

ACTON
INSTITUTE

spire

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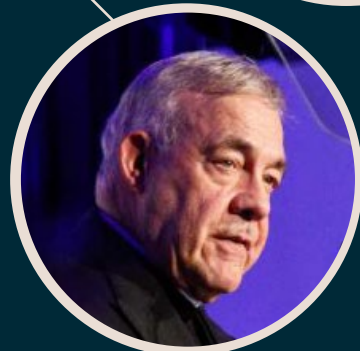
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ACTON INSTITUTE



WHAT IS A LEGACY?

According to the dictionary, it's "the long-lasting impact of particular events, actions, etc., that took place in the past, or of a person's life."

LONG-LASTING IMPACT.

That's how true change is made—through enduring influence. Many organizations, whether in politics or poverty alleviation, focus on short-term solutions—what some might call “giving a man a fish.” But at the Acton Institute, we know that transformative change requires more. It requires empowering individuals with the tools to create lasting impact.

For 35 years, the Acton Institute has been committed to fostering long-term change. We recruit, train, and equip leaders with the knowledge and resources to advance a free and virtuous society. Tens of thousands of leaders have participated in our programs, gaining foundational insights rooted in philosophy, theology, and economics. These leaders, in turn, pass on their knowledge to countless others—as professors, teachers, clergy, lawmakers, and more—spreading the principles that lead to flourishing communities.

This ripple effect is why we prioritize recruiting strategic attendees. They are the agents of lasting impact. **They are our legacy.** They carry forward the foundational principles we champion, even in the face of opposition from popular media and cultural trends.

I am proud of our alumni and the stories of transformation they share. Each issue of *Spire* highlights their remarkable achievements, demonstrating the power of their influence.

But in this issue, I also want to honor another kind of legacy: the legacy of a life well-lived.

The Acton Institute's work would not be possible without our supporters. Many of them understand that creating lasting change takes time—changing a culture is not an overnight endeavor. These supporters have entrusted us with their legacies, whether by including us in their estate plans, donating treasured libraries or art collections, or funding scholarships for future leaders to attend Acton's programs.

There are many ways to build and honor a legacy, and Acton can help. The question is: ***What will yours be?***

Very Truly Yours,



KRIS ALAN MAUREN
PRESIDENT



Understanding Real Compassion

HOW JAMES WHITFORD IS CHANGING CHARITY IN AMERICA

One evening on the streets of Joplin, Missouri, Ralph—a chronically homeless man—offered James Whitford half of his sandwich. At that moment, both men were living on the streets, though Whitford’s situation was temporary—a voluntary experience to better understand the people his ministry served. The simple act of sharing would later reinforce a profound shift in Whitford’s understanding of charitable work.

This shift began when Whitford and his wife Marsha, who founded the ministry with him, attended an Acton Institute Free and Virtuous Society (CityFAVS) conference in 2009 for leaders in the poverty-alleviation space. **CityFAVS conferences offer an introduction to the moral foundations of personal and economic liberty by combining an in-depth treatment of sound economic principles with those of social justice and anthropology.**

There, Father Robert Sirico’s teaching on subsidiarity—the Catholic social principle emphasizing handling matters at the most local level possible—transformed Whitford’s approach to helping others. The sandwich moment with Ralph crystallized this new understanding: he had been viewing people as objects of benevolence rather than individuals with their own agency and capacity to contribute.

“I realized I had been viewing people as objects of my benevolence, intended to be on the receiving end of my charity,” Whitford reflects. “I wasn’t viewing people as subjects who have autonomy and capacity to contribute.”

The combination of personal experience and philosophical framework led to a complete transformation of Watered Gardens’ approach. **Today, the ministry operates four campuses with six active ministries in Joplin, including shelters for homeless mothers with children, adult men and women, a medical respite unit, and a long-term residential recovery program.**



JAMES WHITFORD (CONTINUED)

At the heart of their transformed model is the Worth Shop, where participants can earn vouchers for meals, clothing, or shelter through work and engagement. “If a person has the ability to earn even the very basics like food, shelter, and clothing, it’s a much more dignified approach to helping people,” Whitford explains.

The shift from handouts to earned assistance wasn’t without challenges. When Watered Gardens implemented these changes, their annual visitor count dropped from 4,000 to 1,200. Rather than viewing this as a failure, Whitford saw it as confirmation that traditional charity models often enable dependency rather than foster independence.

This realization sparked another initiative: True Charity, an educational organization launched in 2012. What began as local lunch-and-learn sessions has grown into a network of 220 churches and nonprofits across 32 states, all committed to privately funded, outcome-driven, work-oriented approaches to poverty alleviation.



