Chapter 3

The Many Faces of Fundraising

By Lilia Wagner and Halvard Thomsen

As a fundraising professional, I have found that some Bible stories provide great insight into the principles of fundraising. One of the best examples is found in 1 Chronicles 29:1–17, where David outlines his donations to the building of the temple because “this palatial structure is not for man but for the Lord God.”

“So,” David says, “I’m making all my resources available—gold, bronze, wood, onyx, turquoise, and all kinds of fine stone and marble. And I’ll make these available in large quantities. Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God, I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver, and above everything I have provided for this holy temple, I’m going to give an additional thirty thousand dollars’ worth of gold (gold of Ophir) and seventy thousand dollars of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the building. Now who else is willing to join this campaign and consecrate himself today to the Lord?”

The leaders responded by giving to the work on the temple of God fifty thousand dollars in gold and silver, eighty thousand dollars’ worth of bronze, and a hundred thousand dollars’ worth of iron. Besides that, those “who had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the temple of the Lord in the custody of Jehiel the Gershonite” (verse 8).

David rejoiced greatly, as did the people, at the willing response of their leaders. He responded by praising his God: “I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.”

As my own professional skills and knowledge in fundraising grew, I saw how this story described a modern-day capital campaign so very well. All the steps of a successful campaign were outlined, and the current best practices were also reflected:

- The “kingdom” (i.e., institution or organization) budgets for a campaign because it takes money to raise money; it also practices good stewardship.
- The king (i.e., board chair, president, or executive director) gives personally.
- Leaders (board members, organization personnel) give.
- The campaign is made public, and donors are enthusiastic.
• Donors give when asked.

• People give for worthwhile causes—they give to achieve results. It is not about the money; it is what the money accomplishes.

• The campaign is a success.

Given the ample evidence in the Bible of fundraising as a ministry, there is, nevertheless, a lack of understanding, much less an embracing, of fundraising in churches. We shy away from talking about money (except to chide members for not returning tithe and giving offerings). We avoid using the term fundraising, and separate the act of giving into compartments that often do not intersect. We pray publicy about giving and say in our prayers what we do not dare say in other ways to our congregations. In short, we treat fundraising like a bad word, a despised practice even.

That attitude is all wrong, and the purpose of this article is to help put fundraising in its proper perspective. The first task, however, should be to dispel a few myths about this important ministry.

**Myth #1: "God said 'we must give,' so we do not do fundraising"**

In times past, tithes and offerings just seemed to materialize (or so we like to think). Today's church members, however, are different. They want to be treated as a donor; they do not want their generosity taken for granted. Trust has to be earned through accountability, transparency, and good stewardship.

According to Dr. William Enright, director of the Lake Institute for Faith and Philanthropy, giving to religious institutions has fallen from roughly half of all charitable dollars in 1995 to a third. Between 1987 and 2004, religious giving fell an average of 30 percent. Some denominations, he said, experienced a 50-percent drop in per-household giving.⁴

Clif Christopher writes: "Donors are saying to our churches today that you have to earn our gifts."⁵ In a book called *Passing the Plate*, the authors enumerate the reasons why religious giving is in a decline:

• The influence of mass consumerism

• Clergy discomfort with issues of money

• A confused and uninformed laity as to Christian stewardship practices

• Mistrust of organizations

• The taboo of money-talk in American culture

Impulse giving has replaced planned and systematic giving (for instance, today only 9.4 percent of all American Christians tithe).⁶ For many people, their church is not automatically their "charity of choice." Members want to be informed, want to be asked, and want to know what their offerings and donations are accomplishing. Also, they want to be acknowledged for their giving.
Myth #2: “Fundraising is for secular organizations, not for us”

If we really believe this, then how do we handle all of those Bible texts that counsel us to be facilitators of the giving process?

“Since you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us—I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving. I am not commanding you to do this. But I am testing how genuine your love is by comparing it with the eagerness of the other churches” (2 Corinthians 8:7, 8, NLT).

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:32-35, KJV).

Research has verified what many have believed or sensed: those who give to religious causes are more likely to give to other causes as well. Even if we were to ignore the fact that “it is more blessed to give than to receive,” common sense says that the joining of faith with fundraising is a practical matter that yields the best results—results that are minimized if these two factors are fractured.

Myth #3: “But we’re different”

Many Christians believe that we are a select people, but when it comes to habits of the heart, we are not. Today’s giver usually desires and requires more accountability and more of a say in what happens with their finances. This goes for both the religious and secular giver.

We cannot ignore the reasons why people give, the motivations that cause them to be involved in supporting good causes financially. Researchers Schervish and Havens have determined the most commonly stated reasons for generosity are the following—and these apply suitably to many Christian givers as well:

- Communities of participation: people give because they are part of an entity bigger than themselves.
- Identification with a cause: how much do we do to help people truly be a part of our church life?
- Invitation to participate: according to research, the main reason people do not give is because they are not asked.
- Models and experiences from youth: are we being good philanthropic role models for our youth?
- Assurance of positive outcomes, while also realizing there is an urgency to carry out a cause.
• Demographic characteristics—the changing populations in our churches also cause changes in giving—e.g., people living longer, more consciousness of global needs, more action by youth. At the same time, we must respect the reasons why some people do not give. They may not see the need; they may have other interests besides the cause at hand; they may feel disenfranchised. We need to remember that philanthropy—and therefore the practice that facilitates giving (i.e., fundraising)—is about bringing people together, inclusivity, and working toward a common goal.

