

#iGiveCatholic 2: Catholic Day of Giving Spreads

Dioceses in Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi have joined the 24-hour day of Catholic philanthropy set for ‘Giving Tuesday.’

Peter Jesserer Smith

NEW ORLEANS — A new scholarship for Catholic ministry. A full-time nurse for a pro-life women’s health-center. Restoring a monastery for Carmelite nuns. These are just a few of the dreams that make up the [#iGiveCatholic campaign](#), 24 hours of online Catholic philanthropy for this year’s “Giving Tuesday,” a day dedicated to online philanthropy following Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

The #iGiveCatholic campaign is a 24-hour online crowdfunding effort at [iGiveCatholic.org](#) on Nov. 29 to raise \$1.5 million — all tax-deductible — to support the Church’s schools, ministries, parishes and other charitable organizations. It began last year in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, where it raised a record-making \$1.3 million, blowing past its goal of \$500,000. Now, it is growing regionally.

This year, the campaign has spread beyond New Orleans to encompass the Louisiana Dioceses of Baton Rouge and Houma-Thibodaux, the Mississippi Dioceses of Jackson and Biloxi and the Diocese of Austin, Texas.

In New Orleans, the Office of Black Catholic Ministries has jumped on board #iGiveCatholic to raise funds for the new Bishop Dominic Carmon Scholarship, which will provide an endowed scholarship for African-American Catholics who are active in their parishes and seeking their master’s degree at Xavier University of Louisiana’s [Institute for Black Catholic Studies](#). Ansel Augustine, the office’s director, told the Register the goal is to crowdfund \$25,000 for the endowment and develop relationships with a younger generation of adult donors.

“We’re excited about it,” Augustine said, noting the timing had been perfect, given that November is Black Catholic History Month. Getting the word out, by following the marketing advice of the Catholic Foundation — a nonprofit organization dedicated to managing the finances of the New Orleans Archdiocese and its affiliated organizations — has involved using everything from flyers in parish bulletins to weekly email blasts in advance of Giving Tuesday.

“We want to help shape and form our people to be better servants,” said Augustine.

Last year during the #iGiveCatholic campaign, St. Benilde School in Metairie, Louisiana, raised approximately \$60,000 in 24 hours, after setting a goal of \$25,000. The funds helped cover a portion of the operating budget, build a new mathematics lab and add a pre-K2 classroom.

Principal Matt Downey told the Register the school is hoping to meet and surpass last year's giving. But Downey said the most important aspect for him is how it brought people closer together and generated a lot of goodwill.

"It actually builds a lot of community," he said.

24 Hours Online

The #iGiveCatholic campaign lasts all 24 hours on Giving Tuesday. Catholics anywhere — even outside the participating dioceses — can go to the iGiveCatholic.org home page, [check out](#) the participants and click on any number of listed ministries to make a minimum \$25 donation with their credit cards.

Catholics can check the "[leaderboard](#)" at #iGiveCatholic's website to see how their favorite Catholic parish, school or ministry is doing in raising gifts and donations throughout the day. Participating Catholic organizations can also check their "stats" throughout the day and reach out to their members to encourage them to donate and improve their position on the leaderboard.

Last year, the Catholic Foundation launched #iGiveCatholic. It was the first-ever online giving day by Catholics, dedicated specifically to the works of the Catholic Church, in the history of the U.S. One of the biggest beneficiaries from last year's 24-hour campaign was the [Woman's New Life Center](#) in New Orleans, which raised \$417,010. This helped launch Hope Woman's Clinic, a women's health clinic built on pro-life values, allowing the local community to provide life-affirming women's health care in an area traditionally dominated by Planned Parenthood.

Dioceses on Board

Josephine Everly, chief operating officer at the Catholic Foundation in New Orleans, told the Register that the #iGiveCatholic campaign has been improved for its second year. More diocesan participation means organizers will have even more data to help them figure out how to create the apparatus for national diocesan participation.

So far, 45 dioceses and Catholic foundations have expressed interest in jumping on board, according to Everly.

"We are now faced with the previously unimagined possibility of a day of giving for dioceses and Catholic communities across our country," she said.

Scott Whitaker, director of stewardship at the Diocese of Austin, Texas, told the Register the diocese saw the #iGiveCatholic campaign as a way to get involved with Giving Tuesday through a "Catholic-giving alternative on that same day."

"There's a lot of potential for us," he said. "It also allows Catholics around the country an opportunity to give."

All the 33 participating parishes, schools and ministries in Austin that have joined the #iGiveCatholic campaign have gone through the training. Whitaker said they are actively getting the word out

through social media, particularly on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, posting with the hashtag #iGiveCatholic.

“Some of our parishes and schools have created small little ‘ministry minutes’ that we’re sharing,” where individual people share why they “give Catholic,” Whitaker said.

On Giving Tuesday itself, the diocese plans to share these videos throughout the day to get the #iGiveCatholic message out through social media to people’s phones.

Whitaker, a professional fundraiser for 20 years, said that the Giving Tuesday event provides a great opportunity for the Catholic Church to become part of the conversation of how people give. He said the Church has to think beyond the Sunday collection and realize that millennials tend to give online via their smart devices.

“With #iGiveCatholic, we are able to engage that new generation of Catholic donor,” he said.

Competitive Spirit

Last year, #iGiveCatholic stimulated competition by having more than \$25,000 in bonus prize money for the top three ministries in each category — parishes, schools and nonprofits — at stake. Everly said the Catholic Foundation discovered the competitive aspect was important for parishes, schools and other ministries raising funds. Based on the feedback received, the foundation decided parishes could devise their own competition plans, too.

At St. Benilde’s, #iGiveCatholic donations kicked off with a bang, after the announcement that the first 20 donors would get a magnet from a beloved member of their school and parish known as “Miss Betty.”

Principal Matt Downey told the Register that St. Benilde’s community is “very competitive” and liked checking the leaderboard and encouraging more people to raise funds. They put out the word through web-based social media, email and print communications and pushed out hourly Facebook updates, resulting in a “high number of small donations.”

“Even the pastor got into it,” Downey said.

This year, the parish built a way for the elderly to send in a check to donate to the #iGiveCatholic day. It has also formalized the process of contacting people either to thank them or to call people who have not yet given.

Overall, the #iGiveCatholic campaign has more than \$24,000 in prizes available — \$1,000 for one organization selected at random every hour — for all participating organizations. The marketing has emphasized the parable of the loaves and the fishes.

Everly said it sums up how crowdfunding through small donations can make a big difference for the Church’s ministries, since “little is much when God is in it.

“He delights in taking the humble and simple and using it for his glory.”

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