

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fund Raising for Campus Ministry

**Office of Lutheran Campus Ministry Advancement
1407 North Cleveland
St. Paul, MN 55108**

June, 2005

“A Retreat is a Way to Advance”

Ah, the summer months. Time to kick back and relax, read a few good books, enjoy some personal time—and begin planning for the fall! Sometimes it seems like planning never ends, and in the best of situations, perhaps it doesn't. At an ALDE meeting recently a colleague said, “It seems like our organization is always in a planning mode. Even before one campaign is done, we're well into the next one.” That's likely true in a programmatic sense for the academic institutions we serve, including our own ministries. Planning, implementation, and evaluation follow as closely on each other's heels as a kindergarten class on the way to recess. It may seem like we never get a break in the action.

From one point of view there are really two choices—good planning and poor planning. We have all experienced the results of both choices, I suspect. We know when we are the beneficiaries of good planning by the smoothness of the program, the obvious preparation of the leaders, the adequate provision of materials, etc. But when a program “circles the drain,” it's often because no one took the time to think it through, implement it carefully, or evaluate it at the end. This is particularly precarious when the lack of planning affects more than a single program. When it is the whole scope of the ministry that goes unplanned, the dangers are these:

- Not everyone is on board with the same understanding or level of support.
- The budget has not been brought into line with the projected programs.
- Adequate staff or volunteers have not been secured to carry off the program successfully.
- What seems to be a “good idea” at the moment may not fit with the core values and mission of the ministry.
- Not enough time is available for publicity and interpretation.
- No evaluation is done to see what can be learned from the experience for the future.
- The direction for ministry is left in the hands of a few persons, particularly staff, which works against ownership and accountability.
- Instead of a certain sense of moving forward, a general drift seems to accompany the ministry, to the extent that some may begin to wonder if there is any direction at all that serves to guide ministry into the future.
- Funding partners may become disillusioned and disinterested.

If you find yourself struggling with some of the above indicators, you may want to consider a retreat as a way to regain focus and (re)introduce healthy planning for the long-term well-being of your ministry. Retreats offer an opportunity for board and staff to get to know each other in a more relaxed atmosphere, where quality time can be given to a broader discussion of the ministry beyond the usual reports and action items. Retreats are usually held at a location away from the usual meeting site. A facilitator is often engaged to lead the process; this allows everyone to fully participate and offers the perspective of someone from the “outside,” who can hear with a new set of ears. Most board retreats are held either as full day or overnight events and are scheduled at a time convenient to all. No new information here—just the encouragement to consider a planning retreat as part of the regular, ongoing way in which your ministry moves forward.

Kay Sprinkel Grace, a professional fund raiser and board developer, offers her perspective on the importance of retreats.¹

1. **You may have to do a selling job to get your board members to buy-in.** This is especially true, she says, when the last retreat was a flop or when board participation is uneven. Members may be skeptical about spending too much time on things like visioning, when it’s the plumbing they’re worried about. She states that a well-designed retreat, with an appealing schedule and expected outcomes, will lure some of the busier or more skeptical members. She says that the invitation (which should come from the board chair, not the staff member) should include: (a) why the retreat is important, (b) what the principal goals are, and (c) the process that will be used (such as videos, small groups, etc.) If you have trouble getting members to commit to a full day retreat, begin with a shorter time to build interest and positive expectations. Talk about the retreat several months in advance to allow everyone a chance to get on board
2. **Be inclusive, not exclusive, when developing the list of who will attend, and make sure to include all those whose presence is needed to ensure the desired outcomes.** If there are program staff, such as music directors or peer ministers, consider inviting them as part of the leadership team. The retreat should not become divisive, making those who stayed at home feel less important. Also, don’t “work around” troublesome members; invite all voices to be heard if they have a stake in the outcomes. Most retreats are settings that provide great opportunities to explore new ideas in a relaxed setting. Build on that dynamic as a way of incorporating all voices.
3. **Enlist a retreat planning committee whose members are representative of those who will attend.** These committee members become the champions of the event they are planning. When they get excited, those whom they represent will become excited too. For example, if students are part of the planning experience, they will be more eager to participate and encourage other students to attend when asked.
4. **Allow ample time for the planning committee to develop the agenda, make the arrangements, organize the program to ensure the outcomes, and build in activities to help people get to know each other better.** Three or four months prior to the date of the retreat provides adequate time for preparation. If this becomes an annual

