

Fundraising Theology

A few years before his death in 1996, Henri Nouwen wrote a booklet entitled *The Spirituality of Fundraising*. This is a warm and wise piece of writing, and is an excellent place to start when thinking about the tricky issues around asking people to support ministry of the church. The booklet is both readable and short, and is available in paperback or as an ebook.

The key idea is that fundraising is not one-way traffic. 'Fund-raising is, first and foremost, a form of ministry. It is a way of announcing our vision and inviting other people into our mission. ... Fund-raising is proclaiming what we believe in such a way that we offer other people an opportunity to participate with us in our vision and mission. **Fund-raising is precisely the opposite of begging.** When we seek to raise funds we are not saying, "Please, could you help us out because lately it's been hard." Rather, we are declaring, "We have a vision that is amazing and exciting. We are inviting you to invest yourself through the resources that God has given you— your energy, your prayers, and your money—in this work to which God has called us."

Nouwen makes us question our relationship with money, and suggests that the Kingdom of God '...is where God provides for all that we need. It is the realm of sufficiency where we are no longer pulled here and there by anxiety about having enough.' He is characteristically honest about what motivates us; discussing the reluctance to talk about money, he says, 'The reason for the taboo is that money has something to do with that intimate place in our heart where we need security.'

Nouwen roots fundraising in the shared need for community. 'When fund-raising as ministry calls people together in communion with God and with one another, it must hold out the real possibility of friendship and community. People have such a need for friendship and for community that fund-raising has to be **community-building**. I wonder how many churches and charitable organizations realize that community is one of the greatest gifts they have to offer.' And again: 'Those who need money and those who give money meet on the common ground of God's love'.

He ends the book as follows: 'Fundraising is a very rich and beautiful activity. It is a confident, joyful, and hope-filled expression of ministry. In ministering to each other, each from the riches that he or she possesses, we work together for the full coming of God's Kingdom.'

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But what about the Developing World?

Nouwen's booklet is really valuable for its principled look at how money and spirituality relate. However, some within the church may well be deeply uneasy about spending money on bricks and mortar, when the same money could do wonderful things in other parts of the world where the needs are more basic, where the provision of sanitation and drinking water is, quite literally, a matter of life and death. These are important questions to address, and on which to try to reach a settled view in your church community.

A point worth making is that it is not what is called a zero-sum game - God is a God of abundance. Investing (money / time / energy) locally does not mean that you have to ignore the rest of the world. Some churches address this by committing to give away a proportion of all the money raised for their project.

Further Help

My colleague Eleanor Stead (prev. Gill) facilitates workshops when requested by dioceses and has published funding guides and a short introductory video here - <http://www.parishresources.org.uk/resources-for-treasurers/funding/>.

She also runs workshops on legacies and there is a section on what you could be doing in your parish here <http://www.parishresources.org.uk/legacies/>. This potential long-term funding may not fund next week's project, but in the longer term is a source of funding which needs attention.

You will also find some helpful information about Church Friends' Schemes on Parish Resources on <http://www.parishresources.org.uk/friends-schemes/>

There are a number of people who specialise in helping churches with fundraising; in certain well-defined circumstances it may be appropriate to pay someone to assist this process. When considering whether to work with someone of this nature it is essential to establish how they would approach your particular project, how closely they are aligned with your objectives and where they see the possibilities. As with other appointments, the key is to find someone whose approach fits with your own. Grant-giving trusts tend not to be to take a positive view about making grants where significant fund-raising consulting costs are incurred.