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Ask & Receive

Raising Funds and Friends for Campus Ministry

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September, 2010

STEWARDSHIP AND “THE ASK”

In the world of fund raising the “Ask” is the culmination of all of the planning and strategizing that goes into securing a gift for the organization. It is that crucial time when the interests of the donor are matched critically with the vision of the ministry. Contrary to the belief of some, it is not a successful arm wrestling or pocket-picking event, but a moment when everything comes together for the good of the ministry, as well as the heart of the donor. One good definition of development is “the whole process of earning the privilege of asking someone for a gift.”

Asking has no set of guarantees. It is not a formula to be worked or a manipulation of someone’s ability or intentions. It comes as a result of an organization’s genuine, compelling vision rubbing shoulders with a person’s deep desire to be faithful in what God has given them. It can be filled with surprises and Spirit-led directions unknown until the relationship between the donor and the receiver has been established and affirmed by the Ask.

Fund raising, therefore, is essentially about friend raising. It is highly relational, connecting with people who have historic and contemporary associations with our ministries. Fund raising is not primarily about getting the gift, but building relationships with the giver. Gifts follow relationships that are carefully and genuinely nurtured. The best fund raisers are those who develop and maintain strong relationships with their constituents. Often this dynamic is called “donor stewardship,” recognizing that taking care

of the donor and the donor’s gift are one in the same.

In the church we are well acquainted with stewardship, although often in limited ways that relate more to budget-balancing than to person-care. Healthy fund raising challenges us to rethink how we wrestle with stewardship. While stewardship is more than fund raising, all good fund raising has to do with stewardship.

Here is a definition I like: “*Stewardship is a unique combination of theological beauty and ecclesiastical practicality in which we examine the basic paradox of existence: how to be creatures of a Creator, bound by the responsibility of management over all that lives and breathes, yet never allowed to exercise the rights of ownership. Stewardship combines the matters of great spiritual import with the need to ‘get real.’*” (Christopher Levan, “Fundraising as Ministry” in *Giving Magazine*)

The “Ask” is essentially practicing good stewardship. It is a way of inspiring and encouraging the hearts of people to place the gifts God has given them toward a purpose that is fulfilling and gives them great joy. It “gets real” when those gifts are invited, thoughtfully used, and managed well by our ministries.

Good communication with donors, such as newsletters, correspondence, visits, and phone calls, enhances the circle of respectful relationships that leads to the right to ask someone for a gift, the “Ask.”

“Ask and you shall receive,” we are promised (Luke 11:9), not arrogantly or deservedly, but prayerfully and hopefully. We do not demand or coerce the gift when we ask, but receive it with joy because of the grace of the relationship that it bears.



In a recent survey, 44% said that a great thank you letter alone had the power to invite their next gift. If leadership called, 85% said they would give again.

Penelope Burk, "Rethinking the Way You Recognize Donors," www.donorcentered.com

RECEIVING THE GIFT

The way in which a gift is received is as important as the way in which a gift is asked for. Again, it's about relationships. The donor needs to be thanked immediately and in as personal a way as possible.

The prompt, personal response says several things to the donor. First, it lets the donor know that they have made a connection, that their generous response to your request has lifted your hearts and made a difference for your ministry.

Second, a prompt response says that we are genuinely appreciative of the gift sent, no matter the size. Small gifts need as much attention as larger gifts, for the potential continuation and increase of this gift, among other reasons. Learn to see your donors as "Aunt Martha and Uncle Harry." That being the case, wouldn't you want to thank someone near and dear to you as soon and as personally as you can?

At the University of Michigan a few years back, we received an annual gift of \$2 from an elderly woman, who always included a hand-written note saying that we should use it to take the choir out to lunch. It wouldn't buy a Coke and twelve straws, but we always thanked her quickly for her gift.

Third, promptness signals that you have eagerly opened the gift, probably cashed the check, and are already putting it to good use. It speaks of accountability—that we can be trusted to take care of the gift that was given.

