



# DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

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700 King Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8P 1C7

## OFFICE OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

We are inevitably faced with a plethora of charitable campaigns vying for attention and donor support. In the season of giving many people were happy to donate, volunteer or put together supplies to take to a local food bank or send overseas. Charitable works, however, do not have to be limited to the holidays, but the onslaught provides a good example of how we can be more discerning and compassionate in our approach to charity.

The ways to participate in charitable giving are numerous. Although placing money in a donation box to support a cause is not necessarily a bad thing, when this is our main offering and frames our understanding of charity, disconnection may occur from the realities of community needs. With the call to serve those in need comes the responsibility to ensure that good intentions translate to positive impact. This is not always the case with charitable giving.

Pope Francis in his address to the students of the Jesuit schools of Italy and Albania quoted Fr. Arrupe from his letter to the Centres for Social Research, The Society's Social Centres, "Look, it is impossible to talk about poverty without having an experience with the poor". The Holy Father then went on to say "It is impossible to talk about poverty, about abstract poverty. That does not exist!" For many of us abject poverty and its structures are abstract. Pope Francis terms this as a globalization of indifference stating, "To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed." (*Evangelii Gaudium*) Ultimately, we are all connected with a shared responsibility to create a more just, equitable society.

The process of giving may begin by reflecting on our understanding of social justice and charitable giving. Allow me to preface this article by saying that it is not my intent to undercut projects already under way. I applaud the initiative and opportunities for community engagement. This article is simply meant to frame conversation and provoke thought on how to approach charitable giving. First look to build a relationship with the community you are serving. By working with local organizations and speaking to frontline workers, you are taking an excellent step toward establishing your connection to the community and developing a thorough understanding of their needs.

Hoping to get involved with a project in the global South? Please take the time to first research the project and organization thoroughly. I would be wary of organizations or campaigns that send items overseas such as toys or garments. These projects tend to create waste, undermine local economies that cannot compete with the influx of free items, and may not be relevant in the



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context of that specific community. This is why relationship building and a commitment to a particular community is so important. Become more informed on how to help.

The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, for example, operates predominantly in the global South by investing in locally operated organizations and projects, helping to stimulate local economies, and engage community development by allowing those who know the needs of the community to take on leadership. Additionally, they offer educational resources to communities in Canada to better understand sustainable development.

A grassroots organizations, such as The Working Centre in Kitchener, Ontario, is a great example of an organization re-establishing connections within the community. St. John's Kitchen, one of the centre's many initiatives, provides warm meals for those in need and engages the recipients in meal preparation and service, effectively removing power dynamics that may develop between volunteer roles and the marginalized. This method of operation creates inclusivity. Additional support is offered through onsite counseling services, demonstrating a thorough understanding of the community they serve. Through Advent and Lent, many organizations offered a number of ways to get involved. Follow organizations on social media or reach out to them directly to stay informed on the projects they run and how to offer support. Beyond campaigns, special collections and food drives, stay attuned to legislation being championed by these groups, as they are most likely to advocate for reforms that create long term change. Based out of Ottawa, Ontario, Citizens for Public Justice is a national organization of members inspired by faith to act for justice in Canadian public policy. Consider signing up for its newsletter or visit its website to learn more about some of these topics.

The Holy Father tells us, "A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being." (*Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the 38th Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*).

Creating a more just community and breaking cycles of poverty take time, commitment and an understanding that we need to be willing to elevate those who are most marginalized. We



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can no longer accept charity as an industry in which we pay someone else to do the work while we become less engaged in the realities of those facing poverty.