

# In hard times, charity reflects true values

**E**VERY day we are bombarded with tales of economic end times.

But, not all the news is bleak. Divorce rates go down. It may be too expensive to get a divorce during a recession, but I think the solace of a life partner looks a little more appealing as well.

Religious service attendance goes up — but so does attendance at the other inexpensive entertainment venue: movies.

Support for the arts and relief agencies from individual contributors often goes up. This seems completely counterintuitive — when we are threatened with less money to live on, we give more of it away.

The annual Men Who Cook fundraiser at the Women & Family Life Center in Guilford had a record level of corporate support. The holiday bazaar of New Haven's Trinity Church on the Green had record income. Habitat for Humanity in New Haven has seen a wide range of unsolicited support.

Clearly, all of these institutions and many others have lost funding from whatever endowments they had, and many other avenues of support have dried up. But, as in the Barack Obama presidential campaign, small donors seem willing to give away the money that has become a more precious commodity.



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When money is shown to be as fickle a friend as it has over this past season, what we really value in our lives becomes starkly defined. For those who are threatened rather than actually suffering, there is an autonomic response to help.

People have become afraid to spend money and don't have any home equity left from which to create new indebtedness. We have started to save money again.

When the world around us holds up a mirror to our lives, we see with crystal clarity the benefits of our employment, frugality and resourcefulness. It is humbling to see how easily all that can be removed from our lives by the whim of a market, an employer or any institution from which we derive sustenance.

So, in this grayest and darkest of seasons, winter, and in the grayest and most somber year in the last few decades for many of us, everyone has the ability to shine a little light into the blackness of an uncertain future. Where you decide to donate — the arts, campaigns to cure disease, religious institutions or helping those who don't have enough to eat or a place to live — is a choice that reflects what you truly value.

*Duo Dickinson is on the board of directors of Habitat for Humanity New Haven and a member of the vestry of Trinity Church on the Green. He made a mean beef ragout for the Men That Cook event for the Women & Family Life Center. Write to him at 94 Bradley Road, Madison 06443. E-mail: duo.dickinson@snet.net.*