

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fund Raising for Campus Ministry

Office of Lutheran Campus Ministry Advancement

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INVOLVING THE BOARD IN FUND RAISING

If you want to provide a quick and accurate stress test for your board members, just lay this mandate before them at your next meeting: “One of your primary responsibilities as a board member is to do fund raising for campus ministry.” With few exceptions, the response will probably be immediate and definitive: “You want us to do what!?” This approach is most effective if you wait until they are signed on as board members and have been lulled into thinking that their most important contribution will be baking cookies for the next student dinner. You said that this was going to be fun (or at least interesting) and that being on the board wouldn’t require much time or energy from them. And now, you have betrayed them and dragged them into this “fund raising thing,” which they have no interest in or intention of doing. So after the dust settles and all the gauntlets are thrown down, what do you do now? How do you get this lovely group of well-intended folks, many of whom are your personal friends, to rollup their sleeves and get on with the work of fund raising?

I have met with many boards and staff over the years and I can tell you that this is not an easy sell. I would have better luck pushing Cheesehead hats in Viking country or walking my cat in a rainstorm. Most board members track the conversation pretty well when we talk about the responsibilities of hiring and overseeing professional staff, interpreting the ministry, creating a vital vision, and establishing “best practices.” It’s when the discussion turns to the responsibility of providing adequate resources for the ministry, and their role in soliciting those resources, that they have this collective “deer in the headlights” look. They can’t imagine that they agreed to do fund raising. And maybe they didn’t, particularly if there was no board job description to read prior to signing up. But here we are, together in this quandary, trying to make sense of what it means to raise resources as a member of the board. With our wits semi-assembled, how can we begin to think about what’s both necessary and possible for fund raising in our ministries?

Hildy Gottlieb has a helpful suggestion. In an article titled, “Riding the Horse the Way It’s Going,”¹ she remembers an old cowboy saying that to her at a time of frustration. While the horse may be finally tamed and brought under control, there is a certain sense that the final destination might be negotiable between the horse and the rider. She says that what you need to figure out is “which way the board’s horse is going so that you can find ways to ride along WITH them to get to where BOTH the board AND the staff want to be—a funded and secure organization.”

¹ Help 4 Nonprofits & Tribes, 4433 E. Broadway, #202, Tucson, AZ 85711.
The Web site address is <http://www.help4nonprofits.com>

She suggests that we begin by looking at what the board is already doing well. She lists five responsibilities of boards, which are similar to other lists we have noted recently.

1. Hire, fire, and measure the performance of the CEO (that translates into the campus pastor/minister in our settings).
2. Act as the ambassadors to the community, relaying information between the organization and the community and vice versa.
3. Be accountable for the organization by providing the results the community needs, and ensure that the organization has the resources it needs to provide those results.
4. Define the values upon which the organization will base its actions and decisions, establishing the ground rules for what is appropriate behavior within the organization. (I would add strategic planning and visioning as well)
5. Be responsible for the board itself.

Gottlieb indicates that if the board isn't attending faithfully to any of the above responsibilities, the whole organization is on shaky ground. These duties are necessary in any organization, without exception. They provide accountability and linkage with the community, both of which are vitally essential to successful fund raising. She says, "If the board doesn't do the 'Big 5,' they are abrogating their responsibility and cannot call themselves accountable." Moreover, since the board is responsible for itself (#5), the board alone can determine how it does its job and what additional tasks to take on. It's not up to the CEO (campus pastor/minister) to determine how and if the board does fund raising. They have signed up to provide resources (#3), but they need latitude to determine just how that will happen.

Initially, the board may find itself on one end of a continuum that stretches from "actively involved" to "not involved at all," most likely at this less-active end. If "the horse you are riding" is currently not involved in fund raising and is not anxious to learn, there are at least some minimal expectations. One, they should provide training resources to staff, if it is their expectation that staff do the fund raising on their behalf. This includes an adequate computer system and data managing software. If a board won't raise funds, they must hire or train someone to do it for them. They can't have it both ways. Second, board members must contribute financially themselves, beyond the time they give as volunteers. Obviously this means giving within their means. This is not an option. Not only do other donors want to know about board support, members themselves must see this as a sign of their commitment. Even if a few dollars is all that a board member can afford, it is important that the gift be made. 'Nuff said.

A mid-range point on the involvement continuum is the place where board members might agree to take on certain aspects of the fund raising task, such as coordinating the annual appeal or helping with a phonathon. Some of the members may feel comfortable with making visits in person, but others may hang back for good and sundry reasons. Again, the board determines how this happens and makes sure that it fits into the strategic plan for receiving ministry gifts.

The "active" end of the continuum involves those who have learned how to make effective fund raising contacts and enjoy doing so. Certainly not everyone will get to this point, even with good training and affirming support. When some do, rejoice.

In my visits with boards, I am always quick to suggest that a "Development Committee" (to use a kind of generic term) be appointed by the board to care for serious, long-term fund raising initiatives. While a board member or two should serve as liaison to the committee, the primary membership should be made up of persons with experience in fund raising, with connections in

the community, and with a deep commitment to campus ministry. Duties of this committee will include:

- General oversight of the long-term financial well-being of the ministry, particularly relating to future needs and visions.
- Establishment of an annual/sustaining fund that will supplement the contributions of synods and the churchwide office.
- Establishment of an endowment or capital campaign for the ministry, including the attendant case statements and feasibility studies.
- Provision for planned gift opportunities.
- Oversight of the management of these ministry generated resources, either through the ELCA Foundation or through a mutually agreed upon and fiscally responsible alternative.

Depending upon the skill sets and interests of the committee, they may also take responsibility for data management, publications related to fund raising, and ongoing stewardship of donors.

Ride the horse the way it's going. There may be boards that just refuse to raise funds. If that's the case with your board, it's time to step back and ask the question about how both horse and rider can agree on a direction with will still uplift and enhance the ministry. Hildy Gottlieb suggests that there are still valuable things a board member can do beyond raising money. Primarily, board members are ambassadors for the ministry. They may be able to fulfill the responsibility of obtaining resources by helping expand the base of the ministry's supporters—those who know and care about what you are doing on campus for God's sake. Good fund raising is "friend raising" after all. Friends of the ministry may eventually become funders of the ministry. But in the beginning, they are simply asked as potential friends to come and see what your work on campus is all about. Board members can attend events and invite others they know. They can ask for volunteers. They can provide contacts with international students. They can set up forum presentations in their congregations. They can say a good word for you at synod assemblies. Yes, they can bake cookies. And they can pray.

In the end, the work of the board is about making the ministry strong, accountable, faithful, and visionary. How funds and resources figure into that equation is the board's responsibility. Your job, as a staff person, is to ride the horse in the way it's going, even if for the moment that might not be the exact direction you had in mind. Just hang on; it'll get you there.