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LAUNCHING THE RAY MURPHY LECTURE SERIES

Remarks by
William S. White, President

CHARLES STEWART
MOTT FOUNDATION
The inaugural lecture in the Ray Murphy Lecture Series was given by Ireland’s President Mary McAleese on January 25, 2008, at University College Cork. William S. White, president of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, officially launched the series with these remarks.

The lecture series, sponsored by Philanthropy Ireland with support from the Mott Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies, is designed to encourage the further development of philanthropy in Ireland through exposure to current trends in international philanthropy.

Audio files, photographs and other material from the 2008 event are now available on Philanthropy Ireland’s Web site (www.philanthropy.ie). Plans call for future lectures to be recorded and preserved, with a collection of the lectures to be published at the conclusion of the 10-year series.
I am honored to be part of this launch of the Ray Murphy Lecture Series. Thank you, Liam [O’Dwyer], and thank you, Jackie Harrison and your other colleagues at Philanthropy Ireland for planning and launching this event. And through this lecture series, I believe Ray’s vision, values and voice — indeed, his legacy to philanthropy both here in Ireland and around the world — will continue.

It is fitting that this first Murphy Lecture, which will be delivered later this evening by your president, Mary McAleese, be held here in University College Cork. After all, Cork was Ray’s home, as you all know. He received his first of many degrees from the university, and his widow, Caitriona, is an esteemed faculty member.

It was one year ago almost to the day that [current University College Cork President] Michael Murphy and then-President [Gerard] Wrixon hosted the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme Steering Committee for — as Ray put it — “drinks.”

During that January meeting last year, Ray did a masterful job of chairing and guiding the participants through difficult issues. Through the two days, Ray’s passion for youth and his patience and understanding of differing points of view emerged. Also, there was a soft refrain running through the discussion — his belief in philanthropy and the ability of a good idea to overcome obstacles.
In thinking about my remarks, it crossed my mind that it might have been very helpful to have Ray’s advice and counsel. In all truth, it would have been better if Ray could have written my remarks for me.

Of course, Ray would ask: “Why all the fuss? What were you thinking? A lecture series in my honor?”

Being the humble man he was, he would be genuinely surprised and deeply touched by this gathering, particularly since a lot of you came a long distance to be here. But I also believe he would have been pleased to know that his life and professional contributions to philanthropy are being remembered and celebrated in this way.

You do not need vast wealth to become a philanthropist. I believe within each human heart is the capacity to act on the charitable impulse.

There is a story someone told me about Mahatma Gandhi, and I believe it has relevance.

There was a young newspaper reporter traveling by train, and he recognized Gandhi, who was sitting in a seat ahead of him. He approached Gandhi and implored, “Master, master, give me a message.”

Gandhi slowly took out a piece of paper, scribbled a few notes on it, folded the paper, handed it to the young man, and left the car.

The reporter, wondering what the great master could have written on such a small piece of paper, opened it and the note said, “My life is my message.”

So it is for Ray. Ray’s legacy is rich and it is deep.

First and foremost, it is about his passion for people. He believed we must protect the most vulnerable people in our societies, who are often children and youth. He understood the potential and the capacity of philanthropy to empower and enable people — or put another way — to help people improve their lives.

Likewise, he saw the need for civil society in an increasingly troubled world.

And he believed in the hope and possibility that philanthropy and philanthropic acts bring to both the giver and the receiver.

Ray’s life was built on rock-solid experience and on strongly held values that became the basis for his vision of philanthropy. Through his life’s work, he gave voice to those values and his vision by encouraging new philanthropy and improving professional practices of philanthropy around the world. He was also an advocate for creating social and legal environments that encourage the development of organized philanthropy and individual giving.

Let me suggest that there is an opportunity to honor his values, vision and voice by the efforts we undertake in coming years to expand and strengthen philanthropy here in Ireland and around the world. My sincere hope is that this lecture series will contribute to those efforts.
While Ray began his foundation career in Ireland, he quickly developed into a global foundation professional. His work for the Atlantic Philanthropies and the Mott Foundation took him across Europe, the United States and South Africa.

At the core, Ray believed in the inherent goodness of people. He believed that regardless of which nation or city one calls home, there exists a universal human spirit of caring and giving.

Some people have called that spirit the charitable impulse.

In my mind, it is our response to helping others in need, whether they are on the other side of the street or the other side of the world. The essence of that charitable impulse often first expresses itself in good deeds through a local church, voluntary organization or community center. It is neighbors helping neighbors, families helping families.

You do not need vast wealth to become a philanthropist. I believe within each human heart is the capacity to act on the charitable impulse. I want to repeat this: You do not need vast wealth to become a philanthropist. Within each human heart is the capacity to act on the charitable impulse.

