



A NEW WAY TO CONSIDER

# Charity vs. Philanthropy

JANE R. LANIER, CFRE

**W**hen we think about philanthropy and charity, we naturally think about the generosity of individuals who care about the well-being of others. In Catholic health care, we have the opportunity every day to see that generosity firsthand. We see generosity in the philanthropic and charitable gifts that made a Women and Infants Pavilion take shape at Ascension's St. Vincent's HealthCare in Jacksonville, Florida. In this pavilion, all women, regardless of their socioeconomic status or ability to pay, will receive the same state-of-the-art, compassionate care. That goes for St. Vincent's heart centers and cancer centers and community outreach programs, all funded in part by the generosity of people who think about the importance of giving as part of their nature.

The nonprofit sector blossoms in the United States, where according to *Giving USA 2016: The Annual Report of Philanthropy for the Year 2015*, giving set a record for the second year in a row — \$373.25 billion. As usual, individuals made up the largest sector — 70 percent of all giving in 2015.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to individuals giving to better their communities, help their neighbors and even those whom they will never know, many people ask “Why?” or “What’s in it for the donor?” But donors do not ask that question. At St. Vincent's, we believe that our donors give simply because they have been blessed and, in turn, wish to bless others. One could say this is the American way, but we call it the God way. We receive charitable and philanthropic gifts from individuals of every faith experience and various areas of socioeco-

nomical and educational levels in our society. We tie giving to faith and gratitude.

Philanthropist and Catholic businessman Robert T. (Bob) Shircliff is a role model for philanthropy in Jacksonville and beyond. He has been honored many times, and two of those honors — from the Association of Fundraising Professionals in 1999 and 2016 — recognized his ability to inspire others with his own personal giving.

In an interview published in 2016, Shircliff said, “My motivation comes from my Catholic faith and the example set by my father.” He credited his dad for telling him early on, “Bob, you’ve got to make life better for other people.”<sup>2</sup>

