together as a spiritual family, let us look upon this as our pledge to work together to fulfill our calling, that is, to love one another so that we may love all people. Hence, let us be ready to unite ourselves to those who do not share our vision, that is, those from other religious communities. Let us be united in fidelity to our calling until the end.

THE COMMUNITY SERVES THE POOR

The poor are a special focus of the love of God. The Community of Charity and Social Services always follows the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the teachings of Church leaders on social services.

In its pastoral constitution *The Church in the Modern World*, the Council affirms:

“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest bonds” (*Gaudium et Spes*, p. 1).

Indeed humanity now more than ever achieves progress in science and technology in all aspects. Yet suffering, illness, and hunger increase each day. The life of the people is wounded and threatened repeatedly.

In his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* our late Pope John Paul II affirmed: “Man is the way for the Church.” With this affirmation, members of the Community of Charity and Social Services see clearly their focus of service is the person as the object to love, serve, and share in their life.

In his apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* the same pontiff strongly stated that the new century and new millennium begin to see and wish to see more clearly Christian dedication in service to the poorest among us. If we are truly rooted in adoration of Jesus Christ, we must recognize Him in the faces of our neighbors whom Jesus identified with himself: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me” (Matt. 25:35-36).

In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI also emphasizes that performance of charitable works is as equally valuable as proclaiming the Gospel and performing the sacraments. He writes: “The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being” (p. 25).

With the spirit of the message presented above, the Community of Charity and Social Services directs its activities according to the following goals, which is also the spirit of Caritas International:

1. To be in solidarity with the poor and to serve them selflessly in accord with the teachings and examples of Jesus is the demand of Christian charity and also the fundamental missionary character of the Church.
2. It is in this spirit of responsibility that the Community of Charity and Social Services will wholeheartedly render its service based on the demands of the Gospel, to participate in constructing a just, interrelated and brotherly society, in which the poor and the outcast can see a brighter future for themselves in accord with their human dignity.
3. Love springs from God the Father when he created the universe bestowed the grace of life to humanity (John 1:26). He also shares with humanity the capacity to love and invites them to love and support one another (Gen 1:28).

The love which God reserves for humanity is filled with father care, even though human beings are weak and unfaithful. He gives them future and hope through the promises made to our forefather (Gen 12:15-17). The events of the Exodus and at Sinai (Ex. 13-19) have

created faith: Yahweh is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want (Ps. 23).

To meditate on the enormous love of our Heavenly Father, the Community of Charity and Social Services always affirms: love means to restore for oneself and for others the original image of humanity as God first created us.

4. In Christ, the eternal love of God becomes present (Jn. 1:14). The mystery of the incarnation raises the dignity of humanity so that they can share in the divinity of God.

Jesus preached the message of the Gospel and allowed humanity to see that God is always concerned to care for and liberate humanity (Lk. 4:18). He has perfectly lived out this good news, especially with the poor, the afflicted, sinners, the oppressed, outcasts, and has invited us to follow his example (Jn. 13:1-15).

He gave the command to love God and neighbor, the summary of the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:34-40).

On the cross Jesus took upon himself all the sufferings of humanity. His death on the cross makes present that perfect and profound love of God (Rom. 8). Through his Passion and Resurrection, Christ prevails over the new Creation, where peace resides, and there is no longer suffering and death (Rev. 7:16).

5. The mission of the Church springs from the love of Christ. The Community of Charity and Social Services is a member of the Church and hence has responsibility to continue Christ's liberating and saving mission. Its members are to embrace the proclamation of the Gospel and the promotion of humanity as a guide for their actions; human development and liberation from sin are mutual interactions.
6. Because the dignity of the human person has its foundation as a creation in the image and likeness of God, we must respect and protect life from the moment of conception until natural death. The life of each person must correspond to his or her dignity.

Members of the Community of Charity and Social Services always place great importance on the spirit of cooperation in order to advance the dignity of all human beings.

