

**THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT**  
**Thoughts on Fund Raising for Campus Ministry**

Office for Campus Ministry Advancement  
2481 Como Avenue St. Paul, Minnesota 55108

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## **WRITING A FUND RAISING LETTER**

In this all-important ministry of “friend raising/fund raising,” one of the primary ways to keep in touch with your donors is through the use of direct mail.

Using direct mail to invite gifts for your ministry is only part of your total strategic plan, but it is a very significant part. While you may dream of and even plan for larger contributions, direct mail may well account for those “lower end” gifts that you need to keep your ministry afloat. These donations will likely make up the bulk of your annual (sustaining) income from outside sources. Additionally, direct mail may be the primary means for you to keep in contact with a large number of your constituents, using the mail format as a singular, relatively inexpensive means to inform them of your programs and ask for their continued support. Whatever the reason, when you write that important letter, there are several things to think about.

**1. Provide an opening sentence that is provocative and attention demanding.**

Just as a journey begins with one step, what you long to communicate in this letter begins with one word, then one sentence, then one image, and so on. Your first sentence creates the impression of importance, excitement, or opportunity. It is the “hook” that invites the reader to follow you more deeply into the vision of your ministry as you share what their gift will provide once it is received.

**2. Use images and/or stories that are compelling.**

Once you have decided upon the compelling opening to your letter, you will want to establish a strong copy track (called the platform) to run on. Stories that touch the heart and tell how human need is being met by your ministry are some of the best copy tracks. People give to people with needs, not merely to programs or to brick and mortar. Your letter must take your ministry out of the abstract of ideas and place it into realistic, visual images that people can see and remember.

**3. Ask for what you need early and often.**

Because fund raising letters are usually read rapidly or in a spotty fashion, you will want to let your supporters know at several points what your needs are and what you expect of

them. Usually by the second paragraph, and certainly by the middle of the first page, you should indicate the response you are seeking. If this is the first time you are asking a person for a gift, there is no tomorrow if your letter hits the round file. Don't be shy; ask for what you need, but make it compelling. If you use bold face type or underlining, do so only in a couple of places in the letter, so that the reader's attention focuses there and not everywhere.

**4. Let your readers know how their gift will make a difference.**

Good fund raising letters usually have one succinct paragraph that lays out the case for your ministry: the need, what will be done to address it, and how the donor's gift will help. Describe in concrete terms how needs will be met and lives will be touched by the gift you are seeking. This will help the contributor feel as though they are present with you, involved in the action, and sharing directly in the ministry.

**5. Be as personal as possible.**

Imagine writing to your Aunt Emily or to a longtime friend. Treat each person on your mailing list as the real person they are. Let them know something about you. Connect with their questions and their dreams. Be human, be real, and let them be real to you as well. In their minds who you are and what you represent establishes the integrity of your ministry. If you are new or unknown to most readers, perhaps you will want to have the letter written or co-signed by someone who is more familiar to them. Take a few sentences to introduce yourself (but not in the first paragraph.)

**6. Write with urgency and expectation.**

When your letter arrives in the mailbox, somehow it is going to have to attract enough interest and attention to rise to the top of their reading list. Make your cause bold, important, and significant. Tell why your need can't wait and why the response from this reader will make all the difference. Appeals for support are more than talking about "needs." They are invitations to help find a solution or provide needed resources or life-changing experiences. Give your readers an opportunity to respond to a very real situation, knowing that their gift will make a difference. Why must what you propose be done now and not delayed.

**7. Highlight how others are involved.**

Lift up your students and board members and show how others are actively involved in working on the needs you mention. Active board members indicate a cause they are willing to serve (and contribute to). Volunteers show that the public has found your cause worth supporting. A story line about peer ministers shows how committed students help to expand the impact of the ministry.

**8. Give your reader a reason to trust your organization.**

People want to believe that what you tell them is reliable. They want to know that you are reputable and will use their gift carefully. Refer to your current successes or your careful financial management. Remember, writing a check is an emotional experience. Give your supporters the assurance that they can trust you.

### **9. Describe the solutions as attainable and manageable.**

Most people are not excited about contributing to a large general fund with needs that go on forever. In this letter you should explain how specific goals can be reached and how gifts, whatever the amount, will help to reach these goals. People need to know that their check will make an attainable difference when added to the contributions of others who share the same vision.

### **10. Help your donors to be hopeful.**

“We Care for the Future.” is the name given to the original endowment program of campus ministry. Regardless of how urgent and important you portray your need, your supporters need to have hope that change can happen, problems can be solved, and needs will be met. Is there light at the end of the tunnel? Give your donors a sense that there will be a permanent solution, not just an empty bucket that has to be filled forever. Help them to see that beyond the immediate needs there is more creative, significant ministry that will happen. Their gifts can truly help this vital mission of the church “care for the future.”

### **11. Be informative.**

Although giving is emotional, it is also based on information. Are there facts that can be shared, statistical trends, or new ways of thinking that your supporters might like to know? Why are your particular programs offered? What has the response been? If there are “sticking points” or problems, let them know that too, and ask them for possible solutions. If you truly want people to be involved in your ministry, you will need to keep them informed. Although there are some differences of opinion, most successful fundraisers now agree that a longer letter is better than one that is too brief. The reason they give is that any potential donor who wants to be informed needs a longer copy with more information and will spend the time to read it if it is well-written and helps to provide good information. The *right* prospect loves to read about something in which they are already interested. The *wrong* prospect may not even open your envelope.

