

One of the most poignant moments of Charles Dickens' funny, bitingly satirical and tender masterpiece "A Christmas Carol" occurs when Jacob Marley, the ghost of Ebenezer Scrooge's long-dead business partner, suddenly shows up, to Scrooge's dismay, on Christmas Eve. Marley, burdened by heavy chains, reveals that one of the most agonizing things about his grim afterlife is that he cannot reach out to his fellow human beings.



"It is required of every man," Marley tells Scrooge, "that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellowmen, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world — oh, woe is me! — and witness what it

cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!"

Marley cries out in anger and pain at the thought and shakes his chains in frustration.

The force of that fictional lament is born out in our own experiences. Research suggests that giving to others, when a matter of choice and not compulsion, makes us happy — often, happier than when we spend on ourselves. When we alleviate others' pain, we feel a special pleasure. The things we remember and savor most in life include the times we helped others.

Americans know that. They are a remarkably giving people. Those Rhode Islanders who itemize on their taxes gave an average of \$3,092 to charity in 2015, according to the Rhode Island Foundation.

We cannot begin to cite all the examples of charity we see — any such list would inevitably be unfair to those left off it — but even a cursory look shows acts of kindness blossoming all around us.

Last month, the Rhode Island Foundation honored Rob DeBlois, principal of Providence's Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program, an independent middle school that partners with others to serve disadvantaged children. Mr. DeBlois

said he hoped the award “will encourage more people of influence to think of the kids we serve as their own. To treat them as their own, invest in them as they do their own children.”

Mary McVeigh of Cumberland launched the Rhode Island chapter of the Shoebox Project for Shelters, donating shoeboxes full of personal items for women to Crossroads Rhode Island, the nonprofit serving the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless.

Eight students and two faculty members from Providence’s *St. Patrick Academy* flew to the Gulf Coast of Texas in October after the devastation of Hurricane Harvey. They helped in the cleanup and packed donations. “The faith came in for me when we met back with the people after the day of work and they were so thankful we were there,” Tania Ortiz told the *Rhode Island Catholic* newspaper.

Rhode Island’s Kids, Cops and Christmas campaign, led by the State Police in partnership with other law enforcement agencies, earlier this month distributed gifts for children via a variety of social service agencies. “Every child and teen deserves a special gift at Christmas,” said state police Maj. Christopher Dicomitis.

There are countless others who know the great happiness that poor Jacob Marley cannot share. Christmas Day — which for Christians symbolizes the birth of hope and love in the face of darkness and cruelty, much as Scrooge was inspired by his night of ghostly visits to make a fresh start and live fully — seems a good time to ponder that.

Merry Christmas!