

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fundraising for Campus Ministry

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Teaching Stewardship

One of our colleagues in campus ministry reports this gratifying story. As students were in the process of gathering back on campus for the fall, one of her peer ministers stopped by the Center and presented her with an envelope. She opened the envelope and was amazed to find a check for over \$400—a gift to the ministry from the student. It represented a tithe of his summer paychecks. She was overwhelmed by his thoughtful generosity. It's one of those "ministry moments" that keeps you going way into the academic year. It's a story worth sharing with the wider church and so, to begin with, I share it with you.

Where did this young adult learn about stewardship? While everyone around him is struggling to pay tuition, buying the newest technological gadget, and spending more than a tithe on beer and pretzels, this young person understands stewardship. How did he get to this point? Who showed him the way? Who mentored him? Who taught him about generosity, about giving back?

My experience with stewardship over the years may mirror yours. Stewardship is a tough sell. It invites a personal response, usually highly emotional, and usually negative, that is akin to a conversation about sexuality or politics. It's the topic in the life of the church that borders on "meddling." While we may tip our hats to the necessity of stewardship, we seldom embrace the reality in a deep and heartfelt way. Even our carefully crafted stewardship emphases have to be done in such a way that people aren't offended and accuse the church of "always talking about money."

We certainly have the theological framework to talk about stewardship. We have the biblical stories and challenges, we have the charitable tradition of the church, and we have our personal experiences of graciousness and generosity, all of which can form our understanding of what it means to be stewards of God's creation. Principally, we have the witness of Jesus, who freely and frequently talked about giving to the needs of others out of our own abundance, and what that might do, in fact, for our own salvation.

What we struggle with is the way to communicate this, and perhaps the will. How do we model good stewardship? How do we "teach our children well?" How does the passion of Jesus about sharing the richness of God's gifts to us and to the world get inside the hearts of his disciples?

Before moving into some ideas about how stewardship might be taught in a campus ministry setting, let's hear some voices that may helpfully inform us.

At an ALDE (Association of Lutheran Development Executives) conference this spring, I heard a keynote address by Chuck Underwood, who talked enthusiastically about *The Generational*

*Imperative.*¹ Chuck is a former sportscaster, motivational speaker, and popularizer, who presented the usual generational information in a way that is poignant and interesting. His insights about the Millennial Generation help us understand the students who are college-age today. They were born after 1982, and were highly influenced by the disasters of 9/11 and hurricane Katrina, the War in Iraq, and violence on campus. Some of them have been to the Gulf Coast on mission trips. Some have seen family members or friends leave to fight in an unpopular war. They experience the downturn in the economy, knowing their parents' struggles and their own to find student loans.

The defining marks of the Millennials, according to Underwood, are:

- Optimistic and enthusiastic in general
- Pessimistic about their country's direction
- Respectful of authority
- Focused on their education
- Close with their parents
- Compassionate²

We know many things about Millennials because we minister with them. We know about their fast-paced lives, their pressure to perform academically, their often precarious ways of releasing tension in drinking, drugs, or sex, their fondness for their over-protective parents, and their fascination with technology of all kinds (which ultimately connects them—their highest value is community).

This generation has also been dubbed “Generation Give.” They are generous and energetic when it comes to helping. Testimonies from Teach for America, the Peace Corps, and the National Relief Network laud the willingness of young adults to give back. They see the examples, questionable though they may be at times, of Bill & Melinda Gates, Warren Buffett, Oprah Winfrey, Brad Pitt & Angelina Jolie, and George Clooney using their wealth and positions to help the less advantaged. The conspicuous consumption and self-indulgence modeled for the Gen-Xers by *The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. Underwood notes, “We are the products of our formative years’ times and teachings. And Millennials are forming generational values just as some high-profile Americans seem to be taking their wealth in more selfless direction.”³

Yet there is a counter-trend that Underwood is aware of as well. He cites the study by the Pew Research Center that documents that “first-wave Millennials” (those now in their mid-twenties) rate their top priorities in life as becoming rich and famous.⁴ The cultural drags and pulls on this (and every) generation are powerful, he notes. He suggests that one of the influences the Millennials are missing is what he calls “the little moments.” The Sloan Foundation study director, Elinor Ochs, concludes, “We’ve outsourced a lot of our relationships. . . there isn’t much room for the flow of life, those little moments when things happen spontaneously.”⁵ These moments are as simple as coming home at the end of the day to casual, yet meaningful conversation. Lives are busy, people are tired, family members rush past each other, as they’ve rushed past their colleagues throughout the day, and tiptoe past their children.

¹ Chuck Underwood, *The Generational Imperative: Understanding Generational Differences in the Workplace, Marketplace, and Living Room* (North Charleston, South Carolina: BookSurge, 2007).

² *Ibid*, p. 244

³ *Ibid*, p. 252

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 261 The study indicates that 81% of the 18-25 year olds in 2005 stated that getting rich and becoming famous are their top goals.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 260

All of this has implications for ministry with those who are young adults among us. We need to understand their pressures, their influences, their passions. We need to see what forms them, what challenges them, and what persuades them. We must be aware of the undertow of self-centered, opulent lifestyles, even as we celebrate the selfless generosity of this generation. Stewardship education helps persons wrestle with the issues of consumption, power, sharing, and serving. Stewardship is about the pastoral ministry of helping hearts change and lives find new direction. We can't tiptoe around students with the gospel; we have to help them see how it can transform their values and ultimately their lives.

