

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fund Raising for Campus Ministry

Office of Lutheran Campus Ministry Advancement
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BOARD EVALUATION

“To rule is easy,” quipped Goethe, “to govern difficult.” It’s one of those insights that seem to span the ages. With poetic incisiveness, Goethe seems to have touched the nerve of so much of our present difficulty, whether it is national politics or the local school board. Don’t you wish, sometimes, that a benevolent autocrat would simply arise and tell us all where to go and how to do it? Then we could lay aside the messy stuff of governance, quit the endless meetings and reports and move on with it—whatever “it” is.

With careful and clear-headed reflection, however, we can be thankful that that’s not the way we do things. We’re more collegial, more consultative, and more democratic than a knee-jerk response to bad governance suggests. Our more enlightened ways of leadership and progressive action always seem to involve the perspectives and critical thinking of others. It’s not that we’re indecisive, most of the time. We have come to know through years of experimentation and experience that collective visioning, planning and evaluation gets the mission accomplished more effectively and faithfully than allowing one person to shoulder the responsibility him/herself. So we have, in our wisdom, sought to surround ourselves with competent, engaging, thoughtful people who can help us carry forward the ministry to which we have been called. That group of folks is called “a board,” or other similar nomenclature that you may use locally. The purpose of boards is to govern—to give structure and direction to the ministry by setting policy, hiring and supervising staff, and interpreting the work to those who support it by lifting up the vision and inviting their response.

A few months ago Jack Fortin, who teaches leadership at Luther Seminary, shared some insights about boards with several Minnesota staff and board members.¹ Jack said that boards have *authority*, while staffs have *leadership*. Boards *stabilize* and staff *stretch* the boundaries of the vision and the daily work. Staffs are like the *flow* of a river, while boards provide the *banks* and boundaries. Boards can help focus the energy that the activities of staff generate. Staffs are about *action* and boards are about *reflection and direction*. While staff may deal with the *urgent* issues of the day, the board is called to deal with the *important* issues of today that impact the ministry tomorrow.

I know that I’m preaching to the choir when I say that board development is crucial to the ongoing ministry to which we have been called. We have known this for decades. However, as we begin to live into the new Policies and Procedures for campus ministry, we will find a greater emphasis placed on the effectiveness of local and area agency boards. At the time of the quadrennial review, the review team will consider renewal based on the effectiveness of the

¹ From email notes provided by Jim Holthus, 10/28/02.

ministry and its faithfulness to the campus ministry mission. This review will consider more carefully the work of the board than is now the case, in addition to viewing the leadership of the staff person. While this is not meant to strike fear into the heart of anyone currently struggling with board sluggishness, it does suggest that in the ensuing months attention needs to be given to the care and nurture of those good folks who are in charge of governing our ministries.

The past two First Monday Reports have dealt with board recruitment and job descriptions. This third report seeks to offer some suggestions about board evaluation. Andringa and Engstrom² tell us that one of the most neglected and sensitive of all board evaluation duties is the assessment of its own performance. There are a number of reasons:

- Evaluation of peers is touchy business
- No external entity requires it or even exerts pressure to do it.
- Few board members know how to coordinate an evaluation and fewer still volunteer to do it.
- The press of other urgent board business keeps the board from less pressing topics such as self-evaluation.

The authors go on to suggest reasons why evaluation is essential:

- ✓ An organization, in the long run, is no better than its board. It is in everyone's interest to help the board to function as effectively as it possible can.
- ✓ Board members become frustrated when they perceive that the board is dysfunctional in key areas. As a result, attendance drops, some may resign.
- ✓ Staff morale suffers when the board doesn't seem interested in getting its act together. When staff trust and respect for the board wanes, few chief executives can on their own fill that leadership vacuum.
- ✓ When a board can address its own needs honestly, it sends the right signal to staff members that making mistakes and learning from them is natural and good.
- ✓ An effective board addresses issues, keeps the mission clear, uses funds wisely, and makes board meetings enjoyable. New member recruitment is easy.

