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Cummings Foundation donates \$50 million toward world health

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Shown (from left) are: Paul Farmer, Bill Cummings, Didi Bertrand Farmer, and Joyce Cummings at the 2019 dedication of the University of Global Health Equity.

Woburn, MA A new \$50 million gift from the Cummings Foundation, the philanthropic affiliate of commercial real estate firm Cummings Properties, will expand the work of late global health champion Dr. Paul Farmer.

The major donation establishes the Paul Farmer Collaborative of Harvard Medical School (HMS) and University of Global Health Equity (UGHE). Located in Rwanda, UGHE is an initiative of

Boston-based Partners In Health (PIH), an international health and human rights organization.

Joyce Cummings and Paul Farmer
embrace at the 2019 dedication
of the University of Global
Health Equity.

The funding, to be paid over 10 years, will be divided equally between the two institutions in support of joint programming to advance global health equity.

A legendary champion of global health, Farmer was co-founder and chief strategist of PIH, chancellor of UGHE, and the Kolokotronis University Professor at Harvard University. He died on February 21, 2022, at age 62, while teaching at UGHE.

“During his all-too-brief time here with us, Paul was the vital physical link between Harvard and UGHE,” said Joyce Cummings, who co-founded Cummings Foundation with her husband, suburban Boston real estate developer Bill Cummings. “In Paul’s absence, it is critical that we act to ensure that this bond and his work endure.”

In conjunction with this funding, Cummings has contributed an additional \$2 million to UGHE to fund the construction of housing on its rural campus to accommodate visiting faculty. Cummings Properties’ in-house design team coordinated with UGHE to create the original plans for this 10,000 s/f structure, which will offer 10 apartments as well as a faculty lounge.

The Paul Farmer Collaborative: The gift is intended to honor and amplify Farmer’s legacy and enable researchers at both institutions to deepen their exploration of social medicine, a field focused on the many factors influencing a person’s health.

The goal of the collaborative is to catalyze the development of sustainable, equitable health systems that improve health care delivery to the world’s most underserved populations. Building on existing collaborations between HMS and UGHE, it will include student and faculty exchanges, joint research, an annual global conference, and clinical training opportunities.

“This gift will allow us to continue Paul’s transformative work and honor his vision to reshape health care delivery for marginalized populations and to connect HMS with the University of Global Health Equity,” said HMS Dean George Daley. “This gift is a powerful reminder that as a global community, we are only as strong as the most vulnerable among us. Paul understood better than anyone.”

In dollars and time commitment, the gift represents one of the most significant relationships that HMS has in Africa.

“Rwanda was our family’s home for many years, and it is where Paul left us,” said Dr. Didi Farmer,

wife of the late Paul Farmer. “I am honored that this collaboration between Harvard/HMS and PIH/UGHE bears Paul’s name in the pursuit of social justice and equity in health, to which he devoted his life. I am so thankful for the generosity of Bill and Joyce Cummings.”

Paul Farmer (center) with Bill and Joyce Cummings at a 2018 gathering of the Giving Pledge, an organization founded by Warren Buffett and Bill and Melinda Gates to encourage the world’s wealthiest individuals to commit the majority of their assets to philanthropic purposes. Farmer was a featured speaker.

With this contribution, Cummings Foundation also honors Larry Bacow, Harvard’s 29th president, who in June announced his plans to step down from his role on June 30, 2023.

“Harvard is so grateful for Cummings Foundation’s support to carry on Paul Farmer’s important work,” said Bacow. “Through their thoughtful and generous philanthropy, Bill and Joyce have improved the lives of countless people throughout the world. This gift will build on their important work.”

The donation serves as a bookend to the \$50 million commitment Cummings Foundation made in 2004 to Tufts University, early in Bacow’s tenure as president at that institution. Bacow has since served as a trustee of the Foundation.

“We are so pleased to honor the legacies of both Paul and Larry, two dear friends,” said Joyce Cummings. “Our hope is that this long-term funding will help to carry on their commitments to leadership and service on a global scale.”

Founded by Joyce and Bill Cummings in 1986, Cummings Foundation has awarded a total of nearly \$450 million to date to nonprofits based in greater Boston. Among the Foundation’s assets is a large portfolio of suburban Boston commercial real estate, all of which is managed—on a pro bono basis—by Cummings Properties.

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