

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fundraising for Campus Ministry

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The Flesh & Bone of Money & Mission

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Eighteen months ago my life changed. After 25 years of ordained ministry, 12 years in 2 parishes, and 14 years as a campus pastor, I took a leave from call and accepted an offer to become a major gift officer for a private liberal arts college.

All the years of my ministry were served within the same metropolitan area. In many ways my life was a series of familiar routes, routines, patterns, and programs. All of that changed dramatically.

When I showed up for my first day of work I was shown to a cubicle with a nameplate that had only my name. No “Rev.” or “Pastor.” There were no gifts at the door and no special welcome or installation ceremonies. In *Leaving Church*, Barbara Brown Taylor aptly describes the emotional impact of such a transition.

Though the college was located in the same geographic area, my territory assignments covered 7 states and the District of Columbia in the northeast, portions of Minnesota and Iowa, 2 states in the southwest, and 1 in the middle of the Pacific.

Within a few months my travel schedule settled into an average of a trip every other week. My main responsibilities were to connect with college alumni, learn something about them and their stage of life, fill them in on the life and mission of the college, and encourage their financial support. Sound simple enough? Well it was clear from the outset I had a lot to learn.

Something that began to catch my attention in conversations with alumni was their response to questions about personal values and investment. I found that when I asked a person about their highest values, what matters most to them, they nearly always responded with something like family, friends, faith, and community. The specific order of things would of course differ from person to person but, for the most part, the top three were the same.

When asked about their highest goal or what achievement would mean the most to them, again nearly everyone responded with some version of wanting to know that they had made a difference – for their children, their community or the world.

However, when I asked these same people where they were investing the majority of their resources, their time, energy, and money, the most frequent responses were

work/retirement (success/security), house/home, or achieving/maintaining a certain lifestyle.

There was an obvious disconnect. How could so many people so often claim a set of values that just as often did not match the way they were investing the most important resources of their lives? Moreover, the more obvious the disparity between their stated values and their actual lifestyle, the less likely these people were to be philanthropic. Ruminations about how to address this issue led me to the realization that I was often guilty of the same sort of disconnection. That led me to another question.

Why should or would anyone want to be philanthropic? I went back to the basics. **Philanthropy is literally defined as “a love for humankind, an altruistic concern for human welfare and advancement.”** Then I did some reading. In an effort to understand some of the chief motivations for giving I read *The Seven Faces of Philanthropy* by Russ Alan Prince and Karen Maru File. I also read *The Ask* by Laura Fredricks to gain insights into the pragmatic details of conversations with prospective donors. Both of these volumes, published by Jossey-Bass, are eminently readable and well worth the time.

Shortly after this, in a conversation with a fundraising colleague from a local seminary, I was given a tip that led me to the single most helpful book on fundraising I have ever read. *The Soul of Money* by Lynne Twist, an activist and fund-raiser for many years with The Hunger Project, transformed my understanding of my own relationship with money and gave me a new perspective and comfort in speaking with others about it.

Twist’s main theme is to move us from a sense of scarcity to sufficiency. She works to build an understanding of philanthropy that no longer sees donors or recipients, but rather partners and companions who each contribute what they have to the success and welfare of all. Twist points out that we all participate in the virtually ubiquitous network of money and do so most often unconsciously.

She wants us to see that each of us, whether we have mere coins or millions of dollars to give, have the power to direct our giving in ways that make a difference. “In philanthropic interactions, we can return to the soul of money: money as a carrier of our intentions, money as energy, money as a currency of love, commitment, and service, money as an opportunity to nourish those things we care most about.” (p. 116)

Ms. Twist shares a brief story in which she credits a woman at a Harlem church gathering with teaching her one of the most important lessons in her fund-raising career. Lynne had come to the Harlem parish at the invitation of a group of women who wanted to hear more about The Hunger Project. Following the presentation, Lynne was hesitant to “make the ask,” since this was obviously a group of people who were not likely to have much money to give.

Gertrude, one of the women from the church, spoke up. “To me, money is like water. For some folks it rushes through their life like a raging river. Money comes through my life like a trickle. But I want to pass it on in a way that does the most good for the most folks. I see that as my right and as my responsibility. It is also my joy.” (p.101)

So, to go back to my original question: why should or would anyone want to be philanthropic? Because we all participate in the “life of money,” whether in big or small ways and it is our right, our responsibility and our joy to direct the money that comes our way toward the common good.

