

# THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

## *Thoughts on Fundraising for Campus Ministry*

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### PLANNING FOR AN UNCERTAIN TIME

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#### **Our Context in La Crosse**

In February, 2007, Lutheran Campus Ministry of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan (LCMWUM), ceased to exist. Since the 1950s, LCMWUM funded, staffed, and supported 12 ministries in six synods. When the decision was made to disband, the bishops of these synods mercifully devised a two-year plan to help transition our ministries from a multi-synodical funding structure to local synod funding.

Ours is the sole campus ministry in one of the smallest ELCA synods, the La Crosse Area Synod. We serve the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Viterbo College, and Western Wisconsin Technical College. Being the only campus ministry within the boundaries of the synod is a great advantage to fundraising. However, we are not the only missional ministry here.

This report focuses on how our campus ministry prepared for this change in funding and how we continue to evolve financially.

#### **Preparation for Change**

Shortly after arriving in La Crosse, I noticed the funding was beginning to diminish from several of the LCMWUM synods. We interpreted this as a sign of a shift in local funding paradigms. Synodical budgets were increasingly being challenged by many factors and we decided to be proactive, rather than wait for a crisis to happen.

#### **Board Assessment**

Our local directing committee completed the "Board Assessment" document found in the "Best Practices" section of the ELCA Campus Ministry website. We discovered that our directing committee positions were filled with wonderful, programmatic people, but we had no one on the committee with skills in finance and fundraising. With a transition from a directing committee to a not-for-profit board coming soon, we took immediate action.

#### *A New Board of Directors*

We partnered with the synod nominating committee and our assistant to the bishop to find people who possessed skills in insurance, finance, administration, and fundraising. Notice that

“experience with Lutheran Campus Ministry” is not included. Our top priority was to fill our board seats with people with experience that would help ensure the financial viability of campus ministry. Our board now consists of: the business department chairperson of our vocation college, the chief operating officer of a large organic cooperative, the director of the Boys and Girls Club, the director of a nursing home, and a continuing education staff person for the university. Only one of these individuals has any previous experience with campus ministry.

### **Partnerships**

Lutheran Campus Ministry is not the only mission ministry of the synod to have funding problems. In our small synod we have a mission congregation, an Asian ministry, a Bible camp, the “Raising Up Leaders Program” (RUL) which is designed to help identify and encourage young people for service to the church, along with campus ministry. We have formed partnerships with these various ministries to help ensure the financial viability of each organization.

#### *Mission Funding Team*

Lutheran Campus Ministry, along with the mission congregation, the Asian ministry, and RUL, formed a team to look at each ministry’s funding issues and formulate plans to help each other. Together we proposed a resolution to our synod assembly that encouraged congregations to increase their synod benevolence by 1-2% over three years to help stabilize each of these ministries.

Each ministry visited church councils to give a five minute presentation on the resolution and to thank them for their support. The ministries also combined their donor lists, along with a synod donor list, that each organization may use for a mass mailing once each year to reach a larger number of people. This unified approach has been well-received by our parish pastors. It has helped us all become more aware of each ministry and has virtually eliminated a sense of competition for funding.

#### *Planned Giving Council*

Along with our local Bible camp, the RUL program, and the synod endowment fund for seminarians, Lutheran Campus Ministry partnered in the development of a Planned Giving Council with financial assistance from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. The group produced a short DVD highlighting each ministry with testimonials from many area pastors as to the importance of these ministries and planned giving.

We will have visited nearly every congregation in our synod by the end of 2008. This exposure and the partnerships with other ministries have helped spread the word about planned gifts. Once again, congregations have been receptive to this “united front” approach. This spring, two Lutheran extended care corporations will be joining the Planned Giving Council.

### **Results**

I know, I know...you want to know the bottom line. How have we benefited financially from these efforts and changes? To perfectly honest, I have been astounded at the results!

From 2006 to 2007, gifts from individuals jumped from \$6,300 to \$11,000. Gifts from congregations increased from \$7,000 to over \$21,000. These increases are astounding and as a result our board is committed to increasing our communication with congregations and individuals throughout our synod.

### **The Future**

We know that funding this campus ministry will need constant attention. We have formed a “Development Team” whose sole mission will be to develop and carry out an action plan to raise funds for and awareness of our ministry at UW-La Crosse.

During these last few years of change, our plans to build a new home for our campus ministry were put on hold for a time. This spring we have presented a plan to National Lutheran Campus Ministry, Inc. and the La Crosse Area Synod Executive Committee for a bold new facility concept for our ministry. As we anxiously await the decisions of these entities we press on with ministry to the three institutions we serve.

### **Encouragement**

Without the help of our synod, and specifically the assistant to our bishop, none of these amazing changes would have happened! It is crucial that each of us establish and nurture our relationships with our bishop and her/his staff. These folks helped us identify outstanding leaders in our synod who we might never have known.

Whether your ministry is in a multi-synodical agency, a synod with many campus ministries, or your ministry is the sole campus ministry agency, take a long hard look at the funding picture. Ask questions like these: “Is the funding stable?” “Is it realistic to financially support all ministries?” “Are we visible to our synod and its congregations?” “What does the future hold for this ministry?” “Do we have the right people to move forward?”

And maybe the most important question is: “Am I the right person for this ministry—do I have the energy necessary for fundraising?” These are hard questions, but we must look at each question honestly.

After prayerful consideration of these questions, it’s time to get to work! Do a board assessment. Talk to your synod staff and churchwide coordinator for campus ministry. Consult with local pastors. Be honest and open (no whining allowed), listen carefully to them, and enlist their help. Your ministry will be stronger, you will feel more supported, and together you can face an uncertain future with confidence.