

God has given every one of us our own philanthropic toolbox and it is up to us to understand what our own gifts and talents are, and the causes that have a special place in our heart, so we can become an agent of change / By JOHN STUDZINSKI

How you can change the world

THIS YEAR HAS been a strange, difficult, turbulent one for the world and for the United Kingdom. While Christmas celebrations traditionally provide an escape from everyday cares, the prospect of a new year sparks idealism and optimism. None of us can ever predict the future, but, entering 2023, the mood will be uncertain. The war continues in Ukraine, inflation is contorting the global economy and viruses continue to mutate. In this country, strikes, the beleaguered NHS and a deepening recession signal a winter of discontent.

Inevitably, our instincts will be to retrench, to play safe, maybe even to withdraw. But in doing so, we will fail to do justice to our potential. Crucially, in these testing times, we will also fail to do the best for other people – above all, those whose human dignity is in jeopardy, whether through lack of money, opportunity, education, good health or a safe home.

Yes, prudence is a virtue, but our achievements will be limited if we choose not to cultivate an enterprising spirit or to be ready, in the right circumstances, to take calculated risks. This is as true in the field of philanthropy as in such endeavours as politics, business, science, art or sport. Making your time-honoured and worthwhile Christmas donation to your favourite charities is merely a start. Beyond that, each of us has the capacity to make a philanthropic contribution to society throughout the year. I would even say that *everyone* has the potential to become an entrepreneurial philanthropist.

This is not an exaggeration: we are all different, but God has given each of us our own personal philanthropic toolbox. It is up to each of us to examine what we have in our toolbox, to understand each

of our tools and to learn how to use them to maximum effect. Our aim should be to get out into the world and become an agent of change by putting our beliefs into action.

The word “philanthropy” – though it simply means “love of mankind” – can seem daunting. As it happens, true philanthropy is about more (and in some senses about less) than grand gestures and names on shiny brass plaques. Anyone can be a philanthropist, on the scale and in the way that is right for them. Philanthropy is not the same as charity – a word that also has its roots in love. Charity is more a matter of applying a sticking plaster to relieve immediate pain. Philanthropy is

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John Studzinski before the live-streaming of a Genesis Foundation concert from the Sistine Chapel

about creating and fostering a longer-term solution. It does not necessarily involve parting with money. Money, which we can call “treasure”, is just one of the three components of the basic philanthropic toolbox. The other two also begin with the letter T: “talent”, a term which covers knowledge and skills, and “time”. They hold as much value as treasure, and maybe even more.

The key to your personal toolbox lies in your convictions and passions. It makes all the difference – to your life, and to other people’s lives – if you devote your energies to a cause that has a special place in your heart. Among my own

philanthropic passions are human rights and human creativity, which have such power to enhance society and create cultural memory for the future. I feel so strongly about these causes that I built new, specialist organisations to further them. Having served as vice chair of Human Rights Watch, in 2015 I co-founded Arise to combat modern slavery around the world, largely through the courageous, coordinated action of women Religious. Twenty-one years ago I established the Genesis Foundation, which today continues to nurture the careers of outstanding artists and other creative professionals, mainly through partnerships with cultural

organisations such as the National Theatre and the choral group The Sixteen.

Another enduring passion has been The Passage, now the UK’s largest centre for homeless and insecurely housed people. My involvement with The Passage goes back to its earliest days, in 1980, when the Daughters of Charity opened a day centre at the instigation of Cardinal Basil Hume, then Archbishop of Westminster. At that time, I had just arrived in London from the United States to make my career in the City.

MY PHILANTHROPIC toolbox had first been opened when I was just six years old and I helped my mother serve in a soup kitchen in Massachusetts, where I grew up. At that early age, I had my mother as a philanthropic role model. Later I was to learn in person from an exemplar who, as a Nobel Prize-winner and eventually as a saint, surpassed the aspirations of any philanthropist. That was Mother Teresa of Kolkota. Among the many things she taught me was a formula that I have never forgotten. It is very simple, very practical, and infinitely wise: “You change the world one person at a time.” It expresses her nature as both a visionary and a realist – a duality present in every entrepreneurial philanthropist.

Mother Teresa was a true phenomenon, but my mother had already demonstrated that there is a role model in all of us. Here, time and talent come very much to the fore in the philanthropy equation.

All of us need mentors in our lives. Volunteering your time to mentor someone else is, in itself, an act of philanthropy. No one else has your particular talents and your particular understanding of the world. When you act as a mentor, taking time to share your experience and wisdom, you point the way to solutions, saving on trial and error, and empower the other person in their philanthropic efforts. It is worth remembering the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). There, talents are precious coins, but the parable makes clear that they should be put to good use: invested in an entrepreneurial but responsible fashion, rather than simply kept hidden away. In a similar vein, Luke 12:48 tells us that “To whom much is given, much will be required.” We have all probably been given more than we realise, and it is both our duty and our privilege to share what we can. In the process, we will learn from other people and develop our capacities for compassion and empathy. Philanthropy, like almost everything else in life, is a matter of give and take. Through philanthropic action



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we will gain a sense of fulfilment, satisfaction and reassurance that we are doing what we can to make the world a better place. We will also gain in wisdom, expanding our toolbox through interaction with other people and with the workings of the world. A true entrepreneur never stops learning.

