

MENDICANT

CAC's Financial Philosophy:

“How you do anything is how you do everything.”

MICHAEL POFFENBERGER

When Richard Rohr founded the CAC in 1987, his vision was to provide spiritual grounding for a movement of contemplative activists and prophetic leaders—an “underground seminary” that would teach the path of praxis and prayer. Over the years, we grew from a mom-and-pop shop of volunteers mailing cassette tapes and hosting local retreats into a professional organization serving hundreds of thousands of people every day.

As we have grown and changed, the values behind our work remain consistent. However, the ways in which we seek to practice them have to evolve with us. One question that has been a source of constant reflection has been how we, as an institution, relate to money.

In part, this preoccupation reflects Fr. Richard's unique Franciscan values and practices. Francis, of course, rejected his inheritance as the son of a wealthy businessman and practiced an extreme form of asceticism. The Franciscan order remains one of the most widely recognized examples of voluntary simplicity in the world today.

However, it's about more than values. It's also about how we understand our mission, and the kinds of relationships we want to foster with our community in order to be faithful as conduits of contemplative wisdom.

In the Spring 2021 edition of *the Mendicant*, Fr. Richard wrote, “Our attitude toward the earning, giving, losing, and receiving of money is about as good a mea-

sure for our giving and receiving of love as anything I know. . . . We are either flow people, or dam (!) people.” In other words, our relationships with money—whether as individuals or for CAC as an institution—reflect the character of our relationships with *everything!*

If that's the case, then the way we relate to money at CAC needs to support relationships with our community that are most conducive to our mission of spiritual awakening and transformation—for example, relationships that are transformational rather than transactional, honor God in every person and thing, and reflect an abiding posture of trust. We must ask ourselves, “Will CAC be a ‘flow’ institution or a ‘dam (!)’ institution?” Like Fr. Richard's metaphor of the trinitarian waterwheel, we want to give and receive with receptivity and love.

These aren't just abstract ideas. The choice to be a “flow” or “dam” organization has direct bearing on practical decisions we make every day. That's why we worked over the past year to develop CAC's first Financial Philosophy, to codify our values and teachings around money into clear organizational commitments. We started by listening to Fr. Richard reflect on relevant theological and spiritual themes and ended with principles and practices we can implement on a day-to-day basis.

The resulting document incorporates goals around offering more programming “in the gift,” where participants offer financial gifts commensurate with both their ability to share and desire for others

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A Generosity of Spirit

BARBARA C. OTERO-LÓPEZ

was born and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico, down the street from the Center for Action and Contemplation. Over twenty-five years ago, this proximity to CAC—an oasis in Albuquerque’s South Valley—sparked for me a curiosity about and interest in the teachings offered by Fr. Richard Rohr. Over the years, his relatable wisdom has resonated so deeply with me for many reasons, but mostly because it mirrors the truth and wisdom that my native New Mexican parents, grandparents, and extended family have modeled through their faith, generosity, love of community, and lifestyle.

I am currently a Living School student. Our first unit of study was on non-duality, which really helped me to recognize the connection between what I was learning about oneness with God and others and the foundation I was given by my own family and our New Mexican traditions.

My family modeled a generosity of spirit and love in so many beautiful ways. Money was never plentiful for my parents or grandparents, but that reality was more of a blessing than a curse. There was always more than enough love and willingness to help both family and neighbors. If food was scarce, it never stopped my grandmothers from making their fresh tortillas, beans, and chile stretch to feed their large families and anyone else who came over for a visit.

Through their love and respect of others, my family taught me that we



My family taught me that we can live in wholeness if we realize that what we have is enough and what we truly need to do is be resourceful and generous.

can live in wholeness if we realize that what we have is enough and what we truly need to do is be resourceful and generous. As my grandmother used to say, “Use it up, wear it out, make do, and do without.” To respect and honor our resources, take only what we need, and avoid acting out of scarcity were lessons of love that have shaped me more than I had realized. It’s only now that I am able to see this in the context of the non-dual nature of God, and the oneness we all share with each other and all of God’s creation. An open hand was always my mom’s gesture to me on how to welcome God’s gifts and, just as quickly, give them away.

I believe that this spirit and way of life which was passed down over generations is action-based in oneness and in seeing God in others. I was taught through example how to welcome and allow the flow of love to pass to me, through me, and to my neighbor. I wish that, as a young person, I had seen and appreciated the beauty of this gift so I could express my gratitude to my family, but I suppose that the best way for me to honor them is to pass it on and model this spirit of non-dual generosity, in my own life and in how I see and serve my neighbor.

