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Preparing for Christmas: Giving first to those in need

Tony Magliano | Dec. 9, 2013 Making a Difference

As the Christmas song goes, "It's the most wonderful time of the year."

While Easter is the most important time of the year, Christmas ranks very close. And when we consider in the broader sense that Christmas and Easter are theologically linked, it is true to say that in many ways, Christmas is indeed the most wonderful time of the year.

But first comes Advent, that time presently upon us of preparation for Christmas.

And one of the very best ways of preparing for Christmas is to start giving gifts early -- not so much the kind of gifts we usually give to relatives and friends on Christmas, but the life-saving and life-enhancing gifts of money and service to those most in need, especially those who are living on the edge of survival.

For countless poor human beings who dwell in the shadows of our nation and world, unseen and uncared for, such gifts are priceless.

So allow me to suggest several ways you can make an Advent/Christmas difference in the lives of some of our suffering brothers and sisters.

Since there was no room at the inn for Joseph, Mary and Jesus, consider volunteering at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen.

As you know, this time of the year is the saddest time for lonely people, especially those who have recently lost a loved one or have no one to love them. Think about contacting a lonely soul and befriending him or her. If you don't know of anyone, ask a friend or your parish.

Perhaps you might be able to put together a Christmas basket for a poor family. Again, your parish or local social services agency should be able to help.

Think about stopping by a nursing home. Many nursing home residents never get a visitor.

Making a donation to your diocesan Catholic Charities agency is also a fine idea. Having worked for Catholic Charities in the archdiocese of Washington and the Wilmington diocese, I can personally attest to the good they do. From food distribution to low cost counseling to public policy advocacy, Catholic Charities will put your gift to good work.

The vast majority of the poorest and most vulnerable human beings live in the economically undeveloped nations of the world.

Catholic Relief Services, the official overseas emergency relief and development arm of the Catholic church in the United States, is tirelessly aiding the poorest of the poor in approximately 100 countries.

For instance, CRS is distributing emergency food rations and food vouchers to desperate people in the Central African Republic, where thousands have been forced from their homes since a rebel takeover in March. Many have died.

CRS also is on the scene providing emergency aid to many of the countless victims of the recent devastating Philippine typhoon, where Archbishop John Du of Palo said it is "like a valley of death." He added that he went in search of help responding to his parishioners' plea: "Please go and find us food."

Kindly consider making an Advent/Christmas donation to Catholic Relief Services, Box 17090, Baltimore, MD 21297-0303. You can also go online to donate at www.crs.org [1].

We still have time this Advent to reach out to the poor and vulnerable near and far. And by doing so, our hearts will be ever more ready to sing, "It's the most wonderful time of the year!"

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings about Catholic social teaching. His keynote address, "Advancing the Kingdom of God in the 21st Century," has been well received by diocesan gatherings from Salt Lake City to Baltimore. Tony can be reached at tmag@zoominternet.net [2].]

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