One final thought from Ms. Twist’s book for all of us who struggle doing ministry while raising the funds to support it or who are seeking to raise funds faithfully. Here too she pushes us to go beyond the dichotomies. “Fund-raising is hard work, but I also believe fund-raising is sacred work. It offers a powerful and privileged opportunity to be in intimate conversations with another person about the nature of his or her highest commitments and values.” (p. 115)

Though she does not say it, I could not help but see in her work the basis for what can be a powerful motivation for philanthropy among people of faith. Philanthropy, as an act of love and kindness toward humanity, is linked to our understanding of God.

Theology is the study of the attributes of God, of God’s relation to humankind and to the universe. According to the Gospel of John, the core attribute of God is love. Further, as Christians we believe that in the life of Jesus we find the *sine qua non* of God’s nature and intent toward all creation.

Indeed this loving nature and purpose of God is, through Christ, passed on to those of us who are followers of Jesus. “All this is from God, who reconciled us . . . has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world . . . and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors of Christ, since God is making the appeal through us.” (II Corinthians 5: 18-20)

In fact from the first creative moments recorded in Genesis, we are told of God’s intent for humanity. To humankind was given the task of caring for and stewarding the whole of creation. Through our acts of philanthropy we live out a portion of the original charge given to each and to all of us. By our philanthropy we are able to direct our energy, time, abilities, and money to align our resources in order to achieve the most good for the most people.

How does this realignment of values and investment work in the midst of day to day fund-raising? What does it mean to move beyond seeing donors or recipients to understanding all as companions contributing their part to achieve the greatest good for the most folks? Allow me to share a couple of examples.

A young alumna, who just had her first child a few months before I met her, started a non-profit training center for immigrant and refugee women in a D.C. suburban area. Her center is based in a church school building. The women who come there receive computer training and are tutored in English. Day care is also available on site for those who need it.

The center has only been in existence for about two years, but it has already had a significant impact on the lives of many women and children in the immigrant community there. This young alumna does not have great sums of money to contribute to her alma

mater but she has a great story to tell. I encouraged her to write up a piece on the center focusing on some of the young women's stories that we could publish in an upcoming alumni magazine. Her story can inspire others to support her work directly and to support the on-going mission of a college that produces leaders of value and integrity who are changing the world.

Two other alums living in two different cities in New Mexico also have much to contribute. One heads up a cooperative organic farming group that has been expanding into more and more open air markets in their area. The other alum works in a cramped non-profit community housing office with barely enough room to turn around. Yet on the walls all around his desk are pictures of hundreds of smiling families whom he has helped get into their first homes.

Not only do these alums have stories to tell about how they are living out the values that were instilled or strengthened by their college experience, but they have ways to offer service opportunities and internships for current students. Connecting with alums such as these is about establishing relationships with companions who support the common good. These relationships will inspire others to share ideas, to get involved, and lend financial support to the college that consistently produces graduates who are serious about changing the world.

It is always finally these stories about individual lives and the difference they are making that become the flesh and bone of mission and ministry. Connecting these stories to their roots in organizations or ministries provides inspiration and power to the community and generates both volunteer participation and financial support. It really is true. People do not give to buildings or even to causes. People give to people, to the flesh and bone of what they see as the mission and ministry.

How might this translate to a campus ministry setting? Only you can truly know that, since only you really know the situation. But keep these basic ideas in mind. Campus ministry is not simply the recipient of financial support. It is a vital and strong partner with much to offer the Church and the Academy.

Do not tailor your mission and programs for prospective donors, but engage your donors and prospects in personal experiences of the mission your ministry has and is. Invite key donors to participate in student servant projects, on national and international trips, to portions of retreats. Give them a chance to rub shoulders with some of your key student leaders.

Invite key donors into portions of your long range planning process. Ask their opinions, seek their advice. Show them that they are valued partners, not simply financial resources. Then encourage them to share what they learn with others in their circle of friends.

Philanthropy is about love, concern for the well being of humanity, love that resides in and is enacted through specific relationships. It is this flesh and bone that bring mission and ministry to life. In fact it is the flesh and bone of incarnation that brings God's own mission and ministry to life for the sake of all. It is to this mission we are invited as

companions along the way, with the goal nothing short of the transformation of the world.

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