



Commentaries

How to be sure your donation is used as you intend



Sarah Hanley

By Sarah Hanley • Posted April 14, 2020

As a result of COVID-19, the need for increased charitable giving is more pertinent than ever. There are many new opportunities arising if you want to get involved, and we want to help you be sure your charity is being properly stewarded. To learn more about how the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia can help you support those impacted by COVID-19, visit www.TheCFGF.org.

Charitable giving is a spiritual experience. When we willingly share our blessings with those in need, we are bringing ourselves closer to God. On a personal level, charitable giving gives us a sense of peace. Knowing we've made a difference in the life of someone else brings us joy and fulfillment.

But if this is all true, then why does charitable giving sometimes feel troubling? Why would supporting a cause become stressful? The answer is simple – many people just aren't sure where their money is going, and how it's being used. In turn, they can't justify making a blind gift.

This donor apprehension is something we've experienced firsthand. In fact, many nonprofits have heard from donors that they sometimes feel hesitant when deciding whether or not to give. They're concerned that their gifts aren't being properly allocated, and worried that they could be used for purposes outside of what they intended.

I understand this hesitation. I think at one point or another, we've all felt uncertainty when making a charitable gift. So let's begin the process of putting this concern to rest.

There are countless nonprofits that emphasize transparency with their donors. For example, our goal at CFGF is to keep this message at the forefront of what we do, and I can confidently say that holds true for many Catholic organizations.

At CFGP, our mission is to grow philanthropy according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. This is our understanding of our responsibility as Catholics – and putting our faith in action. We take it seriously, and so stewarding donors’ gifts appropriately is of the utmost importance to us. It’s also important to remember that when we don’t give, or our gifts are not used as they were intended, it is at the expense of those most vulnerable.

So where do donor gifts go? Well, that’s up to you! I can tell you that CFGP gives you the power to determine exactly where your gift goes and how it’s used. You can restrict your gift to a specific cause, or, you can give a general gift that we steward on your behalf.

Part of our work is to know the Catholic landscape in Philadelphia. We strive to personally get to know all of our pastors, Catholic leaders and organizations so that when a general gift comes in, we know exactly where to direct that donation. Whether your gift supports a homeless shelter, food pantry, parish or nursing home, it’s making a difference.

Most importantly, we recognize the sacrifices our donors are making to give these gifts, and so we provide them with diligent reporting on where their gift goes. I think this part of the charitable giving process is the most fulfilling — seeing your kindness in action.

Sometimes we do get questions about overhead costs of nonprofits. Specifically, “How much of my money is going towards overhead?” To be honest, it’s a great question, and one that any diligent donor should ask when forming a relationship with a nonprofit.

Charitable organizations are required by law to make financial information available to the public, and so we encourage you to do your homework before making a gift. Read their annual report or take a look at their published 990 report. However, as with everything we read online, donors should refrain from being too quick to jump to conclusions.

For instance, if the backbone of a nonprofit’s mission is educating others, their program costs would consist of staff time, supplies and rent. For another nonprofit, those expenses might just be considered overhead.

The best thing you can do is to ask the nonprofit you’re giving to about the impact of your gift, and to give them the opportunity to answer the questions you have. Chances are, they would be more than happy to do so.

At CFGP, it’s our job to listen to your aspirations for philanthropy and help you achieve them. Get to know our work and the work of the organizations around you. You can learn so much about the important charitable work we’re all engaging in each day, and discover how you can be a part of it.

I hope this helps you feel a little more at ease as you prayerfully consider your own charitable giving, and I encourage you to reference this information as you continue on your spiritual journey of sharing the Gospel with those around you.

Sarah Hanley is the president and CEO of the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia. To learn more about charitable giving, visit www.TheCFGP.org/community/funds, or call 215-587-5650.

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