There are a number of ways to conduct board evaluations. The simplest way is to have conversation on an ongoing way. Set aside 5-10 minutes at every board meeting to ask, "How are we doing?" "What went well at this meeting; what could be better?" Solicit the comments of newer members especially. They often have the keenest eyes and ears. When members are given the freedom to make suggestions for improvement, they feel more ownership and understand that their ideas are valued. However, when change is discussed, change is expected. So when a consensus emerges about a new direction for board action, it should be addressed, perhaps by a task force or subcommittee.

The next level of evaluation is to consider a retreat or special event where the board will avail itself of some training by using a book or tape, by having an outsider with experience work with them, or by hiring a consultant. In this kind of setting standards can be set and job descriptions written by which board members can gauge their performance.

A third level might be a survey conducted either internally by a special committee or externally by a third party. A survey includes aspects of the board's life to be rated on a scale of one to five, as well as several open-ended questions. The board receives a summary of the responses, although no names are mentioned. The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to

² Robert Andringa and Ted Engrstrom, *Nonprofit Board Answer Book* (National Center for Nonprofit Boards: Washington, DC, 1998).

complete and should be collated by someone outside the board, perhaps a former member. The survey covers such material as mission, board size, committee structure, orientation, and quality of meetings. An alternative would be to do shorter surveys periodically on a single aspect of the board's work.

A fourth level of evaluation would be an external audit. At this level a consultant with expertise on board governance would be asked to examine: review of the articles of incorporation and bylaws, interviews of officers, other board members and staff, observe board and committee meetings, create and administer a survey, and facilitate a discussion about key issues raised.

While board evaluations can occur at any time, there may be natural cycles in the life of campus ministry that are obvious for such activity. The end of the academic year is one important time for self-reflection. The process of the quadrennial review is another built-in time for campus ministry. Summer months, when activity on campus is at a minimum, leaves some time for gathering survey responses. Early fall is often a good time for retreats that look both forward and backward.

I remember reading about an elderly couple from the Midwest who left home to travel to a nearby town. As they drove, they got more and more disoriented, but they just kept driving. They stopped for gas, for an occasional bite to eat, and to sleep by the side of the road. But they did not stop for directions or to ask for help. I guess they just figured that if they kept driving they would arrive at their destination sooner or later. If you've ever felt like you were along for that kind of ride with your board, you know how valuable it would be to stop and ask for directions or for some help. A board that never evaluates its performance is hoping, even risking, that all it needs to do to accomplish its mission is to keep on driving. But what do you think its chances are of getting there?

Attached to this report is a draft of an evaluation tool that may be useful with your own board. If it is helpful, use it. If not, guide your board in the development of their own instrument. The outcome of your trip will depend on it.

BOARD EVALUATION

	INDICATOR						
		5	4	3	2	1	NA
1	The roles of the board and staff are well defined and respected.						
2	The board participates fully in visioning and strategic planning.						
3	Each board member has an up to date job description and has signed it.						
4	The board sets fund raising goals and is involved in the generation of resources.						
5	The board's nominating process ensures that membership is appropriately diverse.						
6	Board members receive initial orientation and ongoing training, including mentoring.						
7	The board regularly reviews the bylaws and policy documents.						
8	The board has a process for handling urgent matters between meetings.						
9	The board has an attendance policy and an annual calendar of meetings						
10	Meetings have written agendas and materials are distributed in advance of the meeting.						
11	The board has a process for managing conflict.						
12	An audit or financial review occurs annually.						
13	The board is involved in accurate reporting of programs and financial resources						
14	The board has a process to regularly review staff performance.						
15	The board has comprehensive personnel policies that have been reviewed by a professional.						
16	Each board member feels involved and interested in the board's work.						
17	The board takes time regularly to understand campus issues and students' concerns.						
18	Care is taken that necessary skills and professional expertise are present on the board.						
19	The board understands and follows campus ministry policies and procedures.						
20	The board is involved in interpretation and communication to the community and churches.						

(5=Very Good, 4 Good, 3 Average, 2 Fair, 1 Poor. NA=Not Applicable)

TOTAL

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Best possible score: 100

Please list three to five points on which you think the board should focus its attention in the next year. Be as specific as possible.

1

2

3

4

5