Joseph Barbato offers some ways to make donors feel appreciated:

- ◆ Give your "thank you" letter substance. Say more than those two little words.
- ◆ Send the letter now and keep it fresh. Don't keep sending the same old note; include new thoughts and new references..
- ◆ Involve board members or students in writing letters or making phone calls.
- ◆ Use the telephone rather than e-mail. It's more personal.
- ◆ Send a photo of a recent event or a newspaper clipping. Gifts are sometimes seen as wasting money, however.
- ◆ Let everyone know. Publish a list of donors with their permission. Let the board know with a gift report.
- ◆ Tailor your notes. For example, if the request was for gifts for renovations, let them know how the project is going.

(James Barbato, "Thanks and Thanks Again," *Contributions*, April, 2005)

A Sample Thank You Note

Dear Harry and Martha,

It was a joy today to receive your gift of \$1,000 to our campus ministry at Slideback University. I remember our coffee conversation last month about your own recent days on this campus and how much the ministry continues to mean to you. As we agreed, your gift will be used to assist our students to go on a service mission trip to the Gulf, to continue work begun by other Christian student groups from across the country. Our students feel that they are making a difference and are learning how their faith can be put into action.

Your generosity has inspired the gifts of several other individuals. We could not have reached our goal without your help.

When we return, I will send you some photos of our ministry group. We are very excited. Thank you!

Blessings,

John Smith, Campus Minister

VOICES AND VENUES

A DONOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Jack Saarela

Some seven years ago, my wife and I inherited a small amount of money from an uncle. It wasn't a huge sum, but enough to fund some small home repair and renovation projects we had been hoping, but unable thereunto to afford to complete. But we decided that we ought to tithe our small windfall just as we seek to do with all of our income.

I discovered something totally new about giving. I had grown up to regard tithing and sacrificial giving to the church as a necessary *obligation*, a sacred *responsibility*. But as I dug out envelopes from various campus ministries and several other social justice organizations that I had been tucking away for some reason, we discovered what a *joy* and *privilege* it was to write a check, no matter how modest, to support those ministries which we had wanted to support before, but hadn't been able to do. We enjoyed aligning ourselves financially with the mission of those campus ministries and organizations so much, in fact, that

we decided to forego one of the home renovation projects in order to tithe yet an *additional* portion.

I was in the position of making an "ask" fundraising visit this past summer in the home of one of our ministry's more generous supporters when I was "in her neighborhood" for a continuing education event. I would normally have expected to be anxious about making such a visit and actually asking for a pre-determined sum of money from her. But when I remembered how pleased and honored my wife and I had felt when we were able to respond to the snail mail requests for financial support from a few other ministries, I knew that I would actually be giving a gift, bestowing an honor, to this donor by asking her for an additional donation. The donation hasn't arrived yet (she promised it by the end of the calendar year), but as I left her home, I had the sense that both hostess and guest had been blessed by the visit.

Jack Saarela is the Lutheran Campus Pastor at Yale University

BUILDING A FUND RAISING LIBRARY

Participants in the fund and friend raising experience these days need to be students of the enterprise. Recommended reading includes the following:

- ♦ *Asking: A 59 Minute Guide to Everything Board Members, Volunteers, and Staff Must Know to Secure the Gift*, Jerold Panas, 108 pp.
- ♦ *The Relentlessly Practical Guide to Raising Serious Money*, David Lansdowne, 237 pp.
- ♦ *Over Goal! Everything You Need to Know to Excel in Fund Raising Today*, Kay Sprinkel Grace, 288 pp.
- ♦ *Great Boards for Small Groups*, Andy Robinson, 110 pp.
- ♦ *Open Immediately! Straight Talk on Direct Mail Fundraising*, Stephen Hitchcock, 259 pp.

