

# Joyce & Bill Cummings

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## Our Giving Pledge

As appears to be the case with many of the early Giving Pledge members, the decision to use our earnings philanthropically during our lifetimes came well before this Association's formation.

After about 15 very successful years in greater Boston commercial real estate, we came to recognize and believe that no one can truly "own" anything. Particularly, as regards real estate, how can we possibly think of ourselves as actually owning land? How can we ever be more than caretakers of the ground that lies beneath whatever we might develop on a property? With these thoughts in mind, it was easy to start giving much more.

In 1986, we established Cummings Foundation and pledged at that time to donate 10 percent of all our income each year to it. Gradually, as it became clear that our four children and any future grandchildren were well provided for, we also began donating much of our commercial properties to the Foundation. Very soon, about 60 percent of the total family assets were donated, and Cummings Foundation had sufficient resources to become a meaningful philanthropic factor.

Cummings Foundation, which is classified by the IRS as an operating foundation, has two subsidiaries that operate New Horizons assisted living communities in Woburn and Marlborough, Massachusetts. A third subsidiary is closely associated with Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University in North Grafton, Massachusetts. Building on this local focus, we established an affiliated grant-making foundation in 2011 that now assists hundreds of mostly small local charities. With this increased regular funding for their good work, these nonprofits will quickly become even more impactful in greater Boston communities.

We created the Foundation's final subsidiary, Institute for World Justice, in 2010, shortly after a life-changing meeting in Jerusalem. We were led on a tour of Yad Vashem by the late Holocaust survivor Eliezer Ayalon, with whom we went on to develop a close personal relationship. Thereafter, we came to three powerful realizations: 1) The lessons of the Holocaust are too vital to be forgotten or denied, 2) genocides are still occurring around the world, and 3) the rest of the world cannot simply sit quietly and let them happen.

We hope that Institute for World Justice will play a meaningful role in reducing genocide, as well as many other societal problems that lead to it, including prejudice, intolerance, racism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia. For us, there could be no greater legacy.

Convinced that real change must come from the next generation of world citizens, we began by creating our first interfaith programs for Holocaust and genocide education at Tufts University and

Salem State University. Through academic courses, immersion travel experiences, meetings with genocide survivors, and much more, we believe we will help students at Tufts, and Salem, and in many other places become sensitized to the early warning signs of genocide. We hope they will become strong and passionate enough to stand up against genocidal forces.

Our interest in genocide led us to Rwanda, where we have a special focus on helping to rebuild after the atrocities there in 1994. We have found Partners In Health to be an extremely effective force in bringing basic health service and education to one of the poorest, but perhaps best run, nations in Africa. Our personal visits to Rwanda have convinced us that this country can, indeed, become the “Switzerland” of Africa, as it is rapidly improving the welfare of all its people by working to realize its potential as a continental hub of air transport and commerce.

As we continue working with Partners In Health, we strongly encourage the support and partnership of others who may be interested in its University of Global Health Equity (UGHE), also in Rwanda. This groundbreaking international school will create a community of learning with a mission to serve the poorest people in the world and improve their health outcomes.

UGHE will train a new generation of physicians, nurses, dentists, and veterinarians through an innovative “One Health” curriculum. By training a new generation of transformational health care leaders, this university aims to advance the cause of global health equity. In addition, it will bolster Rwanda’s international standing, attract businesses to locate or invest within its borders, and strengthen its economy.

Having already pledged privately years ago to donate 90 percent of our wealth to charity, we publicly take the Giving Pledge as well, in the well, in the hope that, with every new member, the Association will gain momentum and provide encouragement to others who have the capacity to give in very meaningful ways.

We have never particularly liked the expression about “giving until it hurts,” but rather suggest that the better standard might be — “Give until it feels good.” The Giving Pledge feels really good, and we applaud the vision and leadership of its founders.

*W. S. Cummings*

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