

President Obama reported recently that job losses are expected to rise above ten per cent as our nation continues its struggle to regain financial footing.

At the same time, the operating budgets of non-profit organizations across the country are being reduced due to cutbacks in funding and donations.

A disturbing consequence is that as the number of our nation's distressed individuals and families increases, our nation's safety net of trained personnel and monetary resources is being depleted.

If greed is the transgression that has brought our nation to its troubling current state of affairs, generosity is the antidote that can help to bring us back into financial, moral, ethical and spiritual equilibrium.

We need to change our national focus from getting to giving.

For decades there has been reluctance by the affluent to give money and other resources directly to those in need; as a nation, we have long preferred the anonymity and emotional distance of donating to others indirectly.

I hope we will rethink that hands-off practice during the current recession.

My grandmother's disturbing story contains a revealing lesson.

She became a struggling young widow when her husband, a dentist, died suddenly, leaving her with eight children to support, all under the age of ten.

Subsequently, she raised her family in near poverty just outside of Boston wherein a very strong Yankee tradition of doing for yourself prevailed.

Her extraordinarily wealthy relatives would routinely give her such non-responsive holiday gifts as a mink coat or an alligator handbag.

Her children recalled eating mostly turnips and potatoes for an entire winter.

No one ever held these relatives to account for their choices even as they gave substantial donations to wealthy institutions like the Catholic Church.

During President Kennedy's administration, as an example, three of them contributed a million dollars each to a fund organized by their Archbishop.

I wondered for decades what moral imperative that kind of giving satisfied.

The recently released movie “Grey Gardens” highlights a similar but even more shocking non-responsiveness on the part of Jacqueline Onassis’ family to her aunt, Edith Bouvier Beale, and to her cousin, nicknamed “Little Edie.”

The two women were discovered in 1975 to be living with no running water in a decrepit, filthy and animal-infested family mansion in the Hamptons.

Indifference to glaring hardship was not unusual back then.

In my opinion, our ability to ignore struggling individuals, even those in our own families, has not diminished over time.

Our heartless Yankee tradition of doing for oneself needs to be abandoned.

Expecting desperate people to pull themselves up solely by their own bootstraps is cruel, self-righteous and not even realistic.

It is my crusade, during this period of anguish for so many homeless, jobless and uninsured people, that we will take the national blinders off that have allowed so many of us for so long to discount those in great distress.

It makes no sense at all for affluent individuals to pursue ever more complex philanthropy strategies while the number of sick, hungry and even homeless individuals and families living marginally among us is rapidly increasing.

It is time now for us to return to our strong spiritual roots as a nation and to reaffirm nearly every religion’s mandate to provide help to those in need

For those who can afford to do so, donate directly to others. Provide cash or gift cards. Do this anonymously if you will feel more comfortable.

For those with limited financial resources, time is money.

Charity begins at home: perform specific chores for needy people you know like assisting at a garage sale, babysitting, or helping them to move.

President Obama has issued a national call to service. Visit www.allforgood.org to see a list of volunteer opportunities in your zip code.