

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fund Raising for Campus Ministry

Office of Lutheran Campus Ministry Advancement
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“Saying Thank You”

At the risk of sounding like the master of the obvious, I want to lift up the importance of saying a genuine “thank you” to all those faithful supporters of your ministry. If it “goes without saying,” sometimes that means that we don’t say it. Saying thank you is one of the ways that we build relationships with our supporters. If they, indeed, are to become like friends and family to us, we need to do what we would do if someone close to us gave us a thoughtful gift. We need to acknowledge the gift in prompt, appropriate ways.

The fact that we respond promptly signals a number of things. It lets the donor know that we open our mail and that we responsible care for the gifts we receive—like cashing the check within a reasonable time. I remember my shock when I began a new job a few years ago and discovered a half dozen checks in my desk drawer, uncashed, written over six months prior. I had to contact each donor, apologize, and humbly ask if they would consider re-writing a check if I would send them the old one. Promptness also lets the donor know that their gift has made a connection with you, otherwise it’s like being on hold on the phone for a long time until someone finally picks up on the other end. The Billy Graham Crusade is successful in its fund raising in part because they have a mandate of replying to each donor within twenty-four hours. It’s a courtesy to say thank you as soon as possible.

Second, consider the appropriateness of your response. For many a brief, handwritten note is what is expected and appreciated. If you’re fortunate enough to have a lot of responses to send, perhaps a pre-printed note that you would personally sign would suffice. In other cases, where the gift is larger or the relationship deeper, a phone call followed by a note is appropriate. In still other instances, a personal visit or invitation to lunch is the best way to acknowledge the gift and the relationship. Additional items, such as a photograph or a news clipping, add interest. In very rare situations an email response might be okay, but it is about the most impersonal form of communication today.

In an article titled, “Thanks, and Thanks Again,” Joesph Barbato¹ offers some ways to make our donors feel special.

¹ Joseph Barbato, “Thanks, and Thanks Again,” *Contributions*, April 2005, p. 6.

- Give your thank you substance. You have to say more than those two little words. You have to let your donors know how their gift helped make a difference. Quote someone who has benefited from it, such as a student who experienced a life-changing encounter on a spring break trip. Barbato says that substance helps to educate donors. Talk about the next new project or your renewed vision. Substance helps them to understand and will encourage more gifts in the future because of that.
- Send the letter now. As mentioned above, this helps the donor know that the check actually arrived and that you appreciate the effort to send it. A warm gift turn cold very quickly with the passage of time.
- Keep the letters fresh. Be sure to write new letters with each round of thank you responses. If a person contributes several times a year, make sure that each note is different and not dated by the mention of a holiday or the beginning of the school year, when it is actually April.
- Tailor your thank yous. If you tailored your “ask,” you need to tailor your thank you. If you appealed to a certain group of alums on the basis of renovating the building, then respond by letting them know how the progress is going. To know the donor is to know how to say thank you.
- Involve board members. Sometimes board members know donors more closely than you do yourself. In that case, ask them to pen the note or make the phone call. The fact that a board member responds is another indication that the person is giving to an organization, not just to you as leader.
- Use your telephone. We usually get calls when somebody wants something. How unique it would be if someone just called to say thank you! How about the donor hearing the voice of a student on the other end, thanking them for the gift that provided new worship books or a mission trip scholarship. This could also be an occasion to invite the donor to an event or ask if they have questions about an existing program. Of course, a note should still follow.
- Encourage donors to participate. Most donors are pleased to send a contribution, but they might also be pleased to be invited to participate in the ministry in some way. This is a way of educating and deepening the relationship. Good donors make good volunteers and good ambassadors.
- Send a gift. From time to time there might be something from your ministry that could be shared with certain donors, such as the manuscript of a campus lecture, a photograph, or a new resource you have produced. This reinforces the pleasure of giving.
- Make a fuss. You may be in the practice of publishing lists of donors in your annual newsletter. If so, be certain that names are spelled accurately and that if you have giving categories, people are placed in the right one. Include photos in your newsletter with donors at an event. Have them write an occasional article or speak with a group. Hold an annual appreciation luncheon. With rare exception, you can’t fuss enough, Barbato says.
- Keep everyone informed. Those who give want to know how their contribution has made a difference. Echoing what was said above, donors need to hear that their relationship with your ministry through their gift has provided experiences, resources, or direction that otherwise would not have been possible. A knowledgeable donor is likely to be a continuing donor.

In one of the campus ministries I served a check would arrive on schedule every year. It was always made out for \$2.00 and suggested that I use it to take the choir out to dinner. Of course the only way to do that would have been to order a giant soda with ten straws or a dish of ice cream with ten spoons. But every year I shared word of the \$2.00 gift with the choir, all of whom were touched. Then I sent a thank you note and invited her to come and hear the choir some Sunday when she was in town. The gift may seemed small to us, but it was heartfelt on the donor's part, and so it required a thank you.

Take some time in these laid-back summer months to consider how to say thank you to those who know you and love your ministry. It's a good thing to do.

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