

Religion is a major influence in the American philanthropy sector. Faith-based schools, congregations,

ing faith with others through religious outreach, such as ministry or mission work.

- Giving a fair share. Intent and manner of giving are important. Rambam, a twelfth-century Jewish scholar, identifies eight levels of giving (Feuer, 2000). The New Testament parable titled “Widow’s Mite” (Luke 21:1–4) illustrates that giving one’s fair share, no matter how small, is more important than a larger contribution from

name is based on the biblical story) are state liability laws that protect citizens who go out of their way to help others.

America was founded on principles of religious expression. In his farewell speech, George Washington cited religion and morality as the indispensable supports of American society (London, 2000).

congregations in the United States; 95 percent of Americans believe in God, 70 percent belong to a congregation, and 40 percent regularly attend religious services (Wood and Houghland, 1990).

Moreover, religion exerts an important influence on philanthropy. Nearly half (47 percent) of all philanthropic giving in America goes to religious institutions and causes (INDEPENDENT SECTOR, 2000). People who attend religious services regularly tend to be bigger givers, and they volunteer more often. Youth who belong to congregations are more likely to volunteer.

Faith-based organizations also exert a positive impact on “non-religious” philanthropy. For example, higher levels of religious involvement correlate with higher involvement and giving to non-church-related charities, such as the United Way and youth organizations (Wood and Houghland, 1990).

Many religious organizations have received high marks for working in areas of high risk, such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and crime prevention. Harvard economist Richard Freeman calls this the faith factor (Shapiro, 1996). John DiIulio (1995) attributes faith-based organizations’ success in curbing youth crime and stabilizing inner-city neighborhoods to their ability to build spiritual capital.

Jeavons (1994) shares the following early childhood (primordial caring) recollection of learning to give at his church:

Many of us will remember being in worship services with our parents and how important it was for us to put something in the plate (like mom and dad) during the offering. While this may seem like it could be a superficial imitation of behavior, children often quickly internalize the rationales for and attitudes behind such giving—the idea of contributing to group, the feeling of obligation (and opportunity) to share in its work, and so on—as well as actual practice. [p. 2]

This early, or primordial, learning occurs primarily in the home. Children learn empathy by being cared for and by taking care of others. They experience this from parents, family members, and neighbors. Today, many more children rely on sources outside the home, such as day care providers or messages they see in books, on videos, and on television.

The importance of faith-based philanthropic concepts is likely

example, the Youth Understanding Philanthropy Project—a five-year study at the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy—identified middle school (grades four through eight) as a

Moreover, youth involved in religious settings are likely to learn philanthropic values that are tied directly to their faith. Many religious philanthropic practices are built into holidays, lifecycle events, and everyday life (Plotinsky, 1995).

Engaging older youth is particularly challenging. Benson (1997) emphasizes that youth ages fifteen to eighteen are most at risk in high school. Older youth are more likely to drop out of congregation life and youth group activities.

Many religious practices meant to reaffirm religious rights of passage, such as bar mitzvahs and confirmations, unfortunately turn out to be points of checking out. Religious commitment declines in adolescence (Benson, Donahue, and Erikson, 1989). However, engaging teens in service is seen as an effective way to address this “adolescent apostasy.” Given the busy school and after-school schedule of most youth these days, more faith-based programs are starting out-of-town activities on weekends and during the summer. These programs focus on strengthening faith, building teams, and promoting social action and religious outreach. Some programs are local and sponsored by congregations, but often they are run by national organizations and bring together youth from several communities.

The concept of offering youth long-term voluntary service opportunities to solve public problems is not new. Peace Corps and VISTA are two successful national service programs created by President Kennedy in the 1960s. More recently, the government established AmeriCorp—a network of national service programs meant to encourage public service and compassion in young peo-

ple. AmeriCorp began in the 1990s by President Clinton, partially in response to concerns about declining civil society.

Intensive summer youth programming that focuses on service is a great way to teach philanthropy to youth. Religious outreach or missionary work is probably the biggest success story in promoting philanthropy.

Christian vision of 'service' rooted in the person and message of Jesus" (LaNave, 2002, p. 1).

Schools face two major constraints in teaching philanthropy. First, they are overloaded with a full curriculum and often specially mandated topics. As most teachers will attest, schools are often called on to correct problems, be it drug abuse, smoking, or voter apathy. Second, public schools must refrain from favoring any religion. This is why schools promote generic values and avoid or, as some say, downplay, the importance of religion.

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Churches, synagogues, and mosques are natural settings in which to promote giving and serving to youth. Since the advent of the Sunday school movement, congregations have sought ways to reach out and engage their next generation of members. Dean (1991) found that despite wide diversity of theological perspectives, religious youth programming shares remarkably similar goals across Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish faith traditions. These include an emphasis on instilling faith identity, engaging youth to become active voluntary members, and promoting healthy adolescent development.

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National youth service, such as through AmeriCorp and Campus Compact, is heralded as another possible approach to instilling the

many mainstream Protestant and Jewish denominations are strengthening their youth outreach efforts as well. For example, in response to high assimilation rates, Jewish organizations have stepped up outreach efforts. Many of these summer and year-abroad programs for study in Israel rely on youth who volunteer to teach and lead activities that promote Jewish identity.

Perhaps the greatest impact of these outreach programs is on the youth volunteers themselves.

The real genius of the Mormon missionary system is its effect on its own members, especially young people. . . . At an age when the youth of most religions are beginning to avoid church activities, Mormon youngsters are baby-sitting, mowing lawns, and pumping gas after school . . . to cover expenses when they serve a mission. [Ostling and Ostling, 1999, p. 214]

A Mormon leader adds, "We want them to say, 'This is the best two years of my life,' and to return each one a convert to the church himself" (Ostling and Ostling, 1999, p. 215). Another former Mormon missionary states, "They learn how to immerse themselves in serving others" (p. 214).

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When the prophet Samson's father, Manoach, asked an angel for advice on how to raise their very special child, it is said that the angel advised Manoach and his wife to change their own behavior and become their son's role models. It would not suffice to teach Samson how to become a righteous leader of his people if he did not see that behavior modeled in his home. The same is true for philanthropic behavior. If we want our children to be philanthropic, we must be philanthropic ourselves.

Families, irrespective of faith, are more apt to embrace efforts to teach philanthropy to their children if these values strike them as relevant and important. So it is with religious families. Parents who care about religion are more likely to embrace efforts by schools,

congregations, and youth-serving groups insofar as they promote

pillars of traditional philanthropy. The names Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller may be held in vast respect—even in awe in some quarters—but they pale in comparison to the names of religious heroes such as Moses, Jesus, or Mohammed, who are likely to be listed by any religiously observant youngster.

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