City FAVS 2009 in Weehawken, New Jersey

“Our vision for True Charity is subsidiarity as the norm nationwide,” Whitford says, directly referencing the principle he first encountered at Acton. “Bad charity crowds out good charity—primarily from the government, but it can also be big, bad private charity that is handout-oriented and traps people in dependency.”

The impact of this transformation extends far beyond Joplin. Today, 62 percent of True Charity Network organizations have made significant changes to their charitable practices, affecting more than 200,000 lives annually. “That’s something you can trace back to Acton,” Whitford notes. “You’ve made an impact in hundreds of thousands of lives through one little organization alone.”

For Whitford, this ripple effect embodies the meaning of legacy. “It’s making some sort of impact that has a ripple effect that is not necessarily ever traced back to its origin, but that heaven knows well about it,” he reflects. His recent book, *The Crisis of Dependency*, further extends this legacy by sharing the principles and practices that have proven so transformative.

This focus on fundamental principles reflects what Whitford values most about Acton Institute’s role in his journey. **“Acton is the best at teaching first principles and understanding who the human person is,”** he explains. **“The nation drifts, ministries drift, culture drifts. But when you’re concrete in first principles, you can create lasting change.”**

From a shared sandwich to a nationwide movement, James Whitford’s story demonstrates how transformative ideas, properly applied, can create generational impact.

It’s a legacy that continues to grow, one transformed life—and organization—at a time.

If you’re an alumni and would be interested in sharing your story like James Whitford, please reach out to Kayla Kaseska at kkaseska@acton.org.



A Legacy of Learning

THE ROBERTS' GIFT TO ACTON INSTITUTE

When Susan Roberts recalls how she and her late husband Owen first connected with Acton Institute, she remembers it started with a lunch meeting. In early 1995, one of their longtime employees announced he was having lunch with Father Robert Sirico, a Catholic priest. "I said, 'Why are you having lunch with a Catholic priest? We're Episcopalians,'" Susan recounts with a laugh. **"He said, 'Because he's really interesting.' And I said, 'Okay, that's a good reason.'"**

That lunch led to a full-day meeting at the Roberts' office with Father Sirico and Kris Mauren, who had recently co-founded Acton Institute. The connection was immediate. "The minute we heard about Acton, we said, 'Okay, we're in. That's fabulous. How can we help?'" Susan says. "We are totally in support of what they did and what they are doing. There's no question in my mind that the philosophy that Father and Kris built into Acton is just essential for freedom."

Owen Roberts was himself a remarkable example of free enterprise in action.

In 1961, he founded a consulting firm with just \$1,000 to his name. In those early days, he would budget one dollar per week to make copies at the post office, carefully selecting the ten most important documents to duplicate at ten cents each. But even then, with such limited resources, Owen prioritized buying books.

"He was a voracious reader," Susan explains. "If you work 100 hours a week, that's twice as much as most other people work—you're going to learn twice as much. And he did. He was a total lifetime learner."

That dedication to learning helped grow his firm from serving local businesses in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties in Florida to advising companies across the United States. The firm's success allowed Owen to pursue his passion for reading and learning, which was evident in the extensive library he built over his lifetime. The collection spanned topics from finance and economics to history, biography, and leadership. Among its treasures was a complete set of *Franz Pick's Currency Yearbooks*—detailed annual analyses of world currencies that Owen would eagerly read during holiday travels.

After Owen's passing, Susan found an extraordinary way to support Acton's mission that went beyond traditional financial giving. During a lunch with Father Sirico, when he mentioned Acton would be honored to have some of Owen's books, Susan had a bigger idea: "I said, 'Would you like to have all of his books?'" The entire library now resides at Acton Institute, where it continues to educate and inspire scholars and staff. This gift of knowledge and wisdom demonstrates how supporting Acton's work can take many forms, each contributing uniquely to the Institute's mission.

For Susan, legacy isn't about what you leave behind—it's about the impact you have while you're here. "I would hope that my legacy would be the impact that I had while I was living on the organizations that we supported," she reflects. Today, she continues to champion the causes and principles she and Owen believed in, particularly through her ongoing support of Acton Institute.

"What excites me is that we've got the potential—me personally, our organization, Acton, and the other organizations that we support—to make a huge difference in the United States," Susan says.