All books may be ordered from Emerson & Church Publishers, 28A Park Street, Medfield, MA, 02052 www.emersonandchurch.com All books are \$24.95

"You can't keep cutting your way to recovery. You need to be out there fundraising, despite how difficult it is. Build relationships, engage your donors, and let them know your mission and the difference you are making."

Nancy Rabin, *Philanthropy Matters*.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

Ask & Receive is a newsletter designed to supplement the Fund Raising Initiative of the Ecumenical Campus Ministry Team. It will present a series of ideas and resources on a monthly basis to address the challenges of fund raising and board development. Each issue will deal with an aspect of fund raising, such as the annual fund, visiting donors, or tuning up the board.

There will also be "Voices and Venues" section, helping us encounter the people and places where good fund raising practices are being lived out. Readers are invited to contribute to this section by sending information and ideas for inclusion. *Ask & Receive* is published on behalf of the Ecumenical Campus Ministry Team at 2481 Como Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55108. The editor is Galen Hora. Phone: 651.649.0454 ext. 228 E-Mail: Galen.Hora@elca.org

BUILDING BETTER BOARDS FOR CAMPUSMINISTRY

A good campus ministry board or committee is hard to come by. These are good people who are volunteers, leading busy lives outside of the organization. They are good-hearted and well-intended. They often come with experience from serving on other church councils or committees. They may give you their last ounce of energy or the last dollar in their pocket, because they believe in the mission of your ministry. But they may not excel at being good board members for a number of reasons.

They treat their responsibilities personally, rather than corporately. In other words, they haven't been taught to think as an organization apart from what they might think as an individual. They must learn to speak and act with a corporate voice.

They need board training, mentoring, and evaluation. A campus ministry board is likely to be very different from any other board on which they have served. When they are invited to serve on the board, they need to know what they are expected to do. They need a job description and a way to evaluate how they are performing as a board.

Here are some common traits of members:

- ♦ Demonstrated interest in the organization
- ♦ Donor of record in the last year
- ♦ Some experience in your mission
- ♦ Able to attend meetings and events
- ♦ Known as a good group decision-maker

In addition, members should be expected to have at least one of the following traits:

- ♦ Recognized community leader
- ♦ Knowledge and comfort with fund raising
- ♦ Specialized knowledge in field of mission
- ♦ Knowledge of facilities management
- ♦ Helps balance the board in terms of gender, age, or ethnicity
- ♦ Has prior experience on nonprofit boards
- ♦ Has expertise in finance, strategic planning, or personnel
- ♦ Understands marketing and communications
- ♦ Has networks within the university, city, or church communities

As members come onto boards, they should expect to be oriented and mentored, so that they can participate fully and knowledgeably as soon as possible. Assemble a board book that includes: a member directory, an organizational flow chart, budget and financial statements, minutes, mission statement, critical reports, and information about the university. Allow time every now and then for “dumb questions,” when anyone can ask anything without appearing stupid (perhaps modeled by the president).

Hold an annual board retreat for the purposes of evaluating the year and planning ahead. Invite a facilitator to direct the conversation.

Finally, remember to thank your board members. They really are your biggest supporters and they work hard to see your mission succeed.

(Lists adapted from the *Nonprofit Board Answer Book*, available from www.boardsource.org)

A Board Member Bill of Rights

1. The right to know the responsibilities of a board member prior to deciding to serve.
2. The right to be invited to serve because of my particular gifts and interests.
3. The right to be oriented to the process and culture of the board.
4. The right to receive mentoring, when needed or requested, to become more effective as a board member.
5. The right to receive information on time, including all financial reports, minutes, staff reports, and any other materials that need to be read prior to the meeting.
6. The right to hear words of appreciation and affirmation, when appropriate.
7. The right to have my ideas valued and my opinions registered fairly.
8. The right to participate in an evaluation process with other board members.
9. The right to know when my service is not satisfactory, so that I can correct it or cease to serve.