

# **THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT**

## **Thoughts on Fund Raising for Campus Ministry**

**Office of Lutheran Campus Ministry Advancement  
1407 North Cleveland  
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### **Volunteers Are Their Own Best Gifts**

When I arrived at the University of Pittsburgh years ago, I inherited a wonderful network of volunteers. They were members of area congregations who served meals at the Lutheran University Center. They came for an entire week, bringing with them assorted desserts, cheerful hearts, and much goodwill for campus ministry. The Center provided noon lunches at cost to students, faculty, and anyone who wandered by on Forbes Avenue looking for a dining companion and a hearty meal. Without these great volunteers we would not have been able to provide these meals that fed over one hundred persons a day.

Throughout the course of the year the congregations these volunteers represented made significant contributions to campus ministry. These good folks were able ambassadors. They had been in the building. They had interacted with students and faculty. They knew our needs first hand. So when it came time for congregations to consider extra benevolence or design their budgets, these volunteers became our interpreters. They could make things happen for us in area congregations that we would have been hard pressed to make happen on our own, given limitations of time and staff. Moreover, these volunteers gave of themselves to make ministry happen. They shared with us an outreach to the university community. They were their own best gifts.

I want to encourage you to think about volunteers for your campus ministry. They can be invited to serve a variety of important functions, such as:

- Mentoring
- Providing meals
- Leading programs appropriate to their interests and skills
- Welcoming visitors to the ministry
- Assisting with office duties, such as mailings, phone calls, or filing
- Contacting congregations and interpreting our ministry
- Entering data or working with the Web site
- Maintaining the facility
- Gathering names of new students
- Sending thank you notes
- Visiting with potential donors

While the above list is not exhaustive, it may nudge you to give some new consideration to how volunteers might benefit your campus ministry. It is obvious that they should be carefully selected, thoughtfully deployed, and thoroughly trained. This is especially true for those who take on responsibilities for representing the ministry as interpreters or gift solicitors. And for the sheer amount of time it takes to provide training and coordination, you might choose to avoid volunteers. However, when you reconsider the amount of assistance and good will trained volunteers provide, you may decide that this is a valuable way to extend your ministry in ways you can't possibly accomplish by yourself.

When you consider inviting volunteers to assist your ministry, here are some things to remember.

1. Volunteers primarily serve the ministry and are your staff assistants only secondarily.
2. Consider how volunteers are to be recruited. Those with positive experiences are the best people to recruit new volunteers.
3. A standard for volunteers should be set. This will range from quality of work to how frequently they serve. What is appropriate and achievable? How might this standard be different for students than for community members?
4. The work and purpose of volunteers should be evaluated regularly by the board, with feedback from you as the staff person.
5. Help volunteers to feel valued. Say "thank you" often. Reward them with a special annual event or, if a smaller number, with a special dinner.
6. Pay attention to volunteer turnover. Is your ministry receptive to volunteers? Have their skills been matched to appropriate tasks? Are there obstacles that need to be addressed, such as time or space?
7. Consider having a Volunteer Coordinator for your ministry, someone who values volunteer work and knows what it takes to recruit, train, and thank other volunteers.

Jarene Frances Lee is the co-author of *What We Learned (the Hard Way) about Supervising Volunteers*<sup>1</sup>. She offers ten items to remember in recruiting your best volunteers.

1. Develop an organizational philosophy of volunteerism. While most organizations are not required to use volunteers, most do. Why would your organization do so? Even if you had all the money it needed, why might you still involve volunteers?
2. Develop jobs and assignments with care. These jobs should complement the work of paid staff in appropriate ways. Volunteer work should not just be "dump work" that nobody else wants to do. Staff might be asked to consider (a) what they are doing that does not require their expertise, (b) what they would do if they had more time, and (c) what needs to be done, but requires extra expertise. The volunteer should have turf, be allowed to think, needs to be accountable, and needs to be evaluated.<sup>2</sup>
3. Make careful matches between prospective volunteers and available tasks. An interview with prospective volunteers helps to clarify this decision, one which should be mutually agreed upon by the organization and the volunteer. You are not obligated to take every person to volunteers.

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<sup>1</sup> Energize, 1999. Available from *The Compleat Professional's Library*, P.O. Box 338, Medfield, MA 02052. (508) 359-0019 From an article titled, "Recruiting Your Best Volunteers," *Contributions*, November-December, 2004, pp. 22f. See also, *The Volunteer Recruitment Book*, by Susan Ellis, also available at the same address.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Lynch, *Voluntary Action Leadership*, Summer, 1983.

4. Avoid wasting a volunteer's time. They are giving you a valuable commodity—time. Don't waste it. Don't let them sit idly behind a desk. Plan for their coming and going.
5. Think of volunteers as staff. They are insiders, not outsiders. They have valuable ideas to offer in addition to their work. Give them adequate work space and supplies. Help them to develop pride in the organization. Offer work that is challenging and meaningful as often as possible. Don't let anyone say, "I'm just a volunteer."
6. Communicate well. It keeps volunteers informed and shows that you trust them. Include them in staff meetings from time to time. Loop them in by e-mail. Put their pictures in the newsletter or on the bulletin board.
7. Deal constructively with volunteer-staff tension. Let them know that when/if problems arise, there is a means of dealing with them.
8. Remove obstacles to success. Help them to be aware of deadlines, quality issues, and other expectations and standards. If you have to redo their work or follow up on their tasks, someone is not helping them to be their best.
9. Be flexible about schedules. Volunteers are giving you their leisure time. Try to accommodate them as much as possible. If they need special time off for personal reasons, try to understand their requests.
10. Give feedback. All volunteers need to feel appreciated. They need "psychic income" like everyone else in the organization. They want to make a difference, not just put in time. Evaluations that are both written and done in person will have an impact that will encourage volunteers to polish their productivity. Ask them what they liked about what they did, what they would do differently, and what help they might need to do an even better job in the future.

In the end volunteers are their own best gift. Sure, they may make modest contributions to your ministry. In fact, many legacy gifts come from persons who have been intimately involved in an organization as a volunteer over a long period of time. They have had a chance to see what the ministry does, how it works, what its mission is, and what it needs to continue. They have felt that they made a significant difference. They have given their time and energy. They have given of themselves—the best gift of all.