

GIVING

IS AN ACT OF FAITH

WHAT EVERY DONOR TO RELIGIOUS CHARITIES SHOULD KNOW

Why Should I Give?

Giving, no doubt, can make you feel good about yourself. It can increase your sense of well being, make you feel superior, help relieve guilt or raise your standing in the community. There are many human reasons – good and bad – for giving. What should concern us as Christians, though, are the deeper reasons, the ones that touch our very souls.

From a spiritual standpoint, you give because of your relationship with God. Giving is an act of faith equal to prayer and fasting. Historically, men and women have made offerings to God in recognition of their dependence on Him and in gratitude for the gifts given them. Everything we have comes from God. We are God's stewards, accountable for the ways in which we use the time, the talents and the material goods God has given us.

The second reason concerns the needs of others. Jesus commanded us to care for our brothers and sisters in need – to “love your neighbor as you love yourself.” Throughout the Gospel, Jesus speaks of His concerns for the poor and the oppressed. God wants those of us who possess the riches of this life to share them with those who are less fortunate. Jesus individually speaks to us when He says, “What you do for these, the least of My brethren, you do for Me.”

To Whom Should I Give?

Charity does begin at home, but it does not end there. Christian responsibility extends throughout the world. There are countless groups within the Church that depend on you for help in their work of spreading the Gospel message.

Dedicated priests, Brothers, Sisters and lay people appeal to you for help. It is impossible for most of us to personally reach out to the starving, to supervise a medical clinic or shelter, to tirelessly work with the physical and mentally challenged, to preach the Gospel amid a devastating drought or to provide comfort and care to the elderly. But we *can* do all of this. We *can* become active participants in the direct ministries of others – by praying for and financially contributing to Catholic institutions. In doing so, we reaffirm our roles as Jesus' disciples and live out the Gospel message to love one another as Christ loves us.

Can You Tell Me More About These Groups And The Work They Do?

There are many different religious communities and organizations that are active in the apostolic work of the Church. Some receive a portion of their financial needs from the diocese in which they serve. But, because most of the people they serve cannot support their work, these groups look to you for support of their ministries. Their prayer is that you recognize that each person is a child of God, worthy of His and your love.

The ministries are vast: children's homes, schools, adult care homes, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, U.S. and foreign missions, colleges and universities, communication centers, drug abuse centers, youth programs, social service agencies, religious shrines, research centers, hospices and more.

Can you imagine the Church without them? All of these organizations and others are supported by offers made directly and personally to you. Try to imagine the number of people they are serving. The dedicated professionals called to the ministry of fund raising look to God, with whom all things are possible. They are found in all 50 states and the world over.

Who Raises The Funds For These Groups?

In most instances Catholic organizations – including members of the National Catholic Development Conference – appoint a person from their religious communities, or a dedicated lay person, to solicit financial support. Those who have been blessed with more are asked to give to those who are in need. Most of them would like to personally visit you to explain the plights of the people who are being served, and to remind you of your impact as a donor. However, because of time and financial constraints, this is not often possible. Instead, religious fund raisers write to you. They also reach you via phone, radio, TV, magazines, newspapers or even the Internet.

In doing so, each is like a modern-day St. Paul, who in the first century of our Church reached out to all in the ancient world, asking for funds for the new Christian church in Jerusalem. St. Paul, in essence, could be considered the Church's first fund raiser!

I'm Sure It Costs Money To Raise Money, So I'd Like To Know More About The Cost Of Raising Funds.

Catholic fund raisers try to utilize the least expensive methods available to conduct their work. For many organizations, asking by mail is the only method open to them. But preparing appeals by mail, even after certain postal discounts are applied, can be costly. Such expenses vary from charity to charity. Stating a flat percentage rate of costs by which to judge a particular charity would be unfair and even misleading. Differences in costs, for instance, can be just a bookkeeping difference.

Much depends on whether a charity:

- is new or well-established;
- is locally based, or a mission appeal that must reach donors either nationally or globally;
- features a mission and/or cause that is considered popular.

I Can't Give To Every Appeal I Receive, So How Do I Decide Which Organizations To Support?

It's a very personal decision because some causes or charities will appeal to you more than others. To help you make an informed and meaningful decision, we'd like to offer some suggestions:

- When you receive an appeal in the mail, read it carefully. It should be in good taste, truthfully presented and contain sufficient information about the organization and the programs to which your donation will be applied.
- Don't feel pressured into giving if you receive a small gift with the appeal. Such a premium or gift does not obligate you in any way. When you make a donation, you should expect a prompt thank-you or acknowledgement.
- If you have any questions at all, don't hesitate to write directly to the charities and ask them for the information you need before you make your gift. You may also want to refer to a current membership list of the National Catholic Development Conference. NCDC's member organizations subscribe to high standards of fund raising, which are outlined in the subsequent section.

Are These Organizations Accountable To Anyone?

Catholic fund-raising organizations have a clear, moral obligation to be fully accountable to you, the donor. Indeed, this obligation was given added emphasis by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, which issued specific principles and guidelines for fund raising by all religious institutions.

According to these guidelines, Catholic charitable organizations must make available financial reports to their donors and the giving public. You may request that they send you such a report. Each organization, of course, also must provide a complete financial audit to its religious superior. They, in turn, report this information to the Bishop of the respective diocese.

Many of the religious charitable organizations belong to NCDC. As members, they agree to abide by both the association's Precepts of Stewardship and the Bishop's Guidelines. NCDC also publishes *A Guide for Preparing a Statement of Accountability*, which is distributed to its members for their additional financial reference.

Is There Anything I Can Do If I Don't Want To Receive Appeals In The Mail?

Yes, First, remember that nobody wants to send mail to anyone who doesn't want it.

Write to the organization and ask that your name be removed from its list. Allow time for a second mail piece to be sent to you. Many groups will not mail to you if their first solicitation is unreturned.

Do You Have Any Other Advice On Giving To Religious Charitable Organizations?

Consider yourself a partner with whatever groups you support. Take a personal interest.

The amount you give is not nearly as important as the spirit in which you give. Giving is an acknowledgement of the gifts you have received from God.

Giving to these religious organizations and charities is an act of faith.



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