

Don't worry, give money

## **Organizations rating nonprofits appeal to the results-oriented. But is that what charity is about?**

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The tagline for [Charity Navigator](#), the charities rating firm reads, “Your Guide to Intelligent Giving.” At the start of Lent, Pope Francis encouraged another way.

In an [interview](#) before Ash Wednesday, the pontiff explained that believers should prioritize giving to the needy, and not second guess how that money might be spent. When considering a homeless neighbor, asking for gifts on the street, the pope said, “There are many excuses” we use to justify not giving, like, “I give money and he just spends it on a glass of wine!”

But, Francis noted, sometimes a “glass of wine is his only happiness in life.” Fair enough! Further, Francis cautioned against giving money without looking the recipient in the eyes, failing to regard him as another human being.

The rise of organizations like Charity Navigator appeal to the practical, results-oriented charitable giver. But they have also turned giving to charity into a business-oriented practice, making support for our needy neighbors an experiment in the best return on investment.

When giving becomes mere investment we’re in danger of losing the human aspect of giving. The focus becomes dollars, return ratios, and spreadsheets rather than our very real neighbors, our sisters and brothers. Or, even worse, a return on investment approach surfaces the danger of making giving about the brilliance of our personal giving choices, about *our* selection of a charity in the Darwinian world of nonprofit giving.

When I read scripture, I find Jesus living out an extreme posture of generosity, **committing flagrant acts of giving** without stopping to check star ratings or bona fides. Jesus is not the sort you'd want on your congregation's outreach council. "Give it away," he'd say, regardless of which nonprofit you'd deem most deserving or efficient.

Like all things, of course, it's about balance. Certainly, there are some bad apple charities whose focus becomes enriching the workers rather than doing the work. But such charities are extremely few and far between.

With the pope, this Lent I'd prefer to cultivate a spirit of giving that leads with an open hand, rather than arms crossed, waiting to react until after I see annual reports and charity ratings. Is that "intelligent giving" as Charity Navigator sells? Absolutely not. It's gospel foolishness.

*Originally posted at [Copeland's blog](#)*