

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fundraising for Campus Ministry

June, 2008

The Top Ten? You be the Judge

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“You’re a pastor not a fundraiser.” I could swear someone told me that when I began serving as a campus pastor. Clearly, I’m from another era. Times have changed. Even Synods which provide strong support have been unable to keep up with increasing costs and growing ministries.

I haven’t mastered the mysteries of development any more than I’ve mastered the mysteries of pastoral ministry. I don’t have the illusion that I can delineate the ‘Top Ten for Development,’ but I am vain enough to think I can generate one. The problem is that I don’t know which of those below is a keeper. That’s for you to judge. Here are the candidates:

1. Get the Lutheran Campus Council on board

My mistakes as a person of faith are not subtle. My problem is not an inability to articulate the Lutheran view of atonement. Instead, I forget what’s most important. My problem is that I forget God loves me and calls me to love others. When I remember this my life and work go better.

What’s most important with Campus Councils is this—the Campus Council is responsible for the long term viability of the ministry. As a staff person, I am responsible for the ministry being a place of hospitality, grace, and service this academic year.

This means that caring for the facility, paying the bills, and raising support are primarily, though not exclusively, Council responsibilities. The site where I serve has five standing committees. Every site needs at least two: Development, to provide the funding necessary to do the ministry, and Property, to care for the facility.

When these tasks become the staff person’s primary responsibility, the program suffers and staff leave believing they’ve failed in ministry when they didn’t have time or energy to do ministry.

The staff person’s role is to assist the council in these areas, not the reverse. Get this backward and your tenure will be short and miserable.

2. Give good ministry

People want to give to a strong ministry, not a failing one. They are more interested in how their gifts will enable ministry than why your budget is so tight. Sell your strengths, not your weaknesses. Tell people what's right about your ministry, not what's wrong; about your blessings, not your burdens. Of course, you can tell people about your needs, but only *after* you've told them your strengths.

3. Learn to love to tell the story

I have a mid-westerner's disdain for self promotion. For many years this hampered my efforts to invite support. Letting folks know what has happened and is happening is informing not manipulating.

I recall a particularly irritating Campus Council member who asked every month for three years, "What are you doing to publicize your ministry?" I still didn't get it until an alum provided us with an endowment earmarked for publicity. I give thanks to God for these two people who opened my eyes to the power of publicity. We have more students involved in, and stronger support for, our ministry because of them.

The single best thing we have done in this area has been to hire a peer minister for publicity who sends press releases to the hometown papers of our six new peer ministers each fall, sends press releases about our monthly service projects to area and hometown papers, the university and synod, and who publicizes events on campus.

It's easy to become overwhelmed by the urgent and neglect the important. Publicity is seldom urgent, but it is one of the most important things we can do to grow our ministries.

4. Integrity isn't just for politicians anymore

Raising money isn't difficult. Raising money with integrity is. Perhaps, like me, you've heard a great sermon and co-opted it for yourself the following week, only to have the words turn to ashes in your mouth. Good preaching and doing development work both require authenticity and congruency. There is a laundry list of things the 'experts' say I should do that I refuse to do, because they strike me as gimmicky or manipulative. On the other hand I am certain there are things I say or do that others would be uncomfortable doing in the area of development.

Don't let what you don't want to do prevent you from doing what you are willing to do. If you think of inviting support as giving people an opportunity to do something meaningful and worthwhile with their gifts, both you and they will feel better about it.

I recall Jean, a political refugee from Rwanda who came to me at Thanksgiving three years ago and asked for my help. He had been working and saving for a year to bring his family to the USA. He had just learned they had been granted visas to enter the USA, but he lacked the funds to bring them here. I told his story in a devotion and was soon receiving unsolicited donations from three states with thank you notes from the donors! It's one of the sweetest memories of all my years of ministry. Thanks to the generosity of many people the family was reunited after several delays. They finally arrived safely on Christmas Eve. Kairos!

5. Help I need somebody!

You aren't in this alone. The university has a building full of people whose vocation is development work. Give them an opportunity to use their gifts on your council or by consulting them for direction or advice.

Let people know you would welcome help with grant writing. I'll confess that, like my insight about publicity, this counsel comes via a recent alum, who repeatedly offered to write grants. I finally made time to meet with her. She wrote a \$65,000 grant for service projects and another for \$60,000 to fund our development efforts. Both were denied. However, both were granted when they were rewritten and resubmitted the following year. Ca-ching. Don't forget local foundations either. A one page grant never fails to secure \$1,000 from one local company.