If you look at the lives of some of the better-known philanthropists — the Carnegies and I'm going to throw the Motts in here and the Rockefellers of the early 20th century in the U.S. and contemporary philanthropists such as Bill Gates and Charles Feeney — you will discover that much of their early efforts were modest.

But as they gained experience in more formalized giving, and as their personal wealth increased, their philanthropic activities kept pace.

For instance, Charles Stewart Mott, who was born in 1875, was actively engaged in charitable works helping social welfare organizations as early as 1900. Based on that early work, he founded the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in 1926.

The Mott Foundation has not been static, but has gone through various phases of development in response to the changes facing it. From 1926 until his death in 1973 — at almost 100 years — Mr. Mott continued to add to the Foundation's endowment, both monetarily and, most importantly, intellectually.

Like Ray Murphy, Mr. Mott deeply believed in the goodness of people. Mr. Mott wrote that the work of the Foundation was so important that it had become “…the realization of the purpose of my life.”

Just as the Mott Foundation has grown over the past 82 years, so has the worldwide growth in philanthropy been explosive. Just look at what has happened in Italy, Germany and the rest of Europe. In our home state of Michigan alone, we are seeing some 200 family foundations or donor-advised funds in community foundations being created annually. And that is in a state suffering terrific economic problems — 200 annually.

Along with this expansion has come the development of the field’s infrastructure organizations with callings similar to Philanthropy Ireland.

According to many experts, Ireland today is positioned to participate in a new era of organized philanthropy that builds on its long tradition of charity. Ray, a man once described as “a supporter of dreams,” had his own dream of seeing Irish philanthropy flourish.
Much of the potential he envisioned stemmed from the success of Ireland’s contemporary economy, the famed Celtic Tiger. As we know, the nation’s explosive economic growth during the past 15 years has created personal and corporate wealth, which is the basis for larger scale philanthropy.

Today, the capacity exists for more organized philanthropic activity. For example, Philanthropy Ireland was created to provide encouragement, access to a network of donors and philanthropists, and technical assistance for those who wish to become more engaged and strategic in their giving.

Some look to the U.S. philanthropic tradition and experience to provide guidance for new models in Ireland.

U.S. philanthropy has developed in a favorable legal and legislative environment. Historically, we have benefited from tax laws and government policies that encourage and promote this sector. Government has also been a powerful and willing partner to test model programs developed with philanthropic resources, and has used its resources to take successful models to larger scale.

Now, there is no single right way to operate a foundation. Just look at the two foundations Ray worked for — Atlantic and Mott. Atlantic has announced it will sunset, or end, its operations in less than 10 years, while at Mott we’ve been around for 82 years and we look forward to the next 82.

What we do share in common, though, is the belief in good, ethical leadership and practices both at the board and the staff levels.

There are many other things we share, too. I believe there are some lessons that are worth sharing from our eight decades-plus of work not only in the U.S., particularly in Flint, Michigan, but also in Central/Eastern Europe, Russia and South Africa.

First, experience teaches us that the most effective philanthropy reflects the community and culture of the place it calls home. I like to say that the philanthropic spirit, if you will, hits the ground on the “Main Streets” of the world, whether Saginaw Street in Flint, or O’Connell Street in Dublin, or Patrick Street here in Cork. It is where people live, work and worship. And, Ray would add, engage in sports. It makes sense to begin your philanthropic efforts in locales that you know or in support of issues with which you are familiar.

If your foundation aspires to grantmaking outside your home turf, I believe it needs to be sensitive to the new area’s community, values and culture. Foundations, particularly U.S. funders, have been known to “parachute” — and we have done this occasionally — into a community or country without doing their homework or considering the longer-term implications of their actions. Then, believing that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, the foundation may pack up and move to the next green pasture.

A streetwise program officer once said to me, “Bill, never forget that it takes a minimum of five years of funding to stabilize a new, community-based organization.”

I know Ray also recognized that patience is a virtue in this work. Often people or organizations aren’t ready to move or change as fast as you would like them to.
On more than one occasion, I saw Ray funding a group that needed extra time, experience and money to stabilize itself. In situations where more time and resources were required, Ray’s passion, patience and understanding of basic needs would temper the central office staff back in Flint who might want to end funding for a particular program.

As an aside, at Mott we do not apologize for funding issues for a very, very long time. For instance, our work in education stretches over 70 years. Likewise our support of community foundations continues after 30 years. Our efforts in micro-enterprise, community organizing and the Great Lakes each has continued a quarter of a century. In all cases where our field of interest has remained constant, our strategies to achieve results have changed to meet the needs of today and tomorrow.

