Columns
Horizons
Ministry

Catholic mothers bring gifts for people living in poverty. (Mary Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan)

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Descriptions of Vietnamese women of the past often mention their communication style and focus on their dignified and gentle features. They did not have much education, so the older Vietnamese women's role was to stay at home to care for their husbands and children, including feeding the family good meals and cleaning the house. They also had to pick up and prepare food for their parents. Women had to depend on the husband's earnings for all household expenses,

Today, women are more qualified and have gradually come to occupy important positions in society. Equal rights have contributed to their ability to expand their knowledge and participate in social activities. However, women still take care of husbands and children is still done by women today — not only cooking delicious meals and cleaning the house, but also transporting children to school and to church to attend Mass and to study doctrine. In addition, women also cooperate with their husbands to earn extra income for family expenses, such as by trading or selling online. Thus, the role of women today is harder because they have to both earn money and fulfill the duties of the wife and mother in the family.

In addition to their usual duties, Catholic mothers participate in parish activities as members of associations, choirs, mothers' groups, the Legion of Mary, Caritas and more. Moreover, they also generously serve the parish in duties like sweeping and cleaning the church's tables and chairs weekly. They are always ready to help the people living in poverty or to do other forms of charitable work.

In summer 2022, my community of Dominican nuns organized charitable works for ethnic people in the Loc Quang Parish and for those living in poverty in the Dong Tam Parish, of the Phu Cuong Diocese. To get gifts for them, we had to ask for the support of Catholic mothers in Tien Chu Parish of the Xuan Loc Diocese, where we have been doing pastoral work.

A 30-year-old Catholic mother sells hamburgers to earn a living. (Mary Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan)

Within a month, the mothers mobilized and asked for 100 gifts (including noodles, rice, cooking oil, sugar and clothing). For children they gathered cakes, candies and educational supplies. They worked hard to distribute these gifts. In particular, they had to wake up at 3 a.m. to prepare food for the journey, and then traveled more than 200 kilometers to deliver these gifts.

Before giving these gifts, the Catholic mothers met the families and inquired about their daily lives. The ethnic people live by hunting and gathering, and only a few of them work as hired labor for the Kinh people. Therefore, their income is not stable.

Most of them are elderly; Their children are married and have their own lives but they are also poor so they can't afford to take care of their elderly parents. The elderly earn a living by peeling cashews (this place is famous for growing and producing cashews). On average, they earn 80,000 Vietnamese dong (a little over $3) per day. This income is only enough for daily meals for the elderly. They were so happy to get the gifts from the Catholic mothers because it means they can save some money to buy medicine for themselves.

After meeting those living in poverty, and understanding their difficulties, a 43-year-old Catholic mother — a grocery store owner — said to Sister Mary (who is in charge of this charitable group) that the trip was meaningful, and the effort of spending a whole month preparing this gift was worth it. Today, she feels happy that she closed the shop for one day to visit them and wants more trips like this.

We Dominican nuns really admire Catholic mothers. Although they work hard to earn a living and to fulfill their duties as wives and mothers, they are always generous with parish jobs like sweeping and cleaning the church, arranging flowers and singing in the choir.

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There is a 30-year-old woman who embraced Catholicism when she married a Catholic man. She has two children: a boy and a girl. She is the most enthusiastic and generous of the Catholic mothers, in spite of her busy life. She sells hamburgers 5 to 9 a.m., earning about 1 million dong — (about $40 dollars) daily. At noon, she cooks meals for her family and picks up her children from school; in the afternoon, she prepares ingredients to sell hamburgers for the next day.

She is busy the whole day, but still spends free time participating in parish activities. For this charitable trip, she donated the most gifts, and said that for her first time doing charity like this, she felt very happy, especially that she got to visit these disadvantaged people.

We Dominican nuns are really grateful to the Catholic mothers and benefactors for their kind and generous hearts, always willing to assist our mission to help people living in poverty. Thanks to their cooperation, we can better serve the poor. We do not know how to repay these Catholic mothers, except with daily prayers from our hearts. May God bless their families and jobs with peace in life so that they are always willing to give God's love to everyone.