

# THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

## Thoughts on Fund Raising for Campus Ministry

Office of Lutheran Campus Ministry Advancement  
1407 North Cleveland  
St. Paul, MN 55108

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### MORE THOUGHTS ON DIRECT MAILING

As I move among our Lutheran campus ministries to talk about fund raising, a frequent question is: “If I need to do one thing well, what would that be?” My first response is usually about the necessity of building relationships and nurturing donors. Sometimes this is called “donor stewardship,” meaning that we are concerned about more than the gift; we’re concerned about the giver. This is most certainly true.

Then I think about how possible this is for most of our ministries, primarily because our alums and supporters are scattered across the country for the most part. And I think that the basic way that we stay in contact with our donors is by mail—snail mail—the old fashioned kind. Yes, the newer trend is electronic, and, yes, the more opportunities we can provide for people to meet face to face, the better chance we have to communicate our mission. But I want to suggest that the single, most important piece of our fund raising work is still regular, systematic contact by direct mail. For most of us it is the foundation upon which all other good development work is done. Unless you happen to have a large staff, a sizeable travel budget or state-of-the-art computer equipment, you are going to rely on direct mail to carry the bulk of your message. So how do you do that well?

Steve Hitchcock, a direct mail expert and developer of our original “We Care for the Future” endowment, keeps pushing for excellence in how we do fund raising by mail. He has written about “Ten Things That Are Almost Always True About Direct Mail Fundraising.” Here is his sage advice:

1. Sending out *thank you letters* or notes as quickly as possible is the single most important factor in insuring the success of your direct mail fundraising program.
2. Those organizations that raise the most money year after year have direct mail fundraising *programs*—not just a collection of appeal letters. What makes the difference is *not* the response rate or total income of any single mailing. Rather it’s the total number of gifts and the overall income generated by an *annual schedule* of mailings—with adequate time between mailings and with a variation in the format or content of those mailings.
3. Asking your donors or members too often increases the rate at which they lapse, *but* organizations that don’t send enough appeals see an even greater percentage of their members and donors lapse.
4. Fundraising appeals work best when there is a letter, a separate response card or reply device, and a return letter. All three are essential.
5. Enclosures—especially brochures—always slow down the process of getting out a mailing, increase the cost, and *rarely* generate enough additional income to justify the

time and money you spend on those inserts. In many instances, enclosures *reduce* response rates. Of course, there are *exceptions* to this rule.

6. Testing random samples of members with variations in letters or packages (for example, testing yellow reply envelopes against a standard white envelope) almost never produces statistically valid differences in response rate.
7. Appeals related to true emergencies or a pressing crisis always bring in more gifts and more money than appeals for institutional purposes or for support of ongoing programs. However, direct mail programs that include institutional appeals—membership renewals, giving clubs and annual report mailings—have higher donor retention and higher overall income.
8. Very, very few donors upgrade their giving. The first gift you receive from an individual is likely to be the amount written on subsequent checks. In fact, many donors *downgrade* their giving levels (in other words, an individual makes an initial gift of \$100, but her next gift is only \$50). Fortunately, the precious few donors who do go on to increase their giving level can be enough to offset those who decrease their giving.
9. Your organization's donor base must include *both* "large" and "small" donors—those who regularly contribute \$1000 and those who send in \$10 bills. Fundraising is democracy in action—you have to let everyone participate at the level he or she wishes. You will bring about your own demise if you try to recruit and solicit *only* major gifts. And you must give donors the opportunity (and incentives!) to make substantial contributions; you can never generate enough net income from \$10, \$15 or even \$25 contributions to sustain your fundraising program. Okay, this rule isn't true for a couple dozen organizations—in the whole country.
10. Organizations that send out newsletters and informational mailings—*not* just solicitation letters—generate more income from their direct mail programs.<sup>1</sup>

I want to make a couple more observations from my desk. Too often we rely on our newsletters to carry the weight of the "ask." While a newsletter can convey relevant and exciting programs and pictures, it is one step removed from the personal correspondence of an actual letter. The personal column we write in our newsletters is not very personal is it? Newsletters are effective as support pieces for regular personal mailings, but they never take the place of a well-crafted letter. Three letters per year, interspersed by two newsletters, might be considered a good balance for us in campus ministry.

Another observation is that we need to make our letters as personal as possible. How can you communicate the urgency of your ministry in a way that invites your reader to "feel" themselves into your appeal? Write as though you are communicating with a close friend. Say what you need to say with passion, clarity and openness.

Remember that what you are trying to do with your mailing is get a response. So you have to ask your donors to do something: return the card and envelope with a check, complete a survey, send names of others they know or share some advice. Involve your donors. Invite them to help you in some way or another.

I want to lift up a well thought out mailing program (see #2 above) designed by one of our campus ministries. At Northwestern University, Lloyd Kittlaus and his associates have developed a series of mailing inserts that each display one of the core features of the ministry—worship, community, support and comfort, convenience, growth, future, fun and service. Each 8 ½ x 11 piece is done on crisp, white paper with photos, using Northwestern purple as the basic

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Hitchcock, Mal Warwick and Associates, Berkeley, CA

color. Each piece also includes a laundry list of what various levels of gifts would provide for each particular emphasis (eg. for worship, \$75 buys communion bread and wine for a year, while \$5,000 would provide 1/3 of the cost to air condition the first floor where the chapel is located). A simple 1/3 page brochure talks about the core beliefs of ULC. And a return envelope invites gifts, as well as alum news and names of others who might be interested in supporting ULC. I'm sure that Lloyd would be glad to send you a copy of his material if you write him at 2204 Orrington Avenue, Evanston, IL 60201. His email address is [l-kittlaus@northwestern.edu](mailto:l-kittlaus@northwestern.edu).

Finally, I would be glad to offer a gentle critique of any mailing you would like to send me, including the text of letters. By all means put me on your mailing list. And if you have good stuff to share, send it my way so that others can benefit from your creativity.

God's grace for all you do.

Galen Hora  
Lutheran Campus Ministry Advancement