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# Fundraising: Lessen Your Pain, Increase Your Gain

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Ah, what we could do with and among God's young saints if money weren't an obstacle (sigh).

But wait. There's always fundraising.

You know, car washes, bake sales, and Easter breakfasts—the Trinitarian of youth fundraising (heavy sigh).

In congregations of every size and location, youth are busy raising funds. Some youth ministries beat their congregation over the head with pleas; others are thoughtful, creative and deliberate in their fundraising techniques.

Congregations in the latter group likely view fundraising not only as a means to an end (money for ministry), but recognize the value of fundraising, such as:

- building relationships and community among participants
- giving participants a sense of trip, event, or ministry ownership
- providing service to others
- giving others, especially adults, an opportunity to invest in youth ministry
- an opportunity for youth ministry public relations
- promoting equity among youth of all incomes

In essence, fundraising enables youth to "do." Youth ministry is a ministry on the go—it's nothing if not active. That "doing" may include a ski trip or weekend retreat, or ongoing service in the community or the ELCA Youth Gathering.

Fundraising can be a drag. But fundraising—done with a sense of mission and meaning—opens the possibilities for ministry on the go, and for participation of youth of all incomes and situations. Fundraising is an equity booster.

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## Step I: Establish a Fundraising Philosophy

If you don't already have one, a good first step is to adopt a fundraising philosophy.

For some congregations, that philosophy is that youth will not raise funds. They believe that youth ministry is a part of the congregation's unified budget and that youth ministries should be supported by that budget—generously!

In a perfect world, we should all be so lucky. That philosophy would likely get cheers from burned-out youth ministers and advisors, tired parents, and overscheduled youth.

However, since fundraising is a reality for most youth ministries, it's important to have meaning behind the madness. For instance:

- Consider the 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 philosophy of some congregations. One third of necessary funds come from the congregation's budget, one third from the youth, and one third from group fundraisers.
- What kind of scholarship safeguard is in place for those youth who can't afford a 1/3 or greater payment? How will your ministries include everyone?
- Will youth be allowed to solicit funds outside of the congregations?
- What kind of permission and guidance do you need to get from congregational leaders?
- Will the group give a percentage of profits to another cause or ministry—to the congregation, the ministry of the greater church, a local community organization, or a world issue?

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## Step II: Form Fundraising Guidelines

Rather than setting about willy-nilly to fill the youth activities account, consider some of these guidelines (and add your own):

- **Does the fundraiser provide a service?**  
Good fundraising is also good ministry. It is far better to provide a day of cleaning for someone who could use that help than to send a cadre of young people to sell candy bars or magazine subscriptions door-to-door.
- **Does the fundraiser offer a product someone actually needs?**  
If your fundraising philosophy includes selling products, as well as services, make sure that the product is something others want or need. Many congregations stay within their fundraising philosophy when selling items people will likely buy anyway: Christmas trees or wreaths, spring hanging flower baskets, or bedding plants.
- **Do you encourage the option of giving the money directly to your ministry in addition to buying a product?**  
Most of us don't need more stuff or to be tempted by another bucket of cookie dough in the freezer. Besides, fundraising through selling products usually returns only a percentage of the product's selling price. Why not encourage those who are so inclined to give the full amount of the donation directly to your ministry?

- **How will money be divided?**

More than one youth committee meeting has ended with a disagreement regarding how the raised money should be split and how youth should be paid. Is it an even split among everyone? Only among those who showed up? Only among those who actually worked? Develop your own method that pays close attention to both fairness and grace.

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### **Step III: Get Busy**

Enough talk. Get busy.

Instead of nickel and diming the congregation, choose a few good fundraisers to put energy and effort behind. Do them in a set amount of time so that your fundraising doesn't seem endless. Be organized, which means delegating and putting many people to work—youth and adults. Leave enough lead time for creative and varied publicity.

Be deliberate and creative in planning and execution. Invest in a fundraising book, exchange ideas with others in person or through email. Spend plenty of time advertising and telling people about the how and why of your fundraising effort. A one-time blurb in Sunday's bulletin usually doesn't cut it. Plan to speak to the congregation repeatedly, put articles and ads in every publication, send emails repeatedly, put up posters, and explore other creative ways to reach people.