The best practices

Now that we have looked at some of the myths about fundraising, we need to look at some of the core principles behind it.

First, we often hesitate to use the word fundraising mostly because of abuses, especially among the clergy. But fundraising is a noble act. It is not about the money; it’s about what happens when the money is acquired. We often emphasize the need for money, yet we forget to focus clearly enough on why we need it, on the good that will result, on the people who will be helped, and ultimately, how we will also benefit if we are generous.

When Jesus said, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me,” He added illustrations that apply to us as well. If we help an organization succeed in its mission and purpose because we provide the necessary funds for its functions, we have had a part in helping the hungry, the poor, the hurting, the homeless, and countless others. If we support the enhancement of the human mind and soul through education and the arts, for example, we are serving God as well. We minister unselfishly when we give to needs and opportunities that benefit those within our sphere of influence.

The six “rights” of good fundraising

The following statement, adapted from The Fund Raising School, sums up good fundraising:

Fundraising is the right person asking the right prospect for the right cause in the right way for the right amount at the right time.

These six “rights” encapsulate the complex practice of fundraising.

Fundraising is not just up to the pastor but to a team composed of leaders and lay persons with a sincere commitment to a cause. The pastor should not be a solo performer but should organize, mobilize, and motivate fundraising.

Understanding who our donors might be is a key factor as well. We need to be wise in determining where funds may come from. We also need to make it possible for all those who have an interest in our case to be invited to participate.

Fundraising is not manipulation or coercion. People like to be part of successful efforts, and it is a privilege to be invited to become part of a collective effort. People give because they are asked, because a case has been made that allows them to see the problem they are solving and what solution can be achieved.
Asking potential donors in the right way—that is, employing the right communication strategy (whether through the Internet, by mail, in person, or in other ways)—becomes critical. This adds to the challenge but also increases opportunities as our fundraising team exercises individual talents.

Another consideration is timing. Is this the right time to ask? Is the donor ready? Has enough information been shared? Are people passionate about accomplishing a cause? These questions must precede an invitation to participate.

And we should forever banish the simplistic phrase, "Whatever you can give will help." The result could be a $10 gift when really a $1,000 gift could have been requested for the Lord’s work. By showing donors what their gifts will do, we can ask for a donation in a certain monetary range.

**Fundraising as a ministry**

In the end, we must see fundraising as part of our ministry—a ministry of caring, not just for our congregation’s needs but for the many needs around us, thereby fulfilling Christ’s mandate, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” Fundraising, as a ministry, becomes part of a continuum of giving. We practice good stewardship when we consider our overall giving, beginning with tithing, giving offerings for specific church appeals, and stretching ourselves, and our resources, to care for other causes. We help others practice the same good stewardship when we educate about wise giving, making good choices, the logical expectation of results, and the mutual benefits achieved when resources are shared.

And let us not forget that we also benefit if we give and facilitate giving by others. “If you give to the poor, your needs will be supplied! But a curse upon those who close their eyes to poverty” (Proverbs 28:27, TLB). “Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back” (Luke 6:38, NLT).

Even secular research has borne out this biblical promise. A recent study by the National Institutes of Health said, “The results were showing that when the volunteers placed the interests of others before their own, the generosity activated a primitive part of the brain that usually lights up in response to food or sex. Altruism, the experiment suggested, was not a superior moral faculty that suppresses basic selfish urges but rather was basic to the brain, hard-wired and pleasurable.” Their 2006 finding that unselfishness can feel good lends scientific support to the admonitions of spiritual leaders such as Saint Francis of Assisi, who said, “For it is in giving that we receive.” But it is also a dramatic example of the way neuroscience has begun to elbow its way into discussions about morality and has opened up a new window on what it means to be good.
Conclusion

The following tombstones, I believe, illustrate the great honor of being generous.

In Warwickshire, England, this verse can be seen on a tombstone:

Here lies a miser, who lived for himself,  
And cared for nothing but gathering pelf.  
Now where he is or how he fares,  
Nobody knows and nobody cares.

Contrast those lines to the following epitaph in St. Paul’s Cathedral, London:

Sacred to the memory of Charles George Gordon,  
who at all times and everywhere gave his strength to the weak,  
his substance to the poor,  
his sympathy to the suffering, and his heart to God.

Yes, we all need to always remind ourselves that fundraising is ministry. We then follow the words of Jesus, follow God’s command that we be generous and promote generosity. When we do fundraising, we help people obey what the Lord has called all who profess His name to do.

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1Published in the February 2011 issue of Ministry, International Journal for Pastors. Used with permission.
2Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptures are taken from the New International Version.
3Paraphrased by the author from the New International Version.
4Speech given at the Presidents’ Colloquium sponsored by Philanthropic Service to Institutions, November 2008.
8Matthew 25:40, NIV.