Over the years I have added two further T's to my philanthropic toolbox. They are "ties" (in the sense of personal and professional networks) and, perhaps more surprisingly, "technology". Every entrepreneur needs to be well networked. As I have learned over my 40 years of working in the world of Wall Street and financial services, "Know-who is as important as know-how". In philanthropy too, success depends on drawing in and enthusing other people, and on leveraging their toolsets – their time, talent and ties. The Genesis Foundation emphasises the importance of both structured and informal networks for artists and creative professionals as they develop their careers and build resilience.

In 2004, ties and technology converged in the creation of the Young Vic theatre company's UK-wide Genesis Network, an online platform for directors and other backstage professionals. It started life with just 200 members and now encompasses over 2,000. During the pandemic, the Young Vic team provided a lifeline with online workshops, but maybe the Network's greatest power lies in the way its members support and mentor each other, mutually building skills and opening the way to professional opportunities. Entrepreneurial and philanthropic in spirit and in practice, the Genesis Network exemplifies the value to be derived from ties and technology.

THERE IS one more T that I would like to talk about. Rather than belonging in the philanthropic toolbox, it is engendered by skilful, sincere deployment of the other five Ts. It is "trust". Trust, as we all know, is something that usually has to be worked for. To achieve success as an entrepreneurial philanthropist, you first of all need to trust in yourself. Then you apply yourself to gaining the trust of other people as, both generously and judiciously, you share your treasure and talents and build and energise your ties.

In a challenging world, trust is one of our greatest assets. Trust between human beings can be lost as well as won, but at all times we can be confident in God. As it says in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Thanks to our faith in God, we can have faith in ourselves and our aspirations.

It may well be that 2023 turns out to be another tough year, but God will continue to strengthen and sustain us through its course. Safe in that knowledge we have all the more reason to take the initiative, pick up our toolbox and trust ourselves to become entrepreneurial philanthropists.

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CHRISTMAS remains big business in parishes. It's the one day when people come in droves to church, often for their annual visit. It breaks our hearts that they don't turn up each week and that they rarely return, even at Easter, the most important feast in the Church's year. The Good Friday service is well attended, but it does not attract the same crowds as Christmas. It doesn't help that sometimes grumpy clergy begin the Christmas Mass by berating the congregation for being there.

There has been a lot of talk about Mass numbers in recent years. The Covid pandemic has decimated attendance figures and some of the faithful have not returned. Our older people sometimes found an online Mass that gave them convenience and comfort and they found a new way to pray. This is no substitute for celebrating the Eucharist with the worshipping community, but I understand why many have dispensed themselves from the Sunday obligation because of illness, age or physical frailty.

Catholics are no longer moved by the threat of eternal damnation if they die before being absolved of the mortal sin of non-attendance at Mass. In any case, it's always better to be drawn to Mass by love than driven there by fear.

But it would be a mistake to blame the general slump in church-going numbers on the Covid lockdowns. They have been in a downward spiral for decades. The reasons for the drift away from church-going are many. Individualism, the all-out attack of the new atheists and the criminality in the Church laid bare by the sexual abuse crisis have played their part.

But it must be admitted that many Catholics have not had an encounter of faith that would lead to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They no longer find in the Church a sense of identity and belonging. While many say they are attracted by Jesus and his teaching, they find they are able to live ethical lives without any direct reference to Christianity. If recent surveys are to be believed, most people consider an afterlife a remote possibility at best.

WE SHOULD be careful of the numbers game. I know of a priest who refuses to visit the Catholic school next door to his church "because the students, parents and teachers don't go to Mass any more".

According to this scenario, you have to walk the talk before the pastor of souls will have anything to do with you. The spiritual journey has to be on his terms or not at all. Not much missionary imagination or zeal in that approach.

The Church has laboured for centuries in places and circumstances where there has been little hope of "putting bums on seats". Catholic communities have provided education, healthcare and social services to all for generations without any major flowering of the local church. Japan is one such place.

St Francis Xavier and his early Jesuit brothers were followed by Franciscans and Dominicans who laboured long and hard in the land of the rising sun before Christianity was banned altogether in 1614. Japan reopened to Christianity in 1853 and, ever since, every denomination has sent its best and brightest to serve the people of that great country.

Today the Catholic Church runs 831 educational institutions in Japan. It has given the universal Church 635 saints, almost all of them martyrs. Yet of a population of 126 million, only 1.5 per cent are Christian, with Catholics last year numbering just 431,100. If "putting bums on seats" is the reason for our missionary endeavours, then Japan has been an abject failure. But that is not what we have done or will do.

THE GENIUS of Christianity is that it is not just playing the long game, but that it understands the role of the Church as being like leaven in the cultural bread. The best missionary instinct is to do what the Ignatian Prayer for Generosity asks of us: "To give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for reward, save that of knowing that I do your holy will."

While we all long for the Christmas crowds to turn up in Ordinary Time too, let's all begin this Christmas by being welcoming, hospitable, joyful, affirming, inclusive and compassionate – not because it's a strategy for church growth, but because it's what we believe God has done for us in the babe of Bethlehem.



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