BARBARA C. OTERO-LÓPEZ, an engineer, instructional designer, and teacher, worked for the University of New Mexico for twenty years and now works as an independent consultant for the CAC. A lover of all of God’s creation, Barbara is a wife and mother.

the Mendicant

A publication of the Center for Action and Contemplation

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Extravagant Love and Money

ROSE FEERICK

A small group of friends is gathered in a cabin in the redwood forest. Outside it is foggy and drizzling. Inside, the furniture is worn but comfortable. The friends take turns offering reflections on a shared question: How do I work with money as a wealthy Christian?

I am one of the people in the room. Ten years prior, I received the gift of a financial portfolio, a gift of love intended to give me freedom. It had come at a time when I was making a conscious choice to simplify my life.

I had spent my college years studying liberation theology and mystical spirituality at a private Jesuit university. I also worked with low-income pregnant women during those years. I was troubled by the economic disparity I witnessed. I wanted to create a world where everyone's needs were met. How was I to do that? What should I do with the money I was given?

One Catholic Worker friend quoted (and lived) Mark 10:21: "Sell what you own and give the money to the poor . . . then come, follow me." My financial advisor offered to move a small percentage of my money into a Socially Responsible Investing fund. Mostly, I kept the fact that I had money a secret.

When I turned thirty-one, one of my mentors invited me to join other wealthy Christians on retreat. So, there I was in that cabin in 2001. One friend shared concerns about a trip to work in a slum in another country. He feared for his safety. I wanted to offer advice to protect him. Instead, I picked up a bottle of lotion and began to massage his feet.

As I poured lotion into my hands, something happened. I felt as if I was *inside* of the story of the Anointing at Bethany (John 12:1-8). Who was this woman who offered loving touch to Jesus as he stood at the threshold of death? What did it mean that she used the precious oil of the Song of Songs?

This was the beginning of my journey. I did not yet know about Wisdom Christianity or Cynthia Bourgeault's work



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on Mary Magdalene, but I did know that there was something about the mystical love present in that story that changed the way I asked questions about money.

I now sit as the Co-Director of Wisdom & Money, convening small groups to engage in contemplative spiritual practice and to talk openly about money. We listen deeply to one another. We practice making choices about money that flow from the heart. In this job, I watch miracles.

Wisdom Christianity is a path that has the power to shift our center of gravity from a dualistic mind-state to a heart-centered one. Honesty about money has the power to reveal when we are acting from fear or pride, and when we are genuinely acting from love and freedom. When we work with money in a Wisdom context, we can learn how to let money flow in the world in a spirit of extravagant love.

I think of my friend John, for instance, who could not give money because of an early trauma. His Wisdom & Money circle welcomed his struggle with compassion. When the group decided to make a group gift, John declined to participate. "How about giving the change in your pocket?" someone asked. John offered a quarter. To his surprise, his friends celebrated, recognizing the gift as a crack in

the wall. It was enough.

John subsequently gave \$10,000 to the group gift and went on to convert an historic house on his property into a stunning retreat center dedicated to Wisdom practice. He subsidizes the costs of the center so a wide circle of people can come. Giving has freed him. He explains, "The gift comes from the Christ within. It is the gift that I receive."

ROSE FEERICK has been offering retreats related to money and Christian spirituality for almost twenty years. She lives in Santa Cruz, California and is delighted to be the mother of two young adult sons who share her love of music, nature, and conversation about stuff that matters. To learn more about Rose Feerick and Wisdom & Money, visit <https://wisdomandmoney.org/>.

An Alternative Orthodoxy of Money

ELIZABETH GARLOW

In the Spring 2021 edition of *the Mendicant*, Fr. Richard Rohr refers to money as the “overwhelming system and substance for how we exchange.”

Unfortunately, over time, the system of money has become distorted in our society. We often use it to assign false value, measure worth, and facilitate unfettered accumulation. We need an alternative orthodoxy of money. Thankfully, there is one emerging as part of the CAC’s journey to cultivate its new financial philosophy. In it, money is another form of energy that can help us, and our organizations, align with our sense of mission and engage in personal and social transformation. It is a means by which we can encounter one another and build relationships. It can flow in ways that serve “The Great Turning . . . a shift . . . to a life-sustaining civilization”¹ (according to Joanna Macy), not just ourselves and our small agendas.

This worldview of money invites us to consider how we, as individuals and in our organizations, serve as conduits for money’s energy flow in today’s world. Are we creating blockages by remaining rooted in a mindset of scarcity, where there’s never enough to go around? Are we looking at risk solely through the lens of losing money, rather than considering the ways our investments might be contributing to environmental or social risks? Is our attitude toward money one of flow and generosity, supporting the common good, as Fr. Richard remarks in his article?