¹ Kay Sprinkel Grace, *Contributions*, May-June, 2005, pp8f.

event, you may be able to set the date a year in advance. Or you may want to declare that the first weekend in June, for example, is the date for the annual board retreat. That way when new members consider joining, they know that they are expected to set that date aside. With enough time for planning, invite the facilitator to join the planning committee so that she/he can begin to understand the context and issues. The facilitator can also help with the list of desired outcomes for the retreat. If board members have been a part of successful retreats in other organizations, have them share what was helpful or interesting to them.

5. **Be sure the agenda mixes information, inspiration, and motivation.** These are the three frames for organizing a retreat. They also become the outcomes, according to Kay Sprinkel Grace. **Inspiration** is gained by having the members “see the product.” In our settings that will mean sharing campus ministry stories and, if possible, having students present these stories themselves. Inspiration happens when ideas are embodied successfully. **Information** that is accurate is critical at a planning event. Know realistic budget figures. Know projected program costs. Have information available about the university or about cultural shifts that impact the ministry. **Motivation** is calculated confidence. Members need to know that their efforts make a difference in the way the ministry functions and in people’s lives. Perhaps at the end of the retreat participants could write down a new commitment they are making to the future of the ministry. Then, when you return to work, write each person a note thanking them for their commitment. It’s a way to recognize the valuable work accomplished in the retreat. With permission, share these commitments with the whole group.
6. **Seek 100 percent attendance; be happy with 85 percent; cancel if only 70 percent sign up.** Grace says that it’s simply not worth the effort or expense if only a few die-hards participate. Consider what might keep people away: driving distance, calendar, length of the event, etc. Have the planning committee call members two weeks prior to the retreat. If there seems to be a dramatic falloff, have the board chair call to see if there is a reason that can be addressed. Otherwise, consider cancellation.
7. **Decide early in your planning if you’ll use an inside or outside facilitator.** Inside facilitators are less expensive—often free—but you may lose objectivity. Insiders often know the dynamics of the ministry, but may be seen by others only in their inside role. Outside facilitators can be expensive (\$300 to \$1,000 per day). Check with others to get references and verify the effectiveness of the person you are considering. Whether insider or outsider, involve the facilitator in the planning of the retreat. Do not bring a facilitator cold to a retreat and expect miracles.
8. **Disarm all potentially explosive individuals and issues before the retreat or, if that’s not possible, be sure the facilitator and the participants are aware that the situation may be volatile.** Before the retreat event, you and the leaders need to know where the land mines are, so that a sensitive response can prevail when expected explosions happen. A good facilitator can help address issues objectively, so that individuals who share these concerns can feel respected and heard.

9. **As the retreat approaches, keep the reminders and the information flowing.** One week prior to the retreat, send out a final package that includes directions, the agenda, and any other information that you want participants to look over beforehand, such as the budget. A word about the facility and dress will be appreciated. Emphasize starting and ending times, with the expectation that all participants will honor them. At the retreat be attentive to the time and keep to the agenda as much as possible. If new items or issues arise that are important, but not part of the set agenda, respectfully let the person who raised them know that they will be addressed in the near future as appropriate.

10. **Have solid closure to the retreat.** At the end of the retreat, give each participant a sense of the importance of their presence and contribution. Is there a small gift you could offer as a token of appreciation to help them remember the event? Allow enough time at the end to confirm the planning steps that have been determined. Have the facilitator make closing observations. Conclude with a final inspirational moment or worship time. If there is a theme or a biblical phrase that will be used in the planning for the next year, use this time to lift it up. Finally, shortly after the retreat, send a thank you note to all participants. Include a summary of the decisions, recap the next steps, and accent the highlights. Send this to those who were absent as well, so that they have some sense of involvement. Let them know that at the next meeting some time will be given to bringing them up to speed.

I wish you well as you plan your next retreat experience. May it serve to advance your ministry.

Galen Hora
Campus Ministry Advancement