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Ask & Receive

Raising Funds and Friends for Campus Ministry

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November, 2010

THE ASK AND THE FUND RAISING LETTER

This time of year we are all inundated with letters and appeals of a variety of sorts, asking us to support worthy causes and significant charities. As someone positioned on the receiving end of these solicitations, ask yourself these questions:

- ◆ How does the mailing look? Is it carefully and creatively prepared? Is it bulk rate or first class postage (which may be a clue to your importance on the sender's database)?
- ◆ Have they gone to great expense to encourage your gift, perhaps too much so? Is the mailing slick and professional looking? Is it cheaply printed and hastily prepared?
- ◆ What will make you open this letter as opposed to the others you immediately round-file? Do you count this particular cause as one of your own? Are you curious about what awaits inside the envelope?
- ◆ Is the cause stated well and is it compelling? Will your gift make a difference? Will it be carefully used and accounted for?
- ◆ If you have contributed in the past, have you been properly and promptly thanked?

With this in mind, let's turn to the other side of the process, that of writing the appeal letter. There are several things to consider.

1. Your reason for soliciting gifts should be well-defined, the cause urgent, relevant, and important. While this may simply be your annual/sustaining fund appeal, the cause must still be

presented in a way that makes a difference to those you serve.

2. Write your letter with a person in mind. Use first and second person pronouns; be friendly and informal. Avoid long sentences and big words. Don't write an essay; write a personal letter
3. Remember that in a solicitation letter the signature is read first, then the PS, followed by the first paragraph, then special paragraphs with underlining or boxed words. It's OK to be repetitive.
4. Direct your readers to your Web site, where you will hopefully have much more information and some recent pictures. Younger donors, especially, will go online to find out more about your ministry.
5. Think about the quality of your mailing—things like the kind of paper, color of ink, style of font, etc. Take a couple of your mailings to other non-profits and ask them for feedback.
6. Think about your audience. Help your donors connect on a personal level with your ministry. Tell your story with stories, but also include good content. Be personal without being folksy, informative without being boring.
7. It may be helpful to segment your donor list, sending one kind of letter to one group and another letter to a more select group using first class postage.

While the end of the year is the usual season to send gift request letters, consider the possibility of alternate times and increased frequency. Certainly you will need to do more than send an annual letter, but if this appeal is carefully done, it can be a foundation block of your other gift requests.

“Donors on all giving levels respond because other people benefit from their contributions. They see charitable giving as a way to participate in enriching the human condition, locally, nationally, globally. The level of response depends upon the intensity of interest in a project plus other equally relevant factors. One thing is certain: high-level emotional involvement with and commitment to an organization amplifies a potential donor’s willingness to give and directly influences the amount to be contributed.”

L. Peter Edles, Fundraising, 1993

DONOR RECOGNITION

All donors need recognition for the gifts they give to your ministry, although they certainly may seek it in different ways.

There are donors who wish to be truly anonymous, for a number of reasons. They may be naturally quiet individuals who shy away from the limelight. They may want to give, but not in a competitive way that places them on a list with others who also gave. They may not want the world at their doorstep, with the expectation that they be as generous with all as they have been with you. A prompt, sincere thank you letter will be sufficient in most cases.

Some donors will cherish personal attention from you and your ministry, although they don’t seek it from everyone. Again, a prompt thank you, or perhaps a phone call or visit, would be a gratifying response to their gift. A name on a bronze plaque might be overkill.

However, there are many donors who aspire to see their name in lights. They give, expecting to be publically thanked. Their names listed among the many in your newsletter is minimal public affirmation. If the gift was given during a special campaign or with the intention that names at a certain level are to be listed on a recognition wall or publication, they will expect you to attend to these details. If there is a special recognition dinner, they will want to be invited, even if they live at some distance and may not be able to attend.

People of faith listen for spiritual affirmation, wanting to hear that their gift in response to God’s generosity has been gratefully received and will be used to build up the community of Christ. They consider your ministry to be an extension of the faith community they know

through their congregation or the one they remember from their days in campus ministry.

Describing “Charitable Archetypes” is a way to cluster donors into groups that give for particular reasons.¹

1. The Communitarians: Doing makes good sense
2. The Devout: Doing good is God’s will
3. The Investor: Doing good is good business
4. The Socialite: Doing good is fun
5. The Altruist: Doing good feels right
6. The Repayer: Doing good in return
7. The Dynast: Doing good is a family tradition

While a majority of those who give to campus ministry may be “devout,” there may be others who do so for other reasons. How you recognize donors represented by these archetypes is critical. They will expect you to respond to their primary reason for giving with recognition that is appropriate.

Finally, a word about donor circles or giving clubs. Donor circles have come under particular scrutiny these days for the indicators just named. They place people into artificial categories, assuming that all donors are motivated by the need for public recognition. These circles segment the donors and their gifts into groups or strata as a way of lifting higher the larger gifts, while including all gifts somewhere in the structure. There may be some not-too-subtle overtones that come into play here. The larger gifts are not necessarily the most sacrificial gifts that come from the donor’s heart. While some gifts may be significant amounts, they may actually represent only what more the affluent persons can do from their dispensable resources. Persons of less affluence may feel like second or third class donors if they are in the lower circle. All donors must be thanked, but not everyone needs public affirmation.