Use your friends! Chances are your colleagues have a computer full of fundraising letters, thank you notes, and grants. Ask them for a copy. It's always easier than starting with a blank computer screen—and if you think their letter is appalling, ask yourself why, and you'll discover your own voice.

I think every pastor has the right to resent his or her predecessor. All you hear is about what they did well and all you do is work on the things they didn't do at all. Ugh. Still, your predecessor can let you know which alumni were involved when they were serving in your site, as well as who on campus or in the community are good resources.

6. Get your poop in a group

I always know my sermons are good when I feel particularly hypocritical. If that's true for writing as well, this is the best insight I have. I would rather do almost anything than try to pull together alumni names from old newsletters, files and, most of all, by asking alumni, "Who else was involved with Lutheran Campus Ministry while you were here?" I get a Consumer Reports full black circle in this area. Time to look for a volunteer.

This year we found affordable software which will enable us to do a better job of keeping track of alumni and their gifts. We still have a ways to go in pulling together our previous, failed efforts at organization. (Note the smooth transition to second person from the previous paragraph!)

It's easier to catch a caterpillar than a butterfly. Remember that students are alumni larvae. Get their contact information before they leave the university.

7. Work the program

Kurt Vonnegut reportedly said, "The two most important things America gave the world are the Blues and Alcoholics Anonymous." I concur. AA members are better at detecting bullshit than the most jaded professors. Initially AA slogans sound more like platitudes than proverbs, stifling, rather than initiating, insight. Listen to them again.

The one above, ‘work the program,’ lifts up the value of persistence, consistency, and repetition. In short, it works if you work it—another favorite of mine. This is a digression but *Google* ‘AA slogans’ sometime. They say what you are trying to say in your sermon—only better.

8. Bury the dead and sometimes the dying

People, congregations, and programs all have life spans. Energy and enthusiasm wind down over time. For no other reason than providing students and councils with a sense of ownership, sometimes we need to start with a clean slate.

9. Multiple choice or essay?

The correct answer is...multiple choice. Here are the questions:

Question 1: Which of these options should you provide those supporting your ministry?

- a) a banquet or similar celebration
- b) direct deposit
- c) online giving
- d) matching gifts
- e) designated giving
- f) all of the above

Question 2: When writing alumni should you?

- a) tell a student’s story?
- b) tell them about the day in the life of a campus ministry staff person
- c) give an overview of the ministry
- d) tell them what their gifts will do
- e) let them know the cost per day of supporting Lutheran Campus Ministry or the cost of providing a program or a staff position
- f) have a student write the letter

Answers:

Question 1: Do all this, but not necessarily all the time. We’ve been doing Spring Break mission trips since I arrived here fifteen years ago. Each spring I write alumni about these trips, tell them about the upcoming trip, and invite their support. We still do fundraising to build group cohesion even though we have \$20,000 in the bank. (The past two years I told alumni we didn’t need their support for the trip (that integrity thing), but I also told them we would welcome their support for other parts of our ministry.

Question 2: If you stay somewhere as long as I have (fifteen years and counting), writing alumni two letters a year, you’ll do all this and more. I’m hesitant to parade someone's pain in an effort to garner support for our ministry, but telling the story of the student who planned to graduate in three years until going on one of our mission trips garnered a lot of support. After the spring break trip she decided to do a semester in Puerto Rico, then a semester in the Virgin Islands. Following graduation, she taught science for two years in Namibia of behalf of the ELCA before pursuing her Ph.D. We all have stories like this to tell—and I always ask permission from those I write about.

10. Emulate St. Teresa of Avila

I've always been disappointed that it wasn't Jesus who said, "Moderation in all things."

Likewise, I was once told, but have never been able to confirm, that St. Teresa of Avila said:

"Many people are content with having wished to do the impossible while neglecting the task at hand."

Isn't that a lovely quote? It's also an apt description of my life most of the time.

Imagining you need to inspire others or yourself to put together a dynamic, sustainable, development program will immobilize you for sure. I hope you'll choose one of the things I've mentioned. If it doesn't work, try another one. If it does, try another one.

Finally, send me ideas! I'm much better at talking the talk than walking the walk.