

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fundraising for Campus Ministry

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Setting the Stage

James L. Norlie
Luther House
Oregon State University, Corvallis

Of all the questions asked when I interviewed at Luther House in Corvallis in 1995, one in particular stands out: “Are you afraid to ask for money?” How could I have known then just how prophetic and important that question was?!

Then the Luther House budget was half what it is today. Then the ELCA churchwide provided 17.41% of the money we needed; today it provides 9.68%. Then our region gave us 49.3% toward budgeted expenses; for 2008 it's 37.67%. Then the LC-MS gave us \$6000 and provided salary and benefits for an additional full-time staff person; now they give us no money and they discontinued the staffing arrangement. Then we needed to generate 24.2% of our own income; today it's almost 53%.

A lot can happen in 13 years!

I was told that one-time local fundraising for campus ministry was like frosting on the cake to do the few extras that sweetened our work. Today fundraising is neither optional, nor the added sweetener; it's a staple of our diet which is required to maintain our facilities, provide staff salaries, offer hospitality and outreach, and help underwrite vibrant ministry to the whole academic community. The truth is that most of us didn't enter this field of work to be fundraisers. It's an acquired taste with (hopefully) some good guides to help us do what needs to be done.

When I began at Luther House in 1995, the extent of our fundraising efforts was one annual appeal that raised the additional funds necessary to meet our budget goals. That was then. Today, one annual effort will not do. Today what's needed is a well-crafted, well-planned, well-coordinated fundraising plan. Since my arrival here, board and staff together have developed and are constantly improving just such a plan.

In the paragraphs that follow, I'll give an overview of the principles that guide our fundraising efforts here. It's the result of many tries, some false starts, and continual revision. It's not perfect, but it's a lot more comprehensive than it's ever been. The steps below are not listed in any particular order. We've found all are necessary and all relate to the others. If they're helpful

to you, use them well. If they don't fit your situation, adapt them as you see fit. If you've got ideas of your own to share, send them my way—we're always looking for ways to improve our efforts.

Ten Things We're doing at Luther House

1. Build Relationships. Success in fundraising assumes one has built good relationships between the campus ministry and prospective donors, be they individuals, congregations, synods, granting agencies, or other benefactors. Fortunately, over the years we've maintained a good, ongoing database of alums, friends, supporters, inquirers, volunteers, and prospective participants in our ministry. To deepen these relationships we spend time in congregations preaching, teaching and presenting the campus ministry story. We've chosen to participate in synodical meetings, committees, and synod gatherings where alliances can be built. We regularly host a booth at the synod assembly. We try to be involved in the youth, camping, and leadership training ministries of our synod—the places where youth and young adults often first hear about campus ministry. When parents or prospective students call, we give them time and stay in touch with them. Whenever a pastor or youth worker shows any interest in campus ministry, we make sure we follow up on their questions. We've started to visit with congregational foundations and endowment fund—a source of significant potential support. Also, we maintain a healthy relationship with our Thrivent representatives and their congregational volunteers. By building and deepening relationships with all these sources, when we ask for money or volunteer help we're not a stranger begging at the door. With care—and a little luck—we're a familiar voice that connects us with the concerns they have, especially that their students are well-cared-for on campus.

2. Ask Regularly. We've found it important to give prospective donors every chance possible to make a gift to our ministry. To that end, we include a remittance envelope with every newsletter we send. When we do this we also tell them about our ongoing programs and the new initiatives we're developing to expand our ministry on campus. Every communication or news release we write for newsletters, congregational bulletins, press releases, or synod e-news aims to share why we do what we do and tells about those who benefit from our work—students, faculty, and university staff. We give our donors a clear picture of how their support will make a difference in this work so they see a connection between themselves and our ministry on campus.

3. Provide Plenty of Options for Givers. Since people connect with our work on many different levels, we make sure there are a variety of ways for them to respond with financial support. We offer our donors the options of: regular support for ongoing ministry using remittance envelopes; pledged, periodic giving through a giving club; special purpose giving for one-time projects or programs; endowment fund contributions to the “We Care for the Future Endowment” (a special brochure has been created for this purpose); estate planning with the help of our synod's planned giving director; matching and supplemental funding (such as *GivingPlus*, *SimplyGiving*, and “*Care Abounds in Congregations and Communities*”) offered by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans; matching challenge grants initiated by individuals for special projects; congregational foundation and endowment fund support for particular large-scale initiatives, such as conferences or major programs; memorial gifts and gifts in honor of someone to acknowledge their longtime association with Luther House; time and talent gifts through volunteering; and in-kind gifts. The

newest addition to our array of giving options is electronic giving through our web site and managed by Vanco Services. Because we just started using this service, we have no track record yet of how effective it will be. We're certain it will be a great addition, though, especially for those accustomed to giving online donations instead of writing and mailing checks.

4. Make an Annual Appeal. What once was the *only* fundraising we did, the Annual Appeal now continues as *one of many* fundraising options we undertake. Once a year, right before Thanksgiving, we send an appeal letter to our entire mailing list asking for support. If our experience is an accurate indicator, it seems that people are prepared to give a special gift during the holidays. We make every effort to ensure our appeal isn't lost in the holiday clutter but has a distinctive look and positive focus. We always accompany our request for funds with a few stories written by students, faculty or university staff who have been touched by the work we do on campus. Though we're clearly asking for financial support, this also gives us one more way of interpreting our mission to our supporters and thanking them for the ways they've helped reach out to the academic community in the past year. People respond very generously.

