

# In praise of Catholic caregivers

In a 2017 article for the London-based *Catholic Herald*, Professor David Paton of Nottingham University called the Catholic Church “the largest and most significant non-state organization in the world” and “one of the biggest aid agencies in the world.” The numbers internationally are impressive – over 140,000 schools, 10,000 orphanages, 5,000 hospitals and 16,000 other clinics, with spending between two and four billion per year.

“Even these numbers only tell half the tale,” writes Paton, who notes that Caritas, the organization that provides the numbers, does not factor in developmental spending by religious orders and other charities, nor do their figures reflect small scale charitable projects undertaken by the 200,000 parishes worldwide. “In much of the developing world,” Paton writes, “if the Church was not involved, the services would not be provided at all.”

One study found that Catholic hospitals in the U.S. were more efficient than their secular counterparts while also managing to compile a better track record of serving the poor and marginalized of society. In education, an Australian study shows that attending Catholic schools increases students’ chances of going to college and getting a good job. And on a heartbreaking yet enlightening note about education in one U.S. city, Paton writes, “The University of Chicago Law Review recently concluded that the closure of Catholic schools in poorer areas of Chicago led to a significant increase in urban social disorder and crime.”

So what does this say about the state of Catholic outreach throughout the world? It says that people of faith have been inspired by the Gospel to build a worldwide community of caregivers who are currently making a profound impact on society and in the life of each individual they serve. Christ said, “You will know them by their fruits.” (Matthew 7:16) Faithful Catholics are rising to the call to produce good fruits every day.

As Paton notes, it is important for the Church’s outreach to remain firmly rooted in

the faith because this is the best way to minister to the full range of human needs when dealing with each individual we serve. The greatest threat to the continuation of a robust Catholic outreach comes from secular governments and institutions that sometimes expect the Church to conform to modern trends in morality in order to administer aid.

It is important that Catholics remain confident in answering the call to serve while also upholding the beliefs that have been handed down to us by Christ. This will ensure the future of our mission to serve those in need throughout the world; and, as Paton writes, "If Catholic institutions are able to carry on delivering their services in the context of an ethos that has at its heart the dignity of every human life from conception until natural death, the Church can continue to be the greatest force for good in the world today."

For those interested in becoming part of the thriving culture of service in the Church, Catholic Volunteer Network is a wonderful place to discover information about opportunities for outreach in our nation and around the world. There is truly so much going on and so many opportunities, including opportunities for young people to earn stipends while exploring their gifts as caregivers to those in need.

So take heart in the wonderful work done by Catholic caregivers around the world, and let us go forth as a people of faith to continue to act on the love we have within our hearts for all God's children.

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