Members of the Community of Charity and Social Services also dedicate themselves to serve and to create for everyone the means to build a life of justice, brotherhood, to respect all human rights, and to protect nature and its environment.

7. The short-term goals of the Community of Charity and Social Services are:
 - a. To assist the poor, especially those in rural areas, victims of physical and psychological illness, the poor who have no one to help them or are only assisted minimally.
 - b. The spirit of the Community of Charity and Social services is to cooperate with all people of good will and with those who are suffering in order to exert our strength to bring their life of poverty to a level of stable self sustenance. Those who have no source of income will be given priority access to our assistance.
 - c. Victims of social corruption, such as drug addicts, HIV/AIDS patients, lepers, and the handicapped are the recipients of the ministry of the Community of Charity and Social Services.
 - d. In order to achieve the goals above, the Community of Charity and Social Services encourages the spirit of cooperation among all people, including the weak in society and those whose unfortunate lives are despised by society.
 - e. The areas of service include: medical help, social services, education, career training, community development, restoration of health to the disabled/handicapped, and counseling for families.
 - f. Our last goal, accompanied by the spirit of dedication of love and service to others as Jesus has done, is “to bring the Good News to the poor.” For it is only the Gospel that can truly liberate people from the impoverished situations, both materially and spiritually. The Gospel leads people to the Heavens of Salvation, to the new World, where there will be no sadness and grief, or any kind of suffering, for the God of Love is the eternal Happiness for all people.

THE COMMUNITY PROCLAIMS THE GOSPEL

The proclamation of the Gospel is the responsibility of the Church, and all members of the Church must regard this as their responsibility. The Community of Charity and Social Services, with its vast activities to non-Christians, views this as an opportunity that is well suited for its mission of proclaiming the Gospel.

Furthermore, the Gospel is itself the love of God being introduced to non-Christians. Members of the Community of Charity and Social Services render their service in love and with their fervent hearts grounded in love. They serve with attitudes that respect the dignity of the human person and liberating people from sickness and pain, hunger, and the corruptions of society. It is during these moments that the face of Christ is clearly made present in the person of the members. To bring love to all people is to bring God to them.

In order for the proclamation of the Gospel to bear fruit, members of the Community of Charity and Social Services must possess a spirit of sensitivity in all the circumstances of the people and must always meditate on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the kingdom of their Father, and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest bonds” (*Gaudium et Spes*, p. 1).

The way of the Lord is the way of love serving people even to the point of giving up one’s life. Members of the Community of Charity and Social Services embrace the principle of love and service as their goal in life. Every action should be one of love focusing on the improvement of the situation of the weak in society. Jesus’ application of the words of the prophet to himself at the synagogue in Nazareth is always the light that guides all the actions of members of the Community of Charity and Social

Services: “.... To proclaim glad tidings to the poor” (Lk. 4:18) Once we have focused on advancing the material needs of the poor, we should also focus on their spiritual needs. Above all, our focus should be supernatural, to help people to know God.

The activities of the Community of Charity and Social Services have their distinctive characteristics, such as helping malnourished children, the elderly, the handicapped, the hungry, the poor, and the illiterate. But we are also prepared to cooperate with other organizations in the fields of social services in the diocese.

Members who specialize in health care can work in public hospitals in order to encounter and serve non-Christians as much as we can. In this atmosphere, each member must become a witness of love, especially to those who are poor and lonely.

Smaller communities are usually situated near areas where our non-Christian brothers and sisters reside. Besides helping the sick and handicapped, providing clean drinking water... members are to leave aside time to visit poor families and sick people and to share the Gospel with them.

When we have the opportunity to work with our Montagnard (ethnic tribe minority) brothers and sisters, we must always pay attention to their cultural characteristics and way of life. When necessary, we should help them avoid beliefs that are superstitious, but with a clear attitude of sensitivity.

To pray for our non-Christian brothers and sisters is a part of our daily time of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.