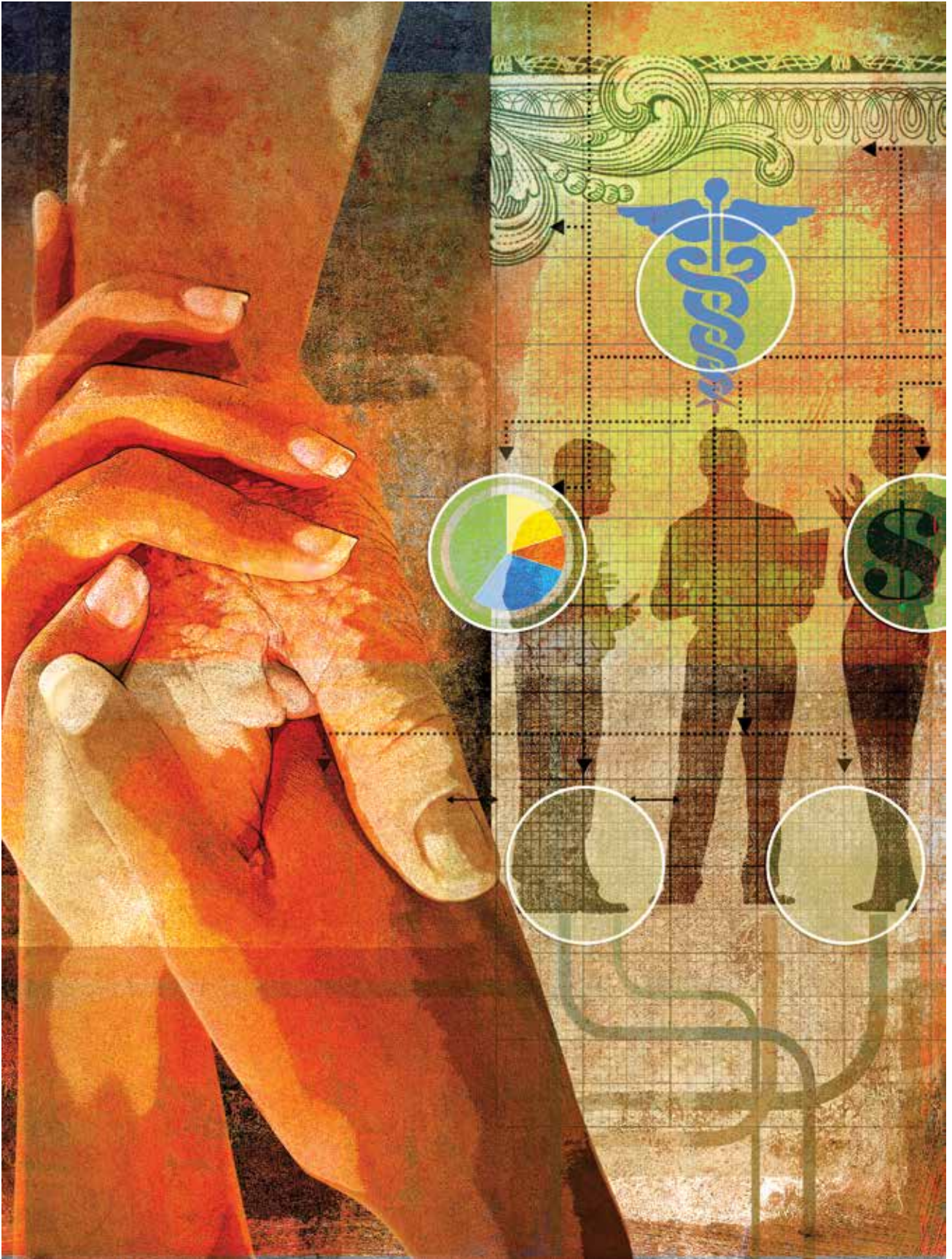
## TERMS AND NUANCES

For decades, there has been a lively debate on the differences or nuances between the terms charity and philanthropy. Development professionals throughout the United States have taken stands on what or who defines these words. Although the debate continues, both words give us a sense of the donor's values and character; a sense of personal, selfless commitment; and the generosity of the human spirit.

Regarding the meanings of charity and philan-

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— JOHN BUNYAN





thropy, Sherry Magill, president of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund based in Jacksonville, stated in an email: “Philanthropy is often talked about as being strategic, which includes identifying and understanding the myriad reasons a problem exists (say, homelessness) and trying to solve these problems with private dollars, public dollars, changes in public policy (i.e., changing the rules), and measuring the change over time (i.e., did we make a difference?).”

“Charity, on the other hand, is my giving something to someone in need to alleviate the circumstance in which she or he finds herself or himself — i.e., providing a meal for a hungry person, providing a place to sleep. The need is real, the act of giving is important to our basic humanity, but the act of giving is in no way designed nor does it pretend to be a way to solve the problem of hunger and homelessness.

“Some juxtapose charity and strategic philanthropy; it’s either one or the other. For me, it’s both, and there are times when, as donors, we must be prepared to engage in both acts. We cannot, for example, allow the hungry and the homeless to continue to be hungry and homeless as we figure out the challenge of low wages and rents that are too high.”<sup>3</sup>

**ROOTED IN HISTORY**

In the 17th century, St. Vincent de Paul defined charity by his very life and is often referred to as the Great Apostle of Charity. He founded the Sisters of Charity with St. Louise de Marillac in Paris.

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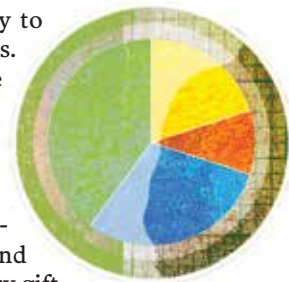
The Sisters became known as the Daughters of Charity, who offered care and hope to the sick and poor, to galley slaves, to abandoned infants and to families in destitute conditions. Today, Ascension, the nation’s largest not-for-profit Catholic health

care system, defines its mission and core values in the same way. Ascension’s first core value is “Service of the Poor.” Philanthropy propels and

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sustains its nearly 400-year-old mission to care for those living in poverty and struggling in communities throughout the United States.

A file in our Jacksonville offices holds the philanthropic record of an individual we may never know. Almost every month, an anonymous donor sends anywhere from \$1 to \$13 in a small, hand-addressed envelope. We have tried, with no luck, through our central post office to identify this donor, simply to write a special note of thanks. All of us in development are privileged to be a small part of this philanthropic exchange. We respect the donor’s intent and hold it as a sacred trust. In Catholic health care we love and respect our donors for every gift



that enables us to carry out our mission to serve those who are struggling most in our communities. This philanthropy takes care of the immediate needs of the children and families we serve, and it supports our vision for a future of quality medical care for each of our patients, for life.

We believe this donor’s gift comes as a sacrifice, and he or she most likely does not have a bank account. In some way, St. Vincent’s has given health and hope to him or her, or perhaps to a family member. We made a

lasting impression.

It probably was not just the safe, clinical delivery of expert care. For this donor, it likely was being treated with compassionate, holistic care that addressed spiritual, emotional and physical

needs at a time when he or she was most vulnerable. We made the human difference, he or she felt blessed and, in turn, continues to bless others, month after month.

We believe this gift could not be more philanthropic. Philanthropy and charity are gifts of love, from the heart.