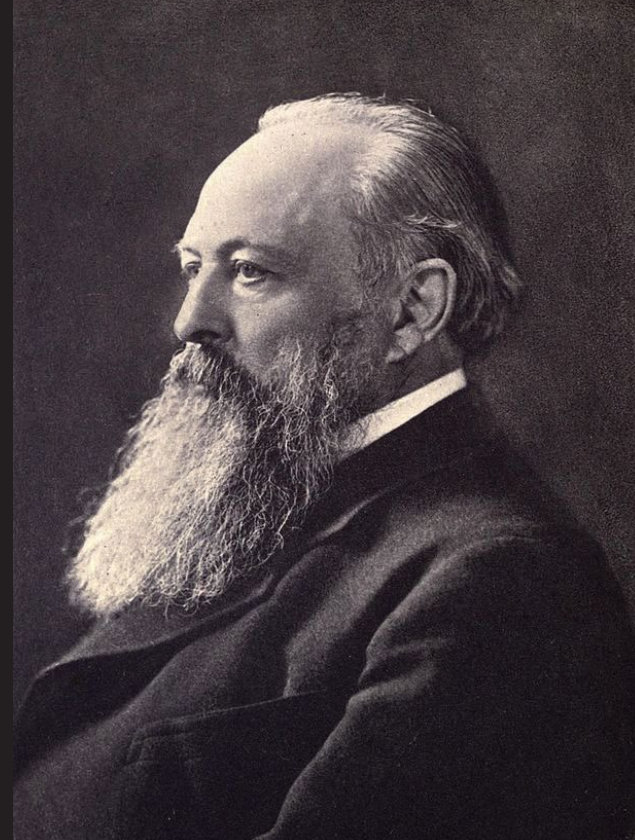
"I think we've gone off track, very much so. Now I would say leverage Acton every possible way we can and continue to spread Acton's philosophy throughout the world and do our very best to help preserve our precious republic."

Through their decades of support and Owen's library finding a new home at Acton, the Roberts have helped advance the vital mission of fostering a free and virtuous society—a legacy that continues to grow and inspire others today.

LORD ACTON LEGACY SOCIETY

“Liberty is not ...
the power of doing what we like,
but the right of being able to do
what we ought.”

- LORD ACTON



ACTON INSTITUTE

BE PART OF SOMETHING TRULY EXTRAORDINARY!

By including the **Acton Institute** in your estate plans, you will play a crucial role in recruiting, training, and equipping moral leaders from around the world to stand up and defend the necessity of both markets and morality, freedom and virtue.

VALUED MEMBERS RECEIVE:

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- Recognition on our headquarters' legacy wall
- Invitation to private receptions and VIP events across the country
- Opportunity to share the story and intent behind your gift
- Annual personal update from our team

Learn more or join the Lord Acton Legacy Society today by visiting:

ACTON.ORG/LEGACY

2025 EVENTS

MARCH

13

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AND THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY**

ACTON BUILDING, GRAND RAPIDS, MI AND VIRTUAL

MARCH

20

**PANEL LECTURE: THE IMMIGRATION WARS:
IDEAS, IDEALS, AND IDEOLOGY,
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ACTON BUILDING, GRAND RAPIDS, MI AND VIRTUAL

APRIL

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IS SOLVING POVERTY POSSIBLE?**

📍 SEATTLE, WA

MAY

8

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📍 UNIVERSITY CLUB OF CHICAGO, CHICAGO, IL

JUNE

23-26

ACTON UNIVERSITY

📍 DEVOS PLACE, GRAND RAPIDS, MI

JUNE

24

3RD ANNUAL DONOR DAY AT ACTON UNIVERSITY

📍 DEVOS PLACE, GRAND RAPIDS, MI

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Preserving Principles

CHIP AND JULIE WISSE'S INVESTMENT IN FREEDOM

At a dinner party in Grand Rapids in the early 1990s, Chip and Julie Wisse met some devout Roman Catholics who introduced them to the Acton Institute. This chance encounter blossomed into a decades-long relationship that profoundly shaped both their worldview and their legacy planning.

"We talked about this a little bit," Chip recalls. "I would go to all the functions that happened during the day, and then I would talk her into taking a day off to come to a special speaker luncheon." Those early experiences with Acton Institute resonated deeply with Julie, who spent her career as a special education teacher. Many of Acton's speakers addressed economic issues and human dignity—topics close to her heart after years of working with children facing various challenges.

For the Wisses, Acton Institute checks all the boxes.

"It's a religious organization, but it's not an overtly religious organization," Chip explains. "One of its goals is to educate religious leaders as to the merits of capitalism and free markets, and we think that's very important." They appreciate how Acton challenges the socialist-leaning economic theories that still influence many religious leaders while maintaining a strong moral foundation.