Second, as I mentioned earlier, if you are thinking of creating a foundation, focus its efforts on your experience and passion. If you do this, I can pretty much guarantee that your philanthropy will always excite and challenge you.

Let that passion frame your work. Use it as the basis to explore and learn. Talk to people who already are active in your area of interest. The odds are very high that there is someone, somewhere, who has previous experience and expertise.

Don’t disregard your instincts, but seek out good advice and learn from the successes and mistakes of others. We have found that organizations such as Philanthropy Ireland are a good place to meet people with similar interests.

Let me share a Mott story here on the importance of listening and learning. The early 1990s were a time of political and social change in Russia, and Central and Eastern Europe. When the Berlin Wall fell, our Trustees and staff sensed that a window of opportunity was opening to help build civil society and support emerging democracies. But we had no real grantmaking experience in that part of the world.

So, I spent about six months there, just looking and learning, and spending time with other funders, particularly Europeans, already active in the region. Eventually we did make grants. But we did so in partnership with other foundations — mainly European — already working there. So, we listened and learned, and used this experience to create a framework for our current grantmaking.

Third point: pay attention to impact. In other words, be thoughtful about determining if your giving had the outcomes you want.

Philanthropic resources in any society, no matter how generous, are finite. Well-executed grantmaking should be more than the writing of a check. There is a place, though, for checkbook philanthropy, and I do not deny that.

You ought to be able to clearly define what you are trying to do with your funding. And like Mr. Mott did, you may change focus or strategy in response to changes in society. This makes sense. After all, Mr. Mott was a highly successful automotive pioneer and entrepreneur. He didn’t stand still in business or philanthropy.

Be prepared for change, both internal and external. Evolution and transformation are as normal and to be expected in foundations as they are in people. Strong and effective foundations need to develop and maintain a capacity for change. And, to do
that, they need to provide space for dialogue and time for reflection. We need to take time to listen, and to listen some more, and then to learn.

As you know, Ray was gregarious, and he loved to talk. But when I first met Ray on a trip to Russia, he was very quiet. In fact, he spent most of the trip listening and absorbing the culture.

Change and creativity go hand in hand. Creativity is crucial to good grantmaking, as is the courage to take on a degree of risk. The two — creativity and risk-taking — also go hand in hand.

Further, it is important to know how to work with people who can translate or implement innovative ideas into reality. Creativity can mean many things. It is about applying old concepts to new situations. It is about thinking totally outside the box and taking risks that haven’t been explored before.

**There is real power in partnerships.** **Partnership brings not only other resources but also diverse voices to the table. But engaging in partnerships involves patience and understanding.**

Let me circle back to the idea of the charitable impulse that I mentioned earlier. We have learned that if one acts from a disciplined and strategic approach to a well-thought-out charitable impulse, in the long run you should achieve good results.

But, be aware that the results may not come in the form, or time frame, one wants or anticipates. There may be mistakes or even failures — I’ve seen a lot of them — but that is OK. We should learn as much from our mistakes as from our successes.

Of course, determining when to change, and then learning how to embrace change while preserving a sense of continuity, is not all that easy. But it is enormously helpful to reflect on your core values and passions on which your philanthropy was created. We have developed a phrase at Mott to describe this process, and we call it “embracing change while remaining true to core values.”

The fourth point is [that] partnerships and collaborations are powerful tools. Rarely does one foundation, however well-endowed or brilliantly staffed, have the resources to go it alone.

There is real power in partnerships. Partnership brings not only other resources but also diverse voices to the table. But engaging in partnerships involves patience and understanding. It requires confidence to leave yourself vulnerable and a willingness to cross distances in perspectives and world views.

Frankly, it also can be a messy business. It can be time-consuming, and it can slow your progress. It can sometimes feel like the problems of partnership overshadow the very issue the partnership was created to address. But the result is worth the effort.

In any given year, the Mott Foundation is involved in dozens of funding partnerships, both in the U.S. and abroad. Some examples from Europe are the Balkan Trust for
Democracy, the Network of European Foundations, the Carpathian Foundation, the Environmental Partnership for Central and Eastern Europe, the Trust Fund for Civil Society, and also many donors forums in the various countries. Also, as mentioned earlier, Ray was chair of the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme.

Besides, bringing different voices to the table can be fun. I remember another site visit to Russia. At that time, Ray was definitely representing Atlantic. Several program officers, including a Mott Foundation program officer, sneaked off to go skinny-dipping in the Volga River.

Of course, Ray and the Mott Foundation officer, as well as the program officers from the other foundations — I think someone from Ford is here, by the way — all denied this ever happened. But knowing the folks involved, it rings true.