### CHARITY AND PHILANTHROPY

Let's take a look at two of the most prevalent and widely held opinions about charity vs. philanthropy. Many individuals, donors and development officers involved with not-for-profits, in social service organizations, in higher education and in the health care field believe that "charity" represents a response by the donor to an immediate need and is defined by gifts not usually considered a "major gift" by the organization.

"Philanthropy" is seen as a solution, usually affected by a collaborative vision between the organization and the donor, and results in what is defined as a major gift or life-changing gift. The website of the Melvin and Bren Simon Foundation states: "Steve Gunderson, former president and CEO of the Council of Foundations, described the nuanced difference between charity and philanthropy as this: Charity tends to be a short-term, emotional, immediate response, focused primarily on rescue or relief, whereas philanthropy is much more long term, more strategic, focused on rebuilding. One of my colleagues says there is charity, which is good, and then there is problem-solving charity, which is called philanthropy ..."

The Simons' website notes that "philanthropy as well as charity are guided by the conviction that, for those able to provide it, such support is not a matter of generosity. It is a core responsibility."

Others in the field of advancement and devel-

opment see it differently. In a 2009 article for the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Andrea McManus, CFRE, the association's past board chair, makes an eloquent and convincing point that we should stop making a distinction between "charity" and "philanthropy." What is sacrificial giving to one donor could literally be

pocket change to another, she points out. Perhaps we must rethink whether we are diminishing a heartfelt gift because the amount of the gift governs whether we refer to it as "charity" or "philanthropy."

### THE POWER OF GIVING

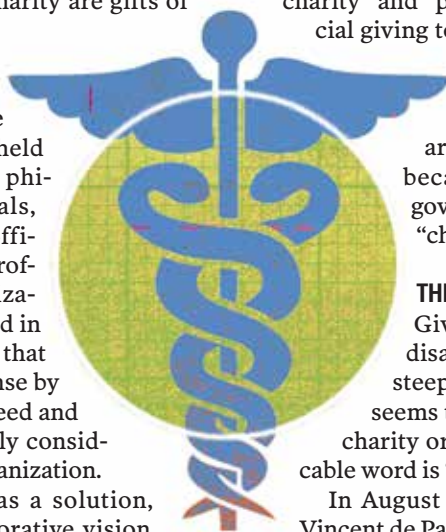
Giving is personal. No one can disagree with that. Because I am steeped in the Vincentian spirit, it seems to me that when talking about charity or philanthropy, the only applicable word is "gift."

In August 1617 at Chatillon, France, St. Vincent de Paul delivered a homily in which he asked his congregation to be aware that one of the local families was suffering from illness and poverty. Later that afternoon, as he traveled to visit the family, he met dozens of his parishioners, coming and going along the way, who wanted to help. The family was overwhelmed with not only kindness, but also medicine and provisions, more than the one family could use. St. Vincent de Paul urges us, "First the heart, and then the work."

The parishioners' actions not only served an immediate need, but also represented a philanthropic and sacrificial response and led St. Vincent to organize the first Confraternity of Charity. His vision was philanthropy in action, and it became the start of organizations found throughout the world today, operated by lay volunteers.

We all are familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan in St. Luke's Gospel, 10:25-37. As we read it, we reflect on which character is most like ourselves. Yet we see some of ourselves in each of the individuals in the story. Is the parable bidding us to philanthropy or to charity? It doesn't really matter, as long as we are doing something for others whom we are blessed to serve. In giving, there is joy.

Any donor will tell you that he or she has received the greater gift. When one of our now longtime, dedicated donors made his first major



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gift, he threw his hands in the air, looked heavenward and exclaimed: "I feel great! This is the first gift I have made of any size, and it will change someone's life, including mine!"

Philanthropy is heartfelt charity. John Bunyan said, "You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you."

Philanthropy and charity are not bound by an amount or a cause. They are governed by the gift, and it is from the heart. St. Teresa of Calcutta said, "It's not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving."

Our belief is that America is a model for philanthropy. Abraham Lincoln's wisdom concluded, "To ease another's heartache is to forget one's own." Giving transforms the donor and sustains the mission of our organizations; both thrive, bringing life and hope to communities served by

Catholic health care. It is not so much how we define charity or philanthropy that's important — it is understanding the power of giving.

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**NOTES**

1. Giving USA, "Giving USA: 2015 Was America's Most-Generous Year Ever," news release, <https://givingusa.org/giving-usa-2016/> (accessed Jan. 23, 2017).
2. Matt Soergel, "Bob Shircliff and the Shircliff Way of Changing the World," *The Florida Times-Union* Nov. 21, 2016. <http://jacksonville.com/news/2016-11-21/bob-shircliff-and-shircliff-way-changing-world> (accessed Jan. 23, 2017).
3. Sherry Magill, email message to author.

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