In embracing an alternative orthodoxy of money, the quality of my participation as a conduit in this flow of energy has been at the top of my mind as I’ve supported the CAC and dozens of other faith-based groups. Recently, I co-led a workshop for twenty-five Roman Catholic investors on strategies to invest in a “livable future.” In *Laudato Si’: On Care for the Human Home*, Pope Francis describes a future rooted in an integral ecology, where we recognize the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop. Seeing our deep interconnectedness invites a moral imperative to “hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”²



Our desire to engage in social transformation is linked with our own personal transformation.

Our money management and investment activities can honor or disturb this integral ecology and, therefore, the possibility for our shared flourishing.

Our desire to engage in social transformation is linked with our own personal transformation, including our relationship to money. One of my favorite of Fr. Richard’s teachings is summed up in this simple phrase: “What you don’t transform, you will transmit.” As I have sought to weave together my work in finance with my faith and formation as a former student of the CAC’s Living School, I have contemplated my own worldview of money and how I transmit it to others.

I continue working to shift from a mindset of scarcity (in which I was formed) to one of abundance, and to embrace the logic of “gift” in how I spend and receive resources. As I grow in awareness, I also grow in my desire to manage money in ways that support a regenerative economy, where we create more value than we extract. This has led to simple changes such as moving personal sav-

ings into a local credit union and, whenever possible, choosing socially responsible investments for retirement accounts.

This work of self-examination, both personal and in organizations—especially in the context of a supportive community—can help us do this most important work with the energy and bold action required.

¹ Joanna Macy, “The Great Turning,” *Center for Ecoliteracy*, June 29, 2009, <https://www.ecoliteracy.org/article/great-turning>.

² Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care for the Human Home*, 49, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

ELIZABETH GARLOW is a Fellow on Faith and Finance with the New America Foundation and Co-Convener of the Economy of Francesco. She is a 2020 Living School sendee and has worked with the CAC’s Finance Committee and staff to support a new financial philosophy. To learn more about Elizabeth Garlow, visit <https://www.newamerica.org/our-people/elizabeth-garlow/>.

Pigeon Economics

Luke 12:22-34

I live in New York City
so I will consider the pigeons,
gathering
around Union Square benches,
sharing
french fries that have fallen
from the fingers of friends
on their lunch breaks,
knowing
that crumbs are abundant
in a place like this,
giving
laughter to children
in awe of their power
to make the birds scatter,
sheltering
from the coming rain
beneath the overhang of the
nearby Barnes & Noble,
living
free because
what they need
is never scarce.

—Drew Jackson



DREW JACKSON joined CAC's board of directors in 2019 and serves as its secretary. Additionally, he is on the contemplative governance and mission and strategy committees. When not leading his faith community, Hope East Village, he enjoys spending time with his wife and their twin daughters. To learn more about

Drew Jackson and Hope East Village, visit <https://www.hopeeastvillage.org/our-mission-and-goals>.

CAC's Financial Philosophy

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to benefit from the same experience (rather than always relying on the shortcut of a market-based price). We examined why and how we ask for money to support our work and committed ourselves to adopting approaches to monetary transactions that are humanizing for both givers and receivers. Another section aims to help us discern our definition of “need,” and commit to the redistribution of some of what we receive to partners in our community who don’t have the same access to resources.

The Financial Philosophy provides a new grounding for our ongoing experimentation and reflection on how organizations like ours can help realize our mission through an alternative praxis around money. Ultimately, our aim is to build relationships that help us all to wake up to the sacredness of everything and relate to money as nothing more (or—perhaps even more daringly—nothing less!) than a tool for building a world that reflects that reality.

Both individuals and institutions like CAC have a key role to play in that task, and I hope our work can support not only CAC but also others in our community who are wrestling with similar questions. In truth, we were inspired by many examples of bold and prophetic action taken by other pioneers ahead of us (especially some of the women’s religious orders). And, of course, we were only able to ask the questions because of the incredible generosity of this community of partners in our mission.

*Even
After
All this time
The sun never says to the earth,
“You owe
Me.”
Look
What happens
With a love like that,
It lights the
Whole
Sky.*

—Rendering of Hafiz by Daniel Ladinsky¹

¹ Daniel Ladinsky, *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz, the Great Sufi Master* (New York: Penguin Compass, 1999), 34.

