



Local News

For church ministries and parishes, #GivingTuesdayNow comes just in time



In the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, global online giving effort GivingTuesdayNow, set for May 5, will focus on supporting Catholic Charities Appeal beneficiaries working to address a range coronavirus-related needs, including hunger and homelessness, as well as parishes facing financial hardship due to the pandemic.
(GivingTuesdayNow)

By Gina Christian • Posted May 4, 2020

Parishes and ministries in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia stand to receive some critical funding thanks to a new worldwide charity effort.

May 5 has been designated as GivingTuesdayNow, a global day of online fundraising for an array of nonprofits and outreaches serving those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the archdiocese, the day-long drive — which unites international and grassroots organizations — will focus on the annual Catholic Charities Appeal (CCA) and the Parish Support Initiative, both of which are managed by the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia (CFGP).

Donors are being asked to participate in GivingTuesdayNow by visiting either CatholicCharitiesAppeal.org or www.SupportMyParish.org to make tax-deductible gifts.

The international organizers of the effort, which follows up on the annual GivingTuesday campaign held in early December, have warned that due to the coronavirus, “the social sector is in crisis at the very moment the world needs it most.”

Amid the pandemic, CCA beneficiaries such as St. John’s Hospice and Martha’s Choice Marketplace have seen skyrocketing client demand for food assistance and other social services.

St. John’s daily lunch service, now in a grab-and-go format to comply with social distancing requirements, has increased from nearly 220 to 320, said Martin Farrell, St. John’s director of development and community relations.

“In any given week we could use \$50,000 to meet our operating costs,” said Farrell.

Martha’s Choice director Patrick Walsh said that the Norristown-based emergency food pantry has seen a “100% increase in client volume.”

Many families are also struggling to purchase supplies of diapers, the monthly cost of which can average \$80 per baby, according to the National Diaper Bank Network.

With infants and toddlers requiring eight to 12 changes a day, “diaper need” can take a toll on both children and parents, said Amy Stoner, director of archdiocesan Catholic Social Services’ community-based, housing and homeless services.

“Babies who are sitting in dirty diapers for long periods of time can develop rashes and urinary tract infections,” she said, adding that infants in severe diaper need are also at greater risk for child abuse.

Recently, archdiocesan Nutritional Development Services (NDS) partnered with the city of Philadelphia, the Greater Philadelphia Diaper Bank and the nonprofit Mitzvah Circle to provide emergency distribution sites for families in need of free diaper supplies.



Lizanne Hagedorn (left), executive director of archdiocesan Nutritional Development Services (NDS), and NDS staff member Nita Weightman greet a family that collected free diapers and breakfast items at the Archdiocesan Pastoral

Center in Philadelphia, April 21. The outreach was a collaboration among the Archdiocese, the city of Philadelphia, the Greater Philadelphia Diaper Bank and the Mitzvah Center in response to the financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic on area families. (Photo by Gina Christian)

Some of the phone calls for the assistance have been heartbreaking, said Robert Jones, director of government programs for NDS.

“I’ve had people say, ‘I have nothing for my child. I lost my job, and I am so happy I can come and get diapers,’” he said.

“With so many people out of work due to COVID-19, the demand for life-sustaining items such as food, essential baby items and rent assistance has greatly increased to unprecedented levels,” said CCA board president Bill Phelan. “Any donation can help make a difference.”

Since mid-March, more than 30 million Americans (about 18.6% of the nation’s labor force) have filed first-time unemployment claims, as businesses — shuttered due to stay-at-home orders — have laid off or furloughed staff. An estimated one in five workers in Pennsylvania are now jobless.

The coronavirus pandemic has compounded Philadelphia’s long struggle with poverty, which stood at 24.5% in 2018, and food insecurity, which rose 22% from 2012 to 2017.

Even as public health officials explore ways to gradually lift COVID-related restrictions, unemployment and food insecurity will remain an ongoing issue for some time.

Parish finances will also loom large in the months and years ahead, as weekly collections have plummeted during the pandemic-related suspension of public Masses.

To counter such declines, the CFGP and the archdiocese have created the Parish Support Initiative, which enables donors to support their own parishes – or those deemed most in need – through online gifts as well as checks.



Clients of St. John’s Hospice, an archdiocesan Catholic Social Services outreach to men experiencing homelessness, line up to receive free lunches donated to the outreach by Wawa as part of efforts to counter coronavirus-related food insecurity. (Photo courtesy of Martin Farrell)

“The COVID-19 pandemic has created many uncertainties for all of us,” said CFGP president and CEO Sarah Hanley. “Our parish communities have felt this impact tremendously too. This initiative offers parishes an additional source of much-needed income in order to supplement their regular offertory.”

Weekly collections provide “the vast majority of operating income, roughly 85%” for a parish, according to Arjun Dias, director of the Office for Parish Service and Support.

“Most area parishes have seen significant declines” in collections, Dias said, with an average loss of 57%.

Although Masses and devotions have moved online, electronic giving at parishes has lagged, he added.

“While 87% of our parishes are equipped with e-giving, the utilization rate is roughly 20%,” Dias said. “So a lack of public Masses means declining collections.”

The Parish Support Initiative has successfully raised over \$90,000 to date, and CFGP staff are hoping that GivingTuesdayNow will enable the fund to top \$100,000.

Through the archdiocesan [Arise](#) project, the monies are already beginning to assist financially challenged parishes in preparing for post-pandemic life. [Grants](#) of \$250 are being made available by the CFGP to help set up email and social media accounts to reach parishioners in real-time as pandemic restrictions are lifted.

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