5. Host Special Events. For several years running we've held a major fundraising event each spring. It's taken different forms in different venues, but the goal has remained the same: gather our supporters and friends for a nice meal, provide a stimulating program, showcase our work, and a give them a chance to support us with their financial gifts. We've had banquets, anniversaries, special speakers, auctions (silent and live), music, takeaway gifts, awards, and prizes. This year the special event took the form of an Earth Week Challenge, where student-led outdoor activities (running, hiking, biking, urban walking, and geo-caching) and indoor activities (reading and swimming) involved many from area congregations, who also sponsored participants. A BBQ, silent auction, and Earth Week celebration completed the day. Local merchants donated food and auction items. Thrivent provided supplemental funding. These special events have proved to be powerful occasions for building energy and activating constituents in support of our work. A lot of money can be raised in a short amount of time this way.

6. Invite Use of our Building. There are times during the week when our facility is not being used for campus ministry purposes. We've invited groups needing short-term meeting space to use our campus ministry center and we ask for a donation to cover cost of utilities and upkeep. It's surprising the good will this has created within the community. The additional income it generates helps defray maintenance and utility costs at a time when these items are rising rapidly. Plus, the good stewardship of our facility requires us to give back to the community in some specific ways. The neighborhood association, spiritual directors' group, Mennonite Sunday School, green building association, international students, and others have benefited from the expanded use of our building. And so have we.

7. Involve and Appreciate Volunteers. This campus ministry is now 82 years old. It would not have been possible to fashion such a legacy of good support and creative programming had volunteers been overlooked. Board members give time and lend their leadership skills once a month. They are the backbone of the volunteers who guide this ministry and steward it well. Supporting them are other volunteers skilled at plumbing, electrical, construction, and landscaping tasks as they care for our 60+ year-old facility. When we have special events, we

rely on task groups to plan and lead the activities. Office helpers label and stuff mailings. Cookie bakers and cooks provide culinary surprises for our frequent meal gatherings. A student leadership team and worship planning team guide the weekly programmatic events. We are blessed with many skilled people willing to offer their gifts for the good of this ministry. Key to their continued involvement is acknowledging and thanking them. All they do saves us money and helps them deepen their connection with campus ministry. We treat them well because they do so much for us.

8. Reduce Costs of Operations. We have a Ministry Associate who has the capacity to cut expenses without reducing the quality of our ministry. She's always looking for a bargain and finding ways to be thrifty. If she has a mantra it is, "never pay full price for anything!" Because we prepare and serve several meals a week as part of our program, this is a critical matter. Recycling and re-using are among her most visible assets. Networking with other non-profits has increased our purchasing power and reduced expenses for goods and supplies. Enlisting volunteers makes our work easier and less expensive. All this is achieved while still being very generous with our hospitality. A relatively new initiative of our board resulted in a complete energy audit of our facility to see where wasteful uses of natural gas, electricity and water are occurring. The result is a growing awareness about reining in our costs for natural resources and a plan to make Luther House a 'greener' campus ministry. Less waste of precious natural resources, greater attention to earth-friendliness, and a commitment to renewable practices will help control the growth of our budget over time.

9. Recognize Growth Points. We know we can expand and improve on the fundraising design we have in place. In our case we recognize three specific ways in which our strategic fundraising plan needs to grow: 1) Find a way to encourage financial commitment to Luther House by new graduates who've been part of our program for years. Since we already spend time with soon-to-be-graduates learning about their future plans and helping them and the whole community with the transition of their leave-taking, it would be relatively easy to give them a way to commit financial support to Luther House in the years to come (a pledge card or participation in our giving club, for example). Our annual sending/blessing service might be a great place to receive those commitments, with the expectation that others will follow their lead in the years to come. 2) Expand grant-writing skills. We've written a number of grants for special projects over the time of my ministry in Corvallis. We've been awarded some small grants. We now need to enlist the help of skilled grant-writers to successfully apply for and receive larger grants for more expansive programs. 3) Undertake a capital campaign. Before long we'll have to take seriously the need for a major upgrade of our aging campus ministry center. To do that, we'll have to undertake a capital campaign. Assistance from experts in this field will ensure our success.

10. Say Thank You. Perhaps the most important element of our fundraising strategy is to say the simple phrase most of us were taught as young children: "Thank you!" For every gift received—small or large—we send a handwritten thank you note immediately to the donor who gave it. This applies not only to financial gifts, but also to gifts of time and talent. We say "thank you" to individuals. We also express our appreciation in writing to congregations, synods, businesses, volunteers, board members, and others who contribute to this ministry. When we say "thanks" we always connect their gift to the rhythm of the academic year or the programs we're in the midst of, or the students who have benefited from their gift. Saying "thank you" strengthens the

bond between donor and ministry and signals our sincere valuing of the many who are partners with us in this important work on campus. Truly, we could not do what we do without those who support us financially. Taking time to say “thank you” is absolutely essential.

One Concluding Thought

So there’s a quick summary of our fundraising efforts here at Luther House. Diligence, thoughtfulness, and necessity have brought us to this point. And there’s still room to grow.

Who knows what the coming years will require? Whatever else we do, we know that careful attention and good planning for a broad-based fundraising plan will help us achieve the goals we have as we reach out in the name of Jesus Christ to students, faculty, and university staff.