Opinion



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by Mary Ann McGivern

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I have a Jewish friend who occasionally comments on a Christian oddity — that we seem to be generous only at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. I'm a little ashamed to admit that my friend is right. All the big asks come now because now, the Christmas season, is the time when most people in the U.S. give. And most of us in the U.S. are Christians (about 70 percent).

Well, we are in that hot moment of giving, so please give generously.

We are surrounded these days by Salvation Army bell ringers, news reports of needy families and neighborhood campaigns to provide gifts for particular families, children's sizes included in the asks. And we respond readily. The gifts to the St. Louis Catholic Worker are enough to purchase food into late spring. But come summer, the pantry shelves are pretty bare. And summer is when kids don't get school lunches, and low-income family budgets are under strain. Oh, for Salvation Army bells in July.

Our giving habit is seasonal. 'Tis the season. 'Tis also the fashion to complain about all the begging letters we receive, persistent email requests, pleas from groups we haven't given to for a dozen years, little gifts like address labels and shopping bags meant perhaps to guilt us a little and push us into making a gift.

I write some of those ask letters. I'm good at it. I focus on a particular situation and how you can help. And I mean every word of it. But I write more of those letters in spring and summer than during the giving season. The off-season is when we need some eloquence.

Once more, I urge you, follow your impulse to give. Give generously. Give until you feel it and it feels good. And then, in February, June, August, October, give again.

[Mary Ann McGivern, a Sister of Loretto, works with people who have felony convictions and advocates for criminal justice. She lived at a Catholic Worker house for 28 years. She has been a public radio commentator and written plays and a cookbook. She lives in St. Louis.]

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