

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fund Raising for Campus Ministry

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HOW BIG IS YOUR VISION?

“If there is no vision, the people perish.”

Visioning is the in-thing these days. Everybody’s doing it—or thinks that they should. Maybe it’s the thing that will lift them from the survival rut, they think. Or perhaps there is some new thing out there on the horizon that will be the magical harkening to a new way of doing things that will make life more interesting and meaningful. Or, worst case, maybe it’s just another of those “should” things on the agenda that keeps reminding us that if we want to be trendy and with it these days, we have to be fussing about vision.

Vision is that long view of the future of your ministry that keeps it moving along from day to day. Years ago, learning to canoe in the Boundary Waters of northern Minnesota, I was taught that the way to paddle in a straight line from one shore to another is to keep your eye on a fixed point on the far horizon, such as a tall tree. If you are too short-sighted as a canoeist, you will use up too much time and energy snaking across the lake or, worse, end up paddling in circles. So I ask the question, “How big is your vision?” Where is it taking you and how will it help you get to the far shore?

Simply stated, a vision is a realistic, credible, attractive, yet inspiring future for your ministry organization. Your vision is the answer to the question, “If our fondest dreams were to be realized, what would this organization look like or be doing in 20 years?” Like a travel poster, the vision doesn’t get you where you want to go, but it does give you a pretty good picture of what it will be like when you get there. It paints a picture that is so compelling that you can’t help but summon all of your resources and energy to get there. It is a picture that is greater and more meaningful than the present for everyone who selects to make the journey.

A shared vision collects all of the activities of those who commit to it and act accordingly. Victor Hugo said, “There is nothing like a dream to create the future.” Leaders are dream weavers who invite others into a way to make a difference. They provide the big picture and do it in such a compelling way that only the faint-hearted will drop away. A shared vision is a major source of hope and esteem for members of an organization. They can see the value of their contributions. They feel pride in being part of the whole effort. It makes them want to go the extra mile to help the organization achieve that vision.

Walt Disney understood vision. He knew that “dreams are the wishes a heart makes.” He knew that if you could dream it well, it might just happen. Some years after Disney died, a tourist to Disneyland remarked to a friend that it was too bad that Disney didn’t live to see it. The friend remarked, “He did see it. That’s why it’s here.!” He knew that vision is the first step into the future.

Some think that having a good mission statement is enough. A mission statement is a “being” statement. It says why you exist as an organization. A hospital exists to cure the sick. A museum exists to display great art. The church exists to spread the good news. Every organization needs to know what it’s business is and why. But the mission needs to be led by a vision. A vision statement is a “future” statement. It says where the organization wants to go. It is not the road map, but the destination.

“The Vision Thing” is an article by Burt Nanus and Stephen Dodds, published in *Contributions*, December, 1999. They offer four steps in the development of a new vision statement:

1. The Vision Audit
In this first phase fundamental questions are raised about the nature and purpose of the organization, its values and culture, its strengths and weaknesses, its benefits to society and clients.
2. The Vision Scope
The major constituencies are identified and examined, including threats and opportunities, and boundaries for a new vision are specified.
3. The Vision Context
A wide range of future developments that may affect the choice of a new direction are identified and evaluated. Funding patterns, socio-political realities and changes in client needs are to be considered.
4. The Vision Choice
Alternative vision statements are formulated and compared and strategic implications are considered.

Dreaming and visioning is best done by a group of people over several weeks or months of time. Although a leader may articulate the vision or announce it in some compelling way, a group effort will pay off ultimately. It encompasses a broader range of perspectives. It involves others in the search and draws them closer together as participants, as those who share the dream. It broadens everyone’s understanding of how the mission will play out once minds are stretched and eyes uplifted.

Jerry Panas, in his new book, *Asking*, says that a person doesn’t go to a hardware store to buy a drill. S/he goes to a hardware store to buy a drill—because s/he needs a hole. It’s not the drill that you are about, it’s the hole. It’s the hole that’s the vision of your organization. It’s the hole that gets people excited, not the drill.

People will rally around and support your vision if it’s big enough, creative enough, tall enough to get them across the lake to the far shore. How can you join with others to create a vision for your campus ministry that will invite people to get involved, be excited and become dedicated, so that they will support the future of your ministry with their time and contributions?

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