NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

Not all charitable giving is a scam

Isabella R. Moyer | May. 15, 2013 NCR Today

Today, as usual, my spam box contained about 16 email messages begging for my IMMEDIATE ATTENTION or URGENT RESPONSE. The scams and hoaxes are easily recognizable and have been around for decades. Thirty years ago, we received small brown envelopes from faraway countries asking for permission to transfer huge sums of money into our bank account. In return, we were promised a large financial recompense.

The context is the same today, while the methods are changing to keep up with the times. And they are becoming increasingly sophisticated.

On Saturday morning, I received separate emails from two religious brothers I know in Europe from different countries. They had each received urgent messages from a person who claimed he was stuck in mid-travel to Europe and desperately needed financial help. This person was using the name of someone I knew many years ago and claimed I had given him the contact information for the brothers in Europe, which, of course, I had never done. We quickly discerned that this was a hoax, but it left me rattled. It was unnerving to think someone merely pulled our names off the Internet and used them in a dishonest scheme.

It also left me angry. For every person who immorally preys on the generosity of others, many more skeptics are affirmed in their belief that giving to others is a waste of time and money.

I was a victim on the famous No. 64 bus to the Vatican, also known as the pickpocket bus. It was my first visit to Rome, long before cellphones. I realized my wallet was gone while waiting for my transfer at Termini station. All I had left was the bus ticket in my hand, and it was due to expire. I had to face the real possibility that I might have to beg for bus fare. In a city where hands are outstretched on every church step and tourist area, who would believe me? Would I believe me? The bus came, and I made it to my destination.

Another time as I was leaving Rome, I offered my purse full of change to a friend, a religious sister, thinking she could use it for a treat or two. Instead, she happily took it with the promise that she would distribute it on the streets to those who really needed it. My friend had years of experience working with the poor. She was blessed with inner radar that helped her differentiate between the scammers and those in real need.

But many of us lack this radar, and too many of us have been jaded over the years. We have read and believed too many stories about professional panhandlers. We walk quickly by the outstretched hands on the streets when our spare change might have bought a much-needed bus ticket or hot meal.

We hear about yet another charitable organization that has mismanaged or abused its funds, so we paint all charities with the same brush of skepticism and become increasingly frugal with our giving.

In some of our churches, we learn that annual diocesan appeals are used for legal costs, cover-ups and payouts for clerical sexual abuse cases. We respond by tightening our purse strings, and many good diocesan programs and projects suffer for it.

Yes, I am angry -- spitting mad, actually -- at all who prey on the generosity of others. Each time generosity is abused, it risks being eroded a little more. Dishonesty and lack of accountability or transparency hurt not only those who have given freely in good faith. It also hurts the many credible and honest efforts working to make our world more equitable and just for all.

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-30 07:57*): http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/not-all-charitable-giving-scam