¹ Russ Alan Prince and Karen Maru File, *The Seven Faces of Philanthropy*, Jossey-Bass, 1994

VOICES AND VENUES

First, it's important to say how blessed I have been as a campus pastor at my site, the University of Colorado, Boulder, to have had a predecessor who did all the critical "spade work" of fundraising and development before I arrived here in the fall of 1996. In place was a sizable "alumni and friends" database, financial support from a little over half of our conference congregations, a newsletter to alumni and friends, and a tradition of an annual appeal.

I also inherited two endowments: one unrestricted and the other created out of the tragic death of a student, whose parents donated her college tuition to form an endowment to help pay for student travel to LSM events and conferences.

By anyone's standards, as a campus pastor, all I had to do was to continue the good work already begun, so I have tried to do this over the past 12 years. Despite having a number of successes in our ministry, I have struggled with: (a) finding the time and energy to solicit major donors consistently; (b) deepening congregational involvement and ownership of our ministry; and (c) fundamentally, the lack of an "overall plan" for fundraising development.

So, out of my own frustration in this general area of fundraising planning, and at the urging of my then board chair, a former IBM executive, I convened a small task force over three years ago to consider developing an overall comprehensive plan for fundraising at our site. Part of our planning included discussions around the number of donors in our data base, levels of current congregational history with our ministry and historical support patterns, levels (or lack thereof) of student activity, etc. We thoroughly considered everything we could think of, and although in some ways our plan is an "obvious" document, it helped us to put everything in one place for future reflection and planning.

I continue to be grateful for all of you, my colleagues, and the wisdom you have shared with me in so many areas over the years.

Laurel Alexander served as Lutheran Campus Pastor at the University of Colorado from 1996 to 2010. These comments were originally written for First Monday in 2008. She currently serves as pastor of St. Philips Lutheran Church in Carmel, CA

FUND RAISING SEMINARS ANNOUNCED

The ECMT is pleased to announce the dates and venues of the first two fund raising seminars. On **January 15, 2011** a seminar will be hosted by Jacob's Porch, the ELCA ministry at the Ohio State University in **Columbus Ohio**, coordinated by Pastor Jay Gamelin. He can be contacted at jay@jacobsporch.com. The second seminar will be on **January 22, 2011** in **Charlotte, North Carolina**, hosted by the United Christian Fellowship and coordinated by Pastor Stephen Cheney. He can be contacted at steve@campus-ministry.org.

Subsequent seminars are in the planning stages. They will be held later in the winter and spring at locations tentatively identified as Ft. Collins, Colorado, Houston, Texas, Chicago, Illinois, and Palo Alto, California. Additional applications continue to be received and are under consideration as well.

For more information contact your denominational representative to the ECMT or Galen Hora, who serves as seminar leader and consultant, at Galen.Hora@elca.org

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

“Among the responsibilities that board members must assume in carrying out the board’s purpose is a responsibility for the continued funding and financial health of the organization. In this respect, board members have two tasks: to give money and to raise money.”

Kim Klein, The Board and Fundraising

INVOLVING BOARD MEMBERS IN FUND RAISING

The primary purpose of the board is to make sure that the ministry is running smoothly, is faithful to its mission, and is adequately funded and staffed. Well-meaning persons of good heart and strong will step forward to assume these heady responsibilities. They give tirelessly of their time and insight. Why is it, then, that these ardent supporters of the ministry cringe when asked to do fund raising or give a gift of significance to the ministry themselves?

One response, often heard, is that they were not told in advance of joining the board what the expectations are. Particularly they don’t remember any straightforward conversation about fund raising responsibilities. There was not a job description for the board that they were asked to read and sign off on. They feel that they have been “hoodwinked,” invited to join a nice group of people and told that “you’ll catch on after a couple of meetings” to the importance of the work that they will be asked to do. When the discussion turns to the responsibility of providing adequate resources for the ministry, and their role in soliciting those resources, that they have this collective “deer in the headlights” look. They can’t imagine that they agreed to do fund raising. Nor can they remember saying that they would give generously to the ministry—financially.

A second response centers around training and expectations. Some board members, but not all, would be interested in calling on donors if they received adequate training. They should expect to know upfront how many calls per year they will be expected to make and/or how much of the budget their calls might provide.

A third response arises from the assumption that staff are the ones responsible for fund raising. Aren’t they the ones with the day to day knowledge of the ministry? Don’t they know the stories that warm the

hearts of donors? How can a board member possibly be as effective? Isn’t that what the staff person is being paid to do? The bottom line is this: if a board cannot or will not raise funds to support the ministry, they must hire or train someone to do it. And they must provide the requisite support services and computer software to manage the process.

Ultimately, board members must contribute financially themselves, beyond the time they give as volunteers and above the smaller gifts they bring by baking cookies or licking envelopes. Contributions of time and money are both important, but very different. A board member who sends a large check every year, but fails to show up at meetings is also shunning responsibility.

Major donors will usually ask if all board members have given to the campaign or annual fund. If the answer is “no,” the serious question then becomes “why not?” Board members must give, 100%, and hopefully give sacrificially. This sets the standard for other gifts. A board member who has made a contribution joyfully to a ministry they know and love will not find it difficult to invite others into the circle of friends and supporters of the ministry. Even if a few dollars is all that a board member can afford, it is important that the gift be made. It serves as a sign of their commitment to the mission.

