

## 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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## How Old Is Your Campus Ministry?

Every fall, as a new wave of students hits campus, I go through this thing about getting older. They have fresh faces and eager minds. For the most part they are excited about being away from home and on their own somewhat (even though they may have affectional ties to their parent's homes and credit cards). It's a venturing, entrepreneurial time in their lives, filled with the attendant risks and worries. It's about being on the edge of a great adventure. I remember being there years ago. What a rush, what excitement! And seeing this new surge of energy and enthusiasm makes me wonder if I still have it or if it can find it when I need it. It begs the question of growing older.

Now I don't mean this First Monday Report to be about me. Or even about the personal aging process *per se*. I want to turn the question to the places we serve and ask you if you have a sense of how old your campus ministry is these days.

Of course you can do this chronologically. Lots of you are celebrating anniversaries of 50 or 75 years. In 2007, all of us will celebrate 100 years of Lutheran Campus Ministry. You might look at the gentrification of your facility and lament the gradual decline of plumbing, roof, and façade. You might do a little historical sketch and note significant events and contributions of former staff. That's all worthy of note.

But I'm thinking more about the energy age of your ministry. I'm wondering about your flexibility, your muscle, and your sense of adventure. I'm wondering if you have a fresh sense of vision and the "stuff" it takes to get you there. Are you excited? Are you engaged in your future? Does it feel entrepreneurial? What would it be like if your ministry was really alive?

We age as ministries and institutions. We lose the edge. We stop focusing on tomorrow with any kind of enthusiasm and think only about getting through today. TGIF applies to ministries, too. Are you glad to get through one more board meeting? Is it drudgery to send out one more annual appeal? Aging creeps up on us as institutions, just as it does as human beings. We don't notice it, until someone else points it out to us, perhaps, and then we get defensive. We become more enamored with the status quo than with the cutting edge. We become closed to new ideas and prefer the tried-and-true. Board structure calcifies. A routine governs our days. Our facilities have the same look from year to year. But while it may be predictable, it doesn't have to be inevitable.

Jim Gelatt, general editor of Aspen's Fund Raising Series for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, probes the question of institutional aging in a recent article.<sup>1</sup> He suggests a little exercise wherein we think about several individuals and ask how old they are in our minds: Richard Nixon, Elvis, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mickey Mantle, and Jesus. In our mind's eye we probably see them at the peak of their energy and at the height of their social prominence. We see them as vital, contributing members of society—wise, powerful, tough, and incredibly interesting.

Now, he suggests, we ask the same question of our organization. How old is your ministry? "In the minds of your donors, or your board, or your staff, how old is it? Is it in its maturity—having gotten past the pangs of youth? Is it still in its awkward teenage years? Or is it—frankly—over the hill?"

He goes on to say that for nonprofits, *image* is key. If our donors and those who support us (such as synods or local congregations) see us as still growing or in stable maturity, they will be more likely to continue to support us than if they see us as doddering, unfocused, and sapped of all energy and creativity. And while we all hope that others come to know us as we truly are, what they often respond to is our "image," rather than our reality. For example, you may have had the experience, as I have, of someone at a synod assembly saying, "Oh, campus ministry, are you still out there on the streets protesting the war?" Or some parent remarking, "This chapel looks just like it did when I was here 30 years ago." When they come to know us, they may think differently, but for the moment they are responding to some sort of image of what they think we're about. It's a sign of aging.

Gelatt pushes us to examine our image. He informs us that there are relatively predictable stages that all organizations go through in their life cycle. The *entrepreneurial stage* describes the new organization—small, informal, often focused on survival. It may offer one product or one service, hoping to expand as time goes on. Some of our startup ministries offer a study group to begin with, or seek to build community around a worship event. This fledgling image may be built around the interests and skills for the staff person or the founding board members. But we need to question if it still holds true today. Years ago I served a campus ministry that had built its identity around a coffee house, complete with folk musicians and poetry readings. By the time I arrived, all that was left was the tables and chairs, but the room was still referred to as the "coffee house" and was off-limits to new possibilities. What launches a ministry may not be that which sustains it. We need to examine current needs and future possibilities. If we stay too long in the entrepreneurial stage, we never leave adolescence. Yet we dare not lose the creative edge that allows us to experiment and dare to try new things.

As an institution matures, Gelatt says, rapid growth and unabated excitement may continue, but the need for structure emerges. "In what might be called a pre-bureaucratic stage, the organization begins to establish procedures, out of necessity." Structure gives form to the passions of the founders. It gives guidance to those who were not there at the beginning, but who have been asked to carry on some early vision. The *formalization stage* gives evidence of stability, both financially and programmatically. This is mid-life—and as in real life, a crisis may hit at some point when the organization gets too bureaucratic, too hierarchical, and too rigid.

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<sup>1</sup> "How Old is Mozart?" Contributions, July-August, 2004, pp 1, 17.

One extreme is the organization that says, “We can do it all!” The other extreme is the one that says, “We can’t do any more.” The first believes, “Everything is permitted unless otherwise stated.” The second believes, “Nothing is permitted unless otherwise stated.”

Sit back for a moment and give some thought to these questions:

- Are current staff and board members committed to the cause for which the ministry was founded?
- Have we grown beyond this original cause, but have not been as intentional or direct about it as we might be?
- Are we interested more in efficiency than in effectiveness?
- Do our supporters “get it” without a lot of interpretation required?
- If a relative “outsider” were asked to say something about the “image” of our ministry, what might they say?
- What do you do well and who knows it?
- If you were to become more stable, how would that affect your ministry on a daily basis?
- At the end of the day, do you and those around you feel like you have made a difference in someone’s life?
- Has the Gospel been proclaimed?

How old is your ministry? It’s a good question to ask in these halcyon days. Does your ministry have the energy and rigor of a first-grader just off to school or a first-year university student bent on a new adventure? I pray that it does. Enjoy the year!