

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fundraising for Campus Ministry

January, 2009

New Year's Resolutions for Fundraising

I want to ask you to join me in getting the New Year off to a bang in the area of fundraising. Sure, we can all complain about a number of things, but this really is a very good time to focus new energies on the delightful task of raising support for our great campus ministries. Fundraising is “friend-raising” after all. It is an opportune time to connect with these friends and supporters of ours. They love us still and will continue to be our cheerleaders and selfless donors as we slog through these gray days. Let me offer to you some resolutions you might embrace to get a grip on fundraising for the New Year.

1. Work on the scrapbook

This is a good time to think about collecting stories and pictures that exemplify your ministry. We often wait until the spring term is over to think about how we are going to chronicle the year. By then students are gone and the photo ops are past. Do this now while you're in the thick of things. Ask students to write brief articles about their experience in your ministry—perhaps a servant event, the trip to the LSM National Student Gathering, or their involvement as peer ministers. Use these stories in your newsletters, when you speak in congregations, and when you talk to potential donors. The stories are what connect the donors to the ministry. They put flesh on the bones. You are asking your supporters to make gifts that will continue and expand these stories. It's true that people don't give to programs; they give to people whose lives have been changed and deepened because of what your ministry does. Give your donors a glimpse of that in words and pictures. Consider having some professional pictures taken. Instead of trying to conjure up some relevant images at a crucial time, begin now to build a scrapbook, both figuratively and literally, that represents the impact of your campus ministry.

2. Take your “aunt and uncle” to lunch

The “aunts and uncles” in your ministry family are those who know you best and are your greatest supporters, no matter what. They love you deeply, warmly, and often patiently. While you may know some of these great folks, this is a time to resolve to know them better—and to let them know you and your ministry better. While we may appreciate the size and continuity of their gifts as they come across our desks, we need to spend time with these highly motivated individuals to deepen our relationship. In the field this is called “donor stewardship,” taking care of those who take care of us. Lunch, or some other special time of meeting, can be an optimal time for listening to their experiences and their concerns. Fundraising, after all, is matching the needs of the donor with the needs of the ministry. Often it takes focused time to find out what that match is. We need to listen, and they need to speak. Laying all other agendas aside, including thinking about what their next gift might be, make this a meeting of hearts. Share those stories—or better yet, take a student with you to

personalize things even more. Don't feel pressed to ask for a gift; there's time for that at a later date. For now, enjoy each other's company. And be sure that you pick up the tab.

3. Find some new friends

Does your campus ministry have enough friends? Probably not, no matter how large or small your database. Friends are important to your ministry. They will be with you through thick and thin. They will talk about you to others. They will give you unexpected gifts. They will sit with you through long, boring meetings. They will pray for you.

Take some time to look over your list of supporters. Who can you count on? Who cheers you on? Typically our databases are filled with "potential friends," often called "prospects" in the fundraising world. We can put as many names as we like on this list and it may not make much difference to them or to us. Certainly we need to continue to expand our constituent lists to include more than alums of our ministry. Area pastors and lay people, current and former board members, parents past and present, faculty and staff, and even civic connections are potential friends that with some nurturing may become those kinds of friends who help our ministries to thrive. Who can you count on as your friends?

4. Bend your bishop's ear

Your bishop wants to be a strong supporter of your ministry. But like any significant relationship, this one will take some focused attention. We can't assume that the synod office reads every word of our newsletters or knows the facets of our programming. While we may have some accountability streams that flow into funding patterns, we owe it to our bishop and to our ministry to build this relationship with some intentionality.

Once a year it would be good practice to schedule a time with your bishop to have conversation about campus ministry. Be sure to bring along those good stories. But also be sure to listen as much as you talk. Help the bishop to understand how the significant gifts of the synod help to change the lives of young adults and invite them into the leadership of the church.

One bishop said to me recently that he was willing to hear all about the troubles of the campus ministry, but just once he wanted to hear the words, "thank you." Forget the whine. Remember the gratitude.

5. Check under the hood

A good campus ministry fundraising program has a fair amount of infra-structure. This may be a good time to look at several items that need regular maintenance. How efficient is your software? Does it carry the load of information required to keep up with the important data you need it to record? Can it segment your population into different groups, such as levels of donations, types of gifts, and personal information? Will it remind you of pledge dates or generate automatic thank you letters? Is it easy to use and relatively trouble free?

You may want to consider adding a development committee to help the board pull the load of work related to your fundraising goals. These might be folks with special skills and interests that could help get a campaign off the ground or build opportunities for legacy gifts.

Beyond that, you might want to do a kind of audit to see how well your budgeting process works. Donors may want to know how carefully and for what purposes their contributions are spent. Is money being wasted? Do contributions generated for one purpose get spent on others without any accountability?

6. Look at the map

The GPS is quickly replacing those old foldout maps that repose in most of our glove compartments. It's a new way to make sure that you get where you intended to go when you left the driveway. Plot your beginning and ending points and the GPS will tell you all the correct turns to make. It will even look up ancillary information on the way, like motels or restaurants. But for all its goodness, it may not be the best analogy for fundraising. It seems too foolproof (although there may be tales) and too automatic. Just put a number on the income line of your budget and at the end of the year you will have achieved it easily and automatically. It's not quite that easy, is it?