So, the moral of the story is doing good should bring enjoyment, regardless of whether you are a skinny-dipper or not.

Fifth, do not shy away from working with government. Look at the tremendous impact Atlantic has had on Ireland's higher education system.

Foundations can provide the research and development dollars to fund innovative projects. We can step forward with funding for untried ideas. But we generally don't have the resources to take grant-funded projects to a larger scale.

For nearly 10 years, Mott has partnered with the U.S. government to provide significant resources to make afterschool programs available for low-income youth. While we have provided grants for evaluation, training and building public awareness, the U.S. Department of Education has provided nearly $1 billion each year to operate these programs. In comparison, our contributions to this effort have been much more modest — about $11.5 million annually.

This partnership developed — and probably this is the key point here — because we were talking with former U.S. Secretary of Education Dick Riley about a specific need he had, and we were able to meet that need, not only with funds but also with advice based on experience.

Now, not all grants need be large. I have in mind a $25,000 grant that led to the development of the Great Lakes Protection Fund, which, on an annual basis, gives out $100 million a year and was formed by the Great Lakes governors.

Sixth, at the same time, be aware of opportunities to influence the development of a philanthropy-friendly policy and tax environment in your country. Sort of dull stuff, but you have to do it.

While U.S. foundations historically have benefited from sympathetic tax treatment, we don't take that status for granted. Our field and its infrastructure organizations scrutinize proposed legislation, both at the state and federal levels. We help our elected officials understand the consequences, both positive and negative, should certain pieces of legislation become law.

While having a favorable legislative climate is important to the development of philanthropic funds, I don't believe — in fact, I know [it wasn't] — that was the primary incentive motivating either Mr. Mott or Mr. Feeney. Rather, I think Messrs.
Mott and Feeny, like many philanthropists, received a deep sense of satisfaction from the good results their funds help produce.

Mr. Mott once said, “People with good incomes don’t seem to realize how much pleasure they can derive from large results at small net costs to themselves.”

Seventh, realize that philanthropists are powerful role models for others. Actions you take to create a foundation may give your peers inspiration and motivation to do the same. You have powerful stories to share and encourage like-minded peers.

Eighth, I think we can all agree that family-founded independent foundations and corporate foundations, whether in the U.S. or here in Ireland, represent private money devoted to public good. As such, they tend to be fiercely independent in their governance.

Because of this, another challenge we face, regardless of national origin, is the need to live up to the highest standards of ethics; good governance, including accountability; and good practice. In other words, be principled.

Last year, the U.S.-based Council on Foundations and the European Foundation Centre jointly developed and published a pamphlet titled, “Principles of Accountability for International Philanthropy.” The principles identified were integrity, understanding, respect, responsiveness, fairness, cooperation and collaboration, and effectiveness. These words embrace powerful ideas.

Interestingly, the document was dedicated to Ray Murphy, whose “work and life personify these principles.”

I would like to offer two closing thoughts.

This is clearly an exciting time for Irish philanthropy and the start of what we all hope will become a professional practice with great impact.

As the years go on, I urge you to be mindful about the need to take the long view. Effective grantmaking is more than giving away money. An integral component of the process is the relationships we develop with our grantees. And I haven’t said much about the craft of grantmaking, but it is about the long-term bonds and connections we forge, particularly with grantees and people they serve.

We should never forget that, in the end, what we accomplish is based on people. People are always the most important asset of any organization. This is most certainly a fundamental truth in philanthropy and the nonprofit sector.

Ray Murphy’s professional contributions — to the Mott Foundation and to the Atlantic Philanthropies specifically and to the field at large — were invaluable. His career paralleled the expanding complexity and sophistication of each foundation’s grantmaking and geographic reach.

He lived his values. His vision for what was possible made a lasting impact. Through our memories and this lecture series, Ray’s voice will continue to be heard.

Thank you.
Ray Murphy, who served as director of the Mott Foundation’s Civil Society program for several years, passed away in March 2007 after a lengthy illness.

He was one of the pioneers of philanthropy in Ireland. He served as chief executive and later as a board member of Philanthropy Ireland, as well as chairman of Clann Credo – The Social Investment Fund.

His career in philanthropy also included seven years each with the Mott Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies. Prior to that, he served as deputy CEO of the National Council for the Blind in Ireland, and was a social worker and community development worker.

He held a bachelor’s degree in German and Philosophy from University College Cork and a master’s in business administration from Trinity College in Dublin.

Murphy was honored posthumously with the 2007 Raymond Georis Prize for Innovative Philanthropy in Europe at the European Foundation Centre’s annual conference.