### **12. Show appreciation.**

Take time to thank your donors, expressing your appreciation in advance for what you hope they will do—even for considering the possibility of giving. If you are planning an event or interesting program that is open to more than students, let them know that they are invited. You may not receive a gift on the basis of a first letter, but an invitation to an event where they can rub shoulders with other committed supporters may be just what they need to see the opportunity themselves.

# SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Friend (or Name),

**(CATCH ATTENTION WITH A PROVOCATIVE OPENING: Point 1)**

Not everyone knows who they are or where they are going when they step onto campus in the fall. Some are confused about their majors. Some get caught up in parties, drugs, and binge drinking. Some are lonely and wish for family and friends back home. Some are anxious about staggering college loans and wonder if they should have come to campus in the first place.

**(USE COMPELLING INDIVIDUAL STORIES: Point 2)**

In this letter I want to share with you the particular story of a young woman named Sarah, who came to the Lutheran Center early this fall. As a new student on campus she found her new surroundings difficult to handle. There were so many new faces and none that she recognized from her small town in central Kansas. Classes were going OK, but she found her interest sagging as she struggled with her future vocation. A couple of other students on her floor in the residence hall invited her to a bible study, but she felt lectured to by the group leader and her questions brushed aside. She said that she felt like she was drowning and that there was no one to reach out to her.

She did not belong to any church, although she had been baptized as a child in a Lutheran congregation. With a sense of relief, she accepted the invitation of one of our peer ministers to join us in worship on Sunday evening and the service project at the local food shelf later in the week. Yesterday she stopped by again to say thank you for the opportunity to be part of our community. She said it was as though we had tossed a lifeline out to her. She now felt that she had found a place on campus to call home. Sometimes all it takes is one simple invitation.

**(ASK FOR THE GIFT EARLY AND OFTEN: Point 3)**

I am writing to ask you to help us continue to inviting students like Sarah into a life-giving ministry. Our peer ministry program is solidly underway this fall. Four students are being trained as leaders of our faith community. We plan to expand this program next year to provide leadership training for five more students. The cost will be an additional \$4,000. A gift of \$200 will go a long way toward extending our lifeline ministry to students like Sarah.

**(BE PERSONAL: Point 5)**

You probably remember from your own days on campus how frantic student life can be. Maybe campus ministry was important to you during your college days. If you could help one of today's students find their purpose in life and make their time at college more rewarding, I'm sure you would respond. We count you among those who care deeply about the ministry of the church on the university campus.

**(LET DONORS KNOW THAT THEIR GIFT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Point 4)**

This past year we have seen a dramatic increase in attendance at worship. Building on this committed core community, we have been able to offer more bible study groups and extend our participation in service projects. A focus on evangelism this year has resulted in several “seekers” joining our expanding faith community. Your gift will help to continue this momentum of mission. People like Sarah will be invited to be a part of our Christian community at a crucial time in their lives.

**(ASK EARLY AND OFTEN: Point 3)**

With this new level of activity and all of these new faces, our program dollars are now being stretched to the limit. We are stepping out in faith and seeking to increase our budget this year by \$10,000. In order to do that, we need 50 people like yourself to make a contribution of \$200 or more. Every dollar will be spent to bring hope and direction to the lives of students at XYZ University.

**(DESCRIBE THE SOLUTIONS AS ATTAINABLE AND MANAGEABLE: Point 9)**

When our campaign ended last year we knew that we were on solid ground financially. We could do those things that are central to our mission—worship, study, counseling, fellowship and service—and do them well. We made the necessary repairs on the building, carried off the mission trip, and added two peer ministers. Financially we ended the year in the black. We trust that this year will afford the same sense of encouragement and prayerful response from friends like you who support this ministry.

**(HELP YOUR DONORS TO BE HOPEFUL: Point 10)**

If you could sit in the Lutheran Center on a daily basis and watch the activities of our ministry, you would sense the difference your contribution will make. When you send your contribution, you will feel like you have had a hand in extending our ministry’s lifeline. Lutheran Campus Ministry has been in existence over 100 years, since 1907. We are committed to being around well into the next century, “caring for the future” of the church and its young adults on campus.

**(WRITE WITH URGENCY: Point 6)**

It is important that we begin our new peer ministry training soon. Our spring mission trip is filling up and we need to provide scholarships to as many students as possible. Also, the annual National Gathering of Lutheran students is meeting over Christmas break. You may have attended the National Gathering or an LSAA Ashram yourself. We plan to assist a dozen of our students to attend this year.

**(ASK EARLY AND OFTEN: Point 3)**

Please use the enclosed response card when send your contribution. It will help us to keep your information file up to date. If you would like to extend your contribution over a period of time, we will be happy to send you a periodic reminder. Your gift is tax deductible.

**(SHOW APPRECIATION: Point 12)**

As members of the board and staff have made their contributions, we have felt the strong support of the friends of this ministry. Thank you for placing yourself among them and hundreds of others as you prayerfully consider your lifeline gift.

Appreciatively,

Mary Doe, Campus Pastor  
(Hand signed if possible)

**(BE PERSONAL: Point 5)**

P.S. When you are on campus, please drop by for a cup of coffee and conversation. I would be delighted to introduce you to some of our students. Once you meet them you will know that your lifeline gift makes a real difference.