The Wisses have been particularly impressed by Acton's non-sectarian approach. Though founded and led by Father Robert Sirico, a Catholic priest, the organization welcomes people of all faiths and backgrounds. "There are people there of all different denominations and religious backgrounds," Chip notes. "It's a really cool thing that they are inclusive of all faith backgrounds."

This commitment to inclusivity extends beyond religious diversity. The Wisses have witnessed firsthand how Acton brings together people from various walks of life who share a commitment to freedom and virtue. "We always meet the most comfortable people," Julie reflects. "It feels like you're at a family dinner." From high-powered attorneys to academics to business leaders, the Acton community consistently impresses them with its warmth and intellectual engagement.

Their connection to Acton has even led to unexpected international friendships. When Julie's nephew was studying in Buenos Aires, Acton staff connected them with Cecilia, who directed an Acton-affiliated group there. "That was probably the best day in Argentina that we spent," Julie remembers fondly.

**To learn more about the Lord Acton Legacy Society,
please visit acton.org/legacy**

The Wisses have been particularly moved by Acton's Emerging Leaders Program, which selects promising young people for intensive training in the principles of a free and virtuous society. After attending a recent gathering, Chip was deeply encouraged: "When I met all of these young men and women, they're all to a person nice, religious people. This gives me great hope for our country."

This hope for the future has inspired the Wisses to include Acton Institute as one of three organizations in their estate planning, alongside their church and Hillsdale College. As members of the Lord Acton Legacy Society, they are ensuring that Acton's mission will continue long into the future.



"We're so confident of the goal and the mission of the Acton Institute," Chip emphasizes. This confidence extends beyond the current leadership: "Even after we're gone, and maybe Father and Kris are not there anymore, the Acton Institute will continue in like manner and continue to fulfill its function of working for a free and virtuous society."

The Wisses see their legacy gift as a way to extend their impact beyond their lifetimes. While Chip's career in sales didn't always feel directly meaningful in and of itself, he finds deep satisfaction in knowing that his legacy will support Acton's vital work. "Part of my legacy then is that with some of the money that we've acquired, I'm excited," he shares. "I mean, I hope we don't peg out for a few more years...but I'm excited about the fact that eventually some of our money is going to go to Acton because there is a certain altruism there."

This thoughtful approach to legacy planning reflects the Wisses' deep appreciation for how Acton Institute combines free market principles with Judeo-Christian values.

As Chip observes, "You need more than just free markets. You need the hand of God. You need the Judeo principles to guide you in that marketplace."

Through their membership in the Lord Acton Legacy Society, Chip and Julie Wisse are helping ensure that future generations will continue to benefit from Acton Institute's unique mission of promoting a free and virtuous society. Their story exemplifies how individual supporters can help build lasting institutions that preserve and advance the principles they hold dear.



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Annual Dinner.

Acton's 34th Annual Dinner

FEATURING DR. WILLIAM INBODEN

AUTHOR OF *THE PEACEMAKER: RONALD REAGAN,
THE COLD WAR, AND THE WORLD ON THE BRINK*



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The Acton Institute is continually grateful for our supporters, who believe in our mission. By joining our Giving Circles, your gift supports recruiting, training, and equipping leaders from around the world to help promote a free and virtuous society.

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(\$10,000+ ANNUALLY, OR \$750/MONTH RECURRING GIFT)

- ✓ Personal call from Acton leadership
- ✓ Opportunity to name Acton University Fellowship
- ✓ Invitation to quarterly "townhall" calls with Acton leadership
- ✓ Complimentary subscriptions to all Acton publications for one year
- ✓ Invitations to private receptions at Acton events around the country, including the Annual Dinner and Acton University

PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE

(\$5,000+ ANNUALLY, OR \$350/MONTH RECURRING GIFT)

- ✓ Invitation to quarterly "townhall" calls with Acton leadership
- ✓ Complimentary subscription to all Acton publications for one year
- ✓ Invitations to private receptions at Acton events around the country, including the Annual Dinner and Acton University

SCHOLARS' CIRCLE

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- ✓ Invitations to private receptions at Acton events around the country, including the Annual Dinner and Acton University

LORD ACTON LEGACY SOCIETY

- ✓ A complimentary lifetime subscription to all Acton publications
- ✓ Recognition on our headquarters' legacy wall
- ✓ Invitations to private receptions at Acton events around the country, including the Annual Dinner and Acton University
- ✓ Opportunity to share the story and intent behind your gift
- ✓ Annual personal update from our team

To learn more about Acton's recurring gift program, please visit **acton.org/giving**.

For questions, please reach out to **Kayla Kaseska**, Donor Relations and Stewardship Manager, at **(616) 369-5716** or **kkaseska@acton.org**.



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