



Commentaries

Women are a driving force in charitable giving



Sarah Hanley

By Sarah Hanley • Posted May 27, 2020

As May comes to a close, we reflect on the month devoted to celebrating mothers, and those who are like mothers. Whether we remembered Mother's Day with loved ones or honored our Blessed Mother, May affords us a time to celebrate women.

When we consider some of our earliest role models, we can't help but think of our mothers, grandmothers, aunts and religious sisters who helped form us in faith. They nurtured us, taught us life lessons and equipped us to lead lives rooted in the values we cherish, values that teach us to treat others as Jesus would and to share our many blessings with others.

As Catholic women, we are responsible for instilling these same values in others, and one of the best ways to do this is to live by example. We can exemplify our beliefs by following our peers as philanthropic leaders across the nonprofit sector and allowing these beliefs to guide the charitable decisions we make.

According to a study conducted by the Women's Philanthropy Institute (WPI), women across most generations are more likely to give to charitable causes than men. In fact, women are as much as 40% more likely to give. While there are many factors that attribute to these statistics, it's important to understand the "why" behind them.

An important explanation as to why women tend to be more philanthropic is attributed to their thoughts and feelings behind charitable giving. According to WPI's study, women tend to make giving decisions based on empathy for others.

"There are many factors that go into our decision to donate whether it is time, talent or treasure," said Dr. Tammy Tenaglia, a clinical psychologist who co-founded the Progressions Companies.

Dr. Tenaglia, who is also a founding member of the board of trustees for the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia (CFGF), said that being charitable is sometimes simply "the right thing to do, such as with the emergency funds set up at CFGF."

“While we cannot give to every organization that asks, it is a matter of choosing organizations that match our affinities,” she said. “Ultimately, we want to make sure that our donations are making a difference in peoples’ lives and that they reflect our beliefs and values.”

Another impactful factor is the rise in women’s wealth. WPI tells us that women’s share of wealth has risen considerably over the past 50 years and today, they hold around 40% of global wealth. This, combined with generational giving trends, make this data even more pronounced.

Women born before or during the Baby Boom (1946-1964) whose income and assets put them in the top 25 percent of wealth holders, give “156 percent more to charity than men,” says Debra Mesch, executive director of WPI.

But the most interesting data surrounding women’s roles in charitable giving has nothing to do with either of these factors. Instead, it has to do with being the decision makers in the household when it comes to philanthropy.

According to a study performed by Bank of America Merrill Lynch, it was reported that for almost 90% of high net-worth households, women were either considered the sole decision makers, or at least an equal partner in charitable decision making.

These studies provide crucial insight to fundraising and development professionals across the nonprofit sector. Knowing your audience is perhaps the most important piece of the fundraising puzzle when soliciting for your cause, and as it turns out, women are an audience to which we should all be devoting our time and attention.

During a month that celebrates mothers and all women, we’re shedding light on all those who are making a difference through charity. While the future of our country and our world feels uncertain amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we must never lose sight of the many generous people who are fulfilling God’s will of living humbly and sharing their blessings.

It’s uplifting to know that our community, and in particular women within our community, are doing their part to support their sisters and brothers in need. These women continue to be leaders in our church and role models to Catholic women throughout the world.

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