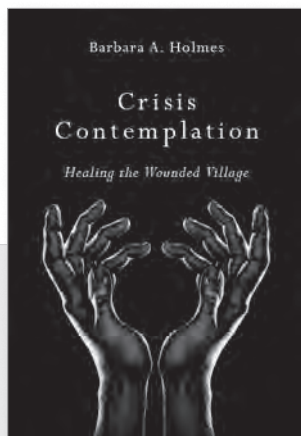
MICHAEL POFFENBERGER has been the CAC’s executive director since 2014, after first serving on the board of directors. A graduate of Notre Dame, Michael served previously as executive director of Resolve, working alongside religious and civil society leaders to build peace and aid war-affected communities in Central and East Africa. He serves as board chair for Invisible Children. Michael delights in spending time with his daughter, Madeleine.



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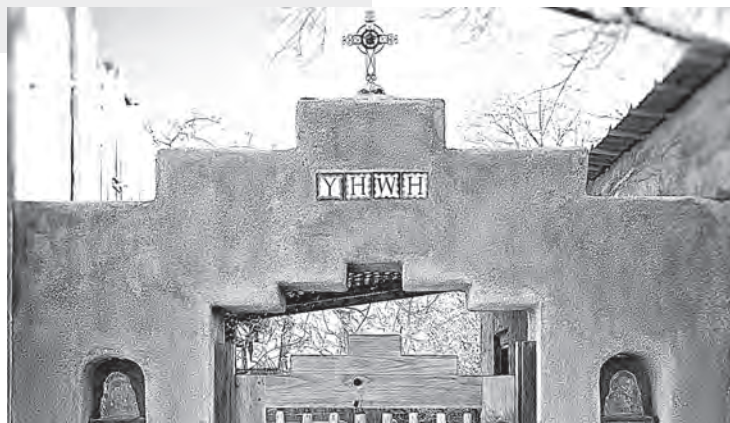


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Effective Generosity: Giving and Receiving Differently!

BY BEN KEESEY

In this edition of *the Mendicant*, we write further about our comprehensive Financial Philosophy after receiving strong positive feedback about the previous issue. The purpose of codifying our philosophy is to incorporate Fr. Richard's values around money: how we raise it, save it, and spend it so that all our engagement with finances reflects our foundational values.

When you give to the CAC, every dollar that you contribute strengthens a partnership with our mission to awaken a more loving world. No matter the amount, you are investing in the effort to engage in transformational work in the world. If it is ever a burden to give money to CAC, we are not doing our job. The goal for our fundraising is to inspire generosity that is freely and cheerfully given. Whether or not you are able to give to CAC, or another organization that inspires you, we believe in a worldview of abundance: there is enough to go around.

As CAC's Development Director, my role is to provide opportunities for wonderful people to connect with our mission through various types of partnership and possibility. This means providing resources, responding to questions, and sharing stories about our future vision and strategy. We believe the future of action and contemplation is important and we trust enough people like you will continue to be partners in making it happen (without convincing or coercing).

If you feel inspired to give, here are a few non-typical but mutually advantageous ways to do so, of which many people are unfamiliar.



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Giving Stock to CAC

- A tax-wise way to support CAC, especially when the market is near all-time highs, is to give appreciated stock. A gift of appreciated stock allows you to avoid the capital gains of selling which could effectively increase your donation by 20%.
- To give stock, you will need CAC's account details. Reach out to me and I'll give you the information you need to submit the request to your broker.

Giving Via Your Retirement Fund: Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs)

- People who are 70½ or older may give from their IRA as a Qualified Charitable Distribution.
- The amount donated to charity is excluded from your taxable income and may help satisfy your required minimum distribution (RMD) for the year.
- To distribute a gift from your IRA, send a note to your account administrator requesting they make a direct charitable distribution from your account to CAC.

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Planned Giving

- Estate Bequests: Bequests are made primarily through gifts of cash or securities.
- Retirement and Insurance Plans: You are able to designate CAC as a beneficiary of the remainder of your retirement or insurance plan.
- Your estate plan should be prepared in writing. The online tool FreeWill.com is a great (and free!) tool to help if you have not already documented your estate plan.

Special Tax Incentives for Giving in 2021 (Part of the COVID-19 Relief Legislation)

- You can deduct up to 100 percent of your adjusted gross income (AGI) for gifts of cash in 2021; this is up from 60 percent in 2019.
- This time-limited benefit only applies to gifts to public charities (like CAC) and not gifts to donor-advised funds (DAFs).

If you would like to learn more about any of these options, please email me at Development@cac.org and I will send you a detailed information sheet. If you need additional guidance, I am happy to help you.

Your trust and support are what makes our mission possible and, for this, we at the CAC are very grateful!

BEN KEESEY is the Director of Development and Partnerships for the CAC. He joined the team in 2016 and helped expand the program and communications capacity through building the Production and Outreach Department. Before joining the CAC, Ben was the Executive Director of Invisible Children, an international charitable organization.