No less a spiritual leader than Henri Nouwen wrestled with the concept of stewardship, particularly as it found form in fund raising. Early on he had the notion that fund raising was "a necessary but unpleasant activity to support spiritual things."⁶ As he struggled to present a talk about fund raising to a large audience, he came to understand that "fund-raising is first and foremost a form of ministry." Onlookers observed Henri on fire during his presentation, passionate about God's kingdom, as he offered them a new set of glasses to see the world around them as it connects with God's mission. He affirmed, "Fund-raising is a spiritual as giving a sermon, entering a time of prayer, visiting the sick, or feeding the hungry."⁷ Replace "fund raising" with the concept of "stewardship," and we have an even more compelling mandate to proclaim the Gospel by helping people to change their hearts as they too wrestle with their God-given responsibilities to steward those things placed so generously in their lives.

Here's a little more background thinking. In his classic writing on *Servant Leadership*, Robert Greenleaf defines our responsibility as leaders who serve and are accountable to each other as "unlimited liability."⁸ We are responsible for all, owners of none, and accountable to everyone, he suggests. Also, in *Leadership Is an Art*, Max DePree reinforces this concept when he writes, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor."⁹ The interplay between stewardship, servanthood, and leadership is noteworthy. Responsible, accountable leaders are stewards of what God has given and in that role are servants of all.

Another voice adds itself to the discussion. Christopher Levan writes, "Stewardship is a unique combination of theological beauty and ecclesiastical practicality in which we examine the basic paradox of existence: how to be creatures of a Creator, bound by the responsibility of management over all that lives and breathes, yet never allowed to exercise the rights of ownership. Stewardship combines the matters of great spiritual import with the need to 'get real.'"¹⁰

Levan continues in the article to hold up fundraising/stewardship as a core element of good ministry. "So I think of asking for money not as a call to obligation, to arm-twisting, guilt-inducing obedience, but as my primary tool for inspiration. More than evangelical rallies and biblical seminars, feats of fundraising will restore worthiness and hope in our communities."¹¹

⁶ Henri Nouwen, *The Spirituality of Fund-raising*, (Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada: The Henri Nouwen Society, 2004), p. iv.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p. 38.

⁹ Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 9.

¹⁰ Christopher Levan, "Fundraising as Ministry," *Giving Magazine*, p. 5. Levan is the former president-principal of Huntington University in Sudbury, Ontario, and the author of several books on stewardship theology.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

In our responsibility to teach stewardship to students. Our ministry is to “get real” with them, helping them to make the connection between the theological beauty and the ecclesiastical practicality of their existence. We need to invite them into the vision of who they are as God’s stewards and how the generous gifts God has placed in their lives can be used with care and consideration for their lives and the life of the world. Let’s look for ways that this might be done.

1. **Make Connections.** Invite students into a deeper understanding of the needs of the community in which they live and give them opportunities to address those needs. Connect the reality with an appropriate response. For example, if hunger is a local issue and the local food pantry is empty, provide a way for students to collect food, serve tables, or advocate with civic leaders. Challenge them to move from a theoretical notion to an engaged understanding of an issue. Help them to see how they can make a difference by using the resources they have at their disposal.
2. **Build a Group Experience.** Based on what we know about the preference for this generation of young adults to experience things together, work at stewardship as a group adventure, all the way from fact-finding to implementation. Service projects and mission trips are good examples. We have plenty of testimonies in campus ministry from those who see the world differently because of their participation in such a group.
3. **Create a Program Focus.** Spend a semester working with an issue such as global warming or poverty and examine it from all angles, including theological insights. What are the realities we face, and how can they be addressed systemically, with the Christian community being part of the system? Involve others from the academic community in the discussion and problem-solving, making the point that stewardship encompasses many disciplines and approaches that challenge and complement the work of the church.
4. **Hand Over Responsibility.** Young adults need to make the transition from participating in their parents’ church to being responsible for their own church. The campus ministry of which they are a part certainly continues to be supported by benevolence, but students can be asked to shoulder some of the expenses of the ministry in ways that are meaningful to them and to the ministry. Include them as potential donors in your annual fund campaign. If they become conscientious donors while they are still in school, they will likely continue to be supportive donors after graduation. We need to inform them of the vision and needs of the ministry and invite them to offer their ideas and support at many levels.
5. **Be Transparent.** Share your own struggles and growth in the area of stewardship. Talk about your own transformation either informally or in sermons or study groups. Where have you grown; where do you need to grow? Let students challenge you, as you challenge them, to envision your self and your God-given resources in a wider world. Find ways to allow for the “little moments” mentioned above by Underwood. Invite one of your solid donors to talk about their own stewardship and the joy they receive in giving.

- 6. Provide Resources.** There is an increasing abundance of fine stewardship materials available.¹² Make some available at the campus ministry center for browsing or give away. Put a poster or two on the wall that will challenge students to reflect on the connections between the needs of the world and the thoughtful use of their time, talents, and treasures. Post some materials of interest on your Web site.

And so we return to the question at the beginning of this article: How might we provide leadership in our ministries, so that the story shared at the beginning becomes more commonplace, although still remarkable? How do we teach both the beauty and practicality of creatively deploying the gifts of God's creation? In our campus ministries, how can we develop leaders who are both servants and debtors, those who know how to define reality and how to say thank you?

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¹² For example, Luther Seminary has a good collection of stewardship materials at www.luthersem.edu/stewardship. These resources include articles, books, sermons, videos, bible studies, worship aids, stories, and even humor. You can also subscribe to an electronic newsletter on stewardship.