



To Love Is to Give: Christian Philanthropy

“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

— Matthew 5:16

“Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

— James 2:17

“Feeding the hungry is a greater work than raising the dead.”

— Saint John Chrysostom

★ INTRODUCTION

Philanthropy, meaning “**love for humanity**,” is not something extra in the life of a Christian. It is at the center. We do not give because we are wealthy, but because we follow Christ. Worship and service go hand in hand. The gifts we receive from God should move us to serve others. A closed hand cannot give or receive, but an open hand can do both.

The early Church understood this deeply. In the Book of Acts, the apostles appointed deacons to care for the poor, widows, and those in need (Acts 6:1–6). This service was not considered something separate from worship; it was understood as an essential part of it.

Today, we will explore how the Church calls us to live lives of charity, not out of guilt or pressure, but out of joy and love. Important: This is always voluntary. We do not give to impress others. We give freely and sincerely as a response to Christ’s love.

Nativity Initiative Connection: During this Nativity season, our Diocese is partnering with IOCC to invite Church-school students to translate prayer into generosity. Each student has received the IOCC Orthodox Prayer Journal, and our parish will also have a simple Nativity Gift Session to collect offerings (small or large) for families and children in need.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH?

Selected Scriptures:

- Matthew 25:35–40

“I was hungry and you gave me food... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to Me.”

Christ identifies with those in need.

- Luke 10:25–37 — The Good Samaritan

Real love goes beyond convenience or boundaries.

- 1 John 3:17–18

“If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart... how does God’s love abide in him?”

- Acts 20:35

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

These verses remind us that the Christian life is not just about going to church. It is about being the Church, especially when we care for others.

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH TEACH?

Orthodox Christianity never separates worship from action. The Eucharist must overflow into daily life through acts of justice, love, and mercy.

Core Orthodox Teachings:

- The Eucharist is thanksgiving. It leads us to gratitude and generosity.
- Charity is asceticism in action, offering what we have for the sake of the other.
- Saint Basil the Great said, “The bread you keep belongs to the hungry. The coat you store belongs to the naked.”
- Saint Maria of Paris taught, “Each person is the very icon of God... and should be venerated as such.”

This view has ancient roots. In Byzantium, feeding centers, hospitals, and orphanages were not just side projects. They were seen as important ways to express worship. Helping the poor was seen as an encounter with Christ Himself.

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS SERVING TODAY

A notable example of this tradition in practice is the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC). Founded to express the compassion of the Orthodox Church, IOCC works in more than sixty countries, offering emergency aid, school kits, clean water, and long-term recovery support to people facing crisis.

Our Diocese supports IOCC in real and hands-on ways through annual donations and Church-school activities. Most recently, IOCC provided every Church-school student with the *Orthodox Prayer Journal*. This year, we are doing this again. During Nativity, our Diocese is collecting a Church-school offering for IOCC to help children and families in need. Give what you can, if you can, and give it quietly. Small gifts, given with love, matter.

Today we will set up our class collection. If you are able and willing, you may contribute a small gift toward IOCC's work this Nativity season. We will gather gifts through the end of January and forward them to IOCC through the Diocese.

ACTIVITY 1: CHARITY IN ACTION

Imagine this:	<p>During Church-school, a teen in our Diocese opens the IOCC <i>Prayer Journal</i>. Something in it hits them: What if I actually did something to help? They talk with a few friends and speak with their priest. Together, they start a small parish project: collecting hygiene items, assembling IOCC Emergency Kits, or raising funds for families in crisis.</p> <p>It does not have to be big to matter. A simple idea, done with love, can bring real help to someone in need. And that idea can start right here, in our parish.</p>
Now it is your turn:	<p>In your group, brainstorm one act of charity you could carry out this week in your parish, at school, or at home. Could your idea become the next story that inspires others? What is one realistic action your group could take during the Nativity season that connects prayer to giving, for example by organizing a small IOCC collection, creating a parish needs list, or planning a simple service project?</p>
Some ideas include:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assembling an IOCC Emergency Kit• Writing thank-you notes for Church-school leaders• Creating snack bags for a local shelter• Raising funds for a charitable cause• Organizing a prayer service for those in need
Reflection questions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is one small way you can help someone this week?• How can we give in a way that is humble, not performative?• Why is it sometimes difficult to give?• Can teenagers truly make a difference?



ACTIVITY 2: ROLE PLAY — THE GOOD SAMARITAN TODAY

Scenario:	A new student at school is left out and ignored. No one wants to sit with him.
Task:	In small groups, act out what it would look like to be a “Good Samaritan” in your school setting.
Questions to reflect on:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does mercy look like where you are?• Is it always easy to help others? Why or why not?



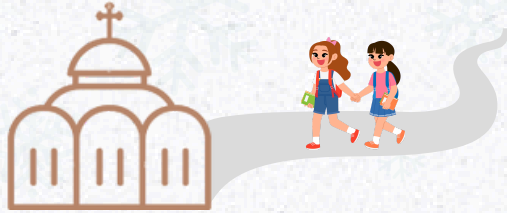
ACTIVITY 3: JOURNAL REFLECTION

Instructions:	<p>Draw two columns: Column 1: <i>What I Have Been Given</i> Column 2: <i>What I Can Give Others</i></p> <p>Write down the blessings you have received—your time, support, friendships, or kindness—and then list ways you might share those gifts with others.</p>
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ACTIVITY 4: SAINT SPOTLIGHT — SAINT NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER

Instructions:	<p>Let us take a closer look at one of the most beloved saints in the Orthodox Church: Saint Nicholas. He was not only a bishop, but also a quiet giver. One famous story tells of how he secretly left gold coins in the home of a poor family to save them from disaster. He did not want to be praised. He simply wanted to help.</p> <p>This kind of hidden giving is what Christ meant when He said, “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Matthew 6:3). Saint Nicholas teaches us that true charity is often quiet, humble, and filled with love. As we give during this Nativity season, we can practice Saint Nicholas’ spirit: give quietly, without posting, without flexing, and without needing credit.</p>
Reflection questions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why do you think Saint Nicholas gave in secret?• What can we learn from his way of helping others?• How can we practice kindness without looking for attention?



♥ PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Choose one:

- Do one hidden act of kindness today
- Write a note or prayer for someone in need
- Give up one small treat and donate the amount to a cause
- Say thank you to someone who is often overlooked

? DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to give like Christ?
2. How is charity more than just giving money?
3. Why do people sometimes avoid helping others?
4. How can giving change our hearts?
5. What role does the Church play in organizing charity today?

★ CONCLUSION

Love is not just a feeling or idea. It is a way of life. Philanthropy is not just for the wealthy. It is for everyone who follows Christ. The world needs fewer critics and more helpers. The Church needs fewer spectators and more saints. Let us leave Church-school today not only with ideas, but with a mission: to love, to serve, and to give. Let us be givers of peace, builders of mercy, and doers of the Gospel.

“You are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” — Matthew 5:14–16

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