If there's one thing people do fairly well these days, it's raise funds. School and agency budget cuts have sent many families into fundraising frenzies. Don't let youth ministry do the same to you. Put fundraising into your ministry, not the other way around. Know what and who come first.

When Simon Birch (in the movie by the same name) tells the pastor he thinks God doesn't care about our bake sales, he's capturing the hearts of many weary youth ministers, parents, and kids.

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### **Top Twelve List**

Here are some fundraising ideas. Create your own list. Keep clear records, evaluate carefully, and offer thanks, thanks and more thanks to those who support youth ministry.

1. ***Ask for a stakeholder investment***

Congregation members and others make an investment in youth ministry by buying shares through an outright donation. Often followed with a stakeholder appreciation dinner complete with trip, program, or ministry highlights.

2. ***Host a silent auction***

Goods and services provided by youth, families, congregations, and the community. Buyers offer silent bids. No overhead; great creativity and

- community building.
3. ***Combine fundraisers***  
Combine events, especially those that are a lot of work and little money. Get matching pledges for every car washed and double your car wash money. Add fundraisers to special days or events already on the church calendar.
  4. ***Provide services that say "free" or "donation"***  
Some people simply can't resist handing over a \$10 or \$20 bill when told they don't have to, especially when someone has told them how the money is going to be used.
  5. ***Create partnerships with businesses***  
Provide labor for community businesses. Wait tables for a caterer or do inventory for a store owner. Hold a car wash at a business where it can't be missed. Ask businesses to donate goods and services for fundraisers in the congregation. Offer youth talent—such as young person who could create a business Web page—in exchange for what a business has to offer.
  6. ***Join forces with other ministries***  
Get help by making another ministry group your partner. Ask the women's group to help with a rummage sale, or the men's ministry to help with a breakfast. They bring much wisdom and experience. Always look for opportunities to make fundraising intergenerational.
  7. ***Do something pure fun***  
If you have to raise funds, you might as well have fun. Get the pastor to shave his (her?) beard if a certain amount of money is raised. Host a variety show that provides the congregation with an evening of laughter. Host a community concert.
  8. ***Be clever and visual***  
Put a new twist on old standards. Turn a bake sale into a Christmas cookie extravaganza, selling cookies by the pound. Place gas cans in the narthex for "gas money." Collect a mile of pennies.
  9. ***Mix service work with fundraising***  
If you've adopted a highway or do an annual river cleanup, ask for donations per bag of garbage. Many youth groups make money year-round by recycling newspapers and cans.
  10. ***Look for special gifts, memorials***  
Be on the lookout for funds that might be tucked away and waiting for use—undesignated money or anything that could pertain to youth ministry. Start your own Youth Ministry Endowment Fund, into which money is placed on a regular basis.
  11. ***Remember matching funds***  
Matching funds is not only the last phrase in fundraising, it's the first. Always check into Thrivent matching funds. Or, ask individuals to match the funding of others. "We have five people willing to match whatever we raise on the quilt

auction."

12. ***Tell the story after the funds are raised***

The bank account is fat and the work is done. Right? Not so fast! Spread the word via email, announcements, newsletters, posters, Web page highlights, phone calls, postcards, or appreciation dinners. Tell everyone how thankful you are, how much was raised, how the funds are supporting youth ministry, who the funds are being shared with if a percentage goes to another ministry, and offer a glimpse into your future plans.

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## **Fundraising and stewardship resources**

- [ELCA Mission Investment Fund](http://www.missioninvestmentfund.org/) *www.missioninvestmentfund.org/*
- [10-10-80 Empowering Young Steward Leaders](http://www.elca.org/stewardship/101080/index.html)  
*www.elca.org/stewardship/101080/index.html*
- [The ELCA Foundation](http://www.elca.org/fo/) *www.elca.org/fo/*
- [ELCA Stewardship](http://www.elca.org/stewardship/) *www.elca.org/stewardship/*

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[ELCA Youth Ministries](http://www.elca.org/youth/). 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2447.