Consider the humble, mis-folded, tattered map. Although you can envision the course of your journey laid out before you, you still have to pay close attention to turns and directions. All along the way you have to stay alert to potential detours, speed limits, and what the other crazy drivers are doing. In fundraising you will need to make adjustments from time to time and take more responsibility to achieve your goal. Unlike the ease provided by a GPS, mapwork is closer to the difficult, hands on, detailed responsibilities of day-to-day fundraising.

Check your mission statement. Does it still describe what you are about and give you a direction for the future? Do you have a strategic plan and are you following it? Do you have attainable goals? Do you have a way to measure whether you have reached them? If you intended to get to Chicago, are you content to spend the night in Peoria (which I'm sure is a fine place)? Do you and your board have a vision for your ministry and a plan for how to get there? It may be a good time to check the map.

7. "Beard the lion"

This little phrase means to confront a danger or take a risk. Originally a Latin proverb, it is based on the story of the shepherd, David, in I Samuel 17:35, who pursued a lion that had stolen a lamb, caught it by its beard, and killed it. There is probably a lion or two lurking about your place, some trouble or worry or threat that if left "unbearded" might do serious damage to your flock, your ministry. Sometimes these lions appear in the form of recalcitrant board members or difficult students who are overly critical or who cast a dark shadow on the work that you do. A facility with lots of need for renovation or a relationship with a nearby congregation might also parade about as lions. This may be a good time to take on these troublesome people or issues that threaten the vital work of your ministry. Face the challenge, take it on. Gather around you some good folks who see the same lion that you do. Ask for help, build some courage. Don't let it do you in.

8. Study your craft

While we may do pretty well at keeping up with all of the disciplines of the ministry profession, I would like to urge you to also become a student of the craft of fundraising. Along with its close cousin, stewardship, we are content to know this relative at a distance. However, as you know well, the challenge of raising support for your ongoing ministry requires more attention each year. Like the disciplines of preaching, teaching, and pastoral care, fundraising (which Henri Nouwen defines as equally close to the gospel call¹) also begs to be studied and practiced.

Find out more about your area ALDE chapter² (Association of Lutheran Development Executives). Begin to be a regular attendee at their educational seminars. The cost is

¹ Henri Nouwen, *The Spirituality of Fund-raising* (Henri Nouwen Society, New York), p. iv.

² www.alde.org

minimal. Beyond that you may want to attend the ALDE annual conference or take advantage of training offered by such worthy enterprises as the Indiana School of Philanthropy³ or the Institute for Charitable Giving⁴. Read some of the growing volume of literature that presents itself. For beginners, I recommend anything by Jerold Panas,⁵ Kay Sprinkel Grace, William Sturtevant, Kent Dove, and Stephen Hitchcock⁶. Check out periodicals such as the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, and *Contributions*. There are a number of excellent resources online; get your *Google* going. Get to know some of the fundraising professionals in your area, such as ELCA Foundation staff or persons in your university alumni office. Interview them, ask for their help, they will be glad to share what they know with you (within reason, of course). And finally of course, check out the archived issues of *The First Monday Report*⁷. The archive contains a broad range of topics on fundraising and board development that goes back five years. Sure you can hoard them and read them yourself, but just think what a great thing it would be to share and discuss some of these articles with your board.

9. Live a little

Now I want to encourage you to enjoy your work and the ministry to which you have been called. If you have truly found a vocational fit, I hope that you can find some ways to celebrate this gift and call that you have received. Talk about this exceptional fit with a close colleague or your family. Smile. Share the joy. Feel the goodness, the rightness of the ministry you do. Offer up a prayer of thanksgiving. Write a poem or a little essay and put it in your scrapbook. Open it on a bad day. Laugh in the face of discouragement.

10. Say “thank you” again

This may be the most important of all the “resolutions” on this page. It may also be the one that needs the most attention. Certainly we want to say “thank you” when the responses to our annual appeal or campaign come rolling in. We need to say that “thank you” immediately, genuinely, and as personally as we can. Pick up the phone if the gift is special or unexpected. Write a personal note. Forget e-mail, it’s too impersonal. When you make the next appeal, remember to thank your supporters for their past gifts. By the way, it’s considered kind of tacky to include another appeal envelope in a thank you letter. It’s done, but think about it—would you like to be asked for your next gift in the same breath that thanks you for your current one? Spend a little extra on your best donors. Send a special letter that does nothing more than thank them for what they’ve already done. Period. Enclose a picture or a story about your ministry. Deepen those friendships by showing your sincere appreciation.

I wish you well in adapting these simple resolutions or in developing some of your own. It’s a New Year. By God’s grace, it will be a good one.

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³ www.philanthropy.iupui.edu

⁴ www.instituteforgiving.org

⁵ Such as, *Making the Case* (Institution Press, Chicago) or *Finders Keepers* (Bonus Books, Chicago)

⁶ Stephen Hitchcock, *Open Immediately! Straight Talk on Direct Mail Fundraising* (Emerson and Church, Medfield, MA)

⁷ www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Ministry/Campus-Ministry/Build-a-Campus-Ministry

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