

Toward A Theology of Fund Raising **By Most Rev. Thomas J. Murphy**

Introduction

Human action must have meaning and purpose if it is to be significant. Such meaning and purpose comes not only from the value of such action in secular or human terms, but also from the relationship it has to who we are and what we are about as disciples of Jesus and as members of the Roman Catholic faith community.

Who we are and what we do as fund raisers and stewards of the resources we possess challenge us to see these tasks as more than mere mechanical exercises of human labor necessary for the Church to be incarnate in the world. Rather, hopefully, the ministry we share in fund raising and stewardship is a response to the Lord's great commandment of love: Love the Lord your God with your whole mind, your whole strength, your whole heart and your whole soul, and love your neighbor as yourself. (Mk. 12: 30-31) In pursuit of love, Christ challenged his hearers to a relationship with God that is expressed in loving service of others. We are considering here the basic moral principle of our faith tradition—the need for love to come alive.

Human and Christian Service

Humanitarian motives are the basis today for the service and care of others in countless ways. Appeals are made in the name of education, hunger, poverty and diverse forms of charity whereby people volunteer their time, talent and resources. There are thousands and thousands of people who benefit each day from this genuine human generosity and concern for others.

However, as baptized sons and daughters of God, we are also asked to minister to the needs of others. Such ministry is not mere humanism, but it should rather come from a relationship we have to God and others through baptism. The faith we share and express offers hopefully a new motivation and a deeper understanding of our service of others whereby we should appreciate better who we are and what we do as a consequence of our faith commitment. The question must be asked immediately. Do we make a difference in our service to others because of our relationship to the Lord?

The Church as the continuing presence of Jesus exists in time and space. Its mission is to continue the ministry of Jesus. The Church does this in measurable and visible ways in different cultural, historical and social settings. Education, care for the aged, sick and infirm, help for the widow and orphan have all been part of the Church's mission from the beginning of the Christian community. These ministries were more than the human response to human needs, but rather the fulfillment of the command to love one's neighbor. These ministries are but a normal response to and an integral part of the mission of religion and they become an essential apostolate of the Church. They involve not only buildings, institutions and services, but also the powerful visible commitment of people who give their lives in service to others through works of charity in the name of Jesus.

However, the Church does not exist in a vacuum. It exists in a world where there are material needs and financial demands. For centuries, the followers of Jesus have fulfilled the corporal works of mercy by their generous response to the service of others in the establishment and maintenance of hospitals, schools, orphanages, homes for the aged, and countless programs and services which continue the ministry of Jesus.

In order to serve others today, there is an even greater need than ever to develop resources, to generate funds, to provide services, if we are to continue to do what we have done in the past, let alone expand the ministry of service to an ever-increasing number of people in

need. Escalating costs, inflation, new demands and new challenges are rapidly consuming the resources we possess. Consequently, fund raising to increase our resources and to develop new sources of support is an important vocation in the Christian community. This vocation needs to be recognized, acknowledged and appreciated. But it also must be seen and exercised within the mission of the Church in a spirit of accountability and responsibility.

Towards a Theology of fund Raising

A theological reflection on the ministry of fund-raising in continuing and increasing our response to Christ's command of service to others is well worth considering. Some might say that such reflection is merely an attempt to justify what already exists, a post-script to an "a priori" situation. Others might consider such reflections equivalent to educational endeavors to have "Catholic" arithmetic or "Catholic" geography by placing these subjects under the umbrella of religious wording. Still others would see any attempt to offer a theology of fund raising as an exercise in semantics.

Yet, I believe theological reflection on fund raising within the Christian community needs to be done. This effort would hopefully place our efforts within a Gospel framework, within the mission of the Church which continues the ministry of Jesus.

By its very nature, theology is a reflection on the mystery of God's presence within the human condition and parameters of time and space. We come in contact with this mystery through the Word of God, the Person of Jesus, tradition, and the lived experience of Church. These sources challenge us to see fund raising in the light of stewardship, the virtues of justice and charity, and the ongoing mission of the Church. Theological reflection forces us to ask the bottom line question: does what we do and who we are as fundraisers reflect the mystery of God's presence?

Stewardship

Stewardship as an ideal and a reality is part of consciousness today. From so many points of view, the human race is becoming far more aware of its obligation to be a steward of creation. Our interdependence as a planet and as a universe becomes more evident with every new space endeavor. The depletion of natural resources such as oil and water helps us recognize that there is a need to manage these precious gifts. Ecology is a clarion call to countless people to preserve creation in the face of technological and scientific demands.

The very first commandment God shared with the human race was to assume the responsibility of and care for creation. After the marvelous and magnificent sequence of events which led to the creation of the human person, God told the first humans to increase and multiply. But following that invitation came a command: "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground." (Genesis 1:26)

The heart of stewardship is offered in this first command given to the human race. The dominion and rule of all living things involves a care for and a respect of creation. This would demand a service of administration and management, but always in the best sense of the word. Human beings were asked to be "caretakers" of creation. As they were asked, so are we.

Legal documents might well give juridic ownership of land and possessions to human beings, but all creation is under the sovereignty of God and must redound to the glory of God. What any human being "owns" is really possessions of God held in trust. We are trustees of

what literally belongs to God. This view of human ownership puts all our possessions in a different light and offers a unique religious perspective and challenge.

What we possess and hold in trust is shared with us to fulfill our own needs, but also for the service of others. What we possess for our own necessity and even for what we might call “the good life,” is but a symbol and proof of the far greater gifts which God shares with the human race in the spiritual life. In a world today filled with poverty, hunger and unemployment, Jesus’ words that one’s soul is infinitely more precious than food or clothing (Mt. 6:25) is indeed a challenging statement.

Stewardship calls people to recognize possessions as gifts of God’s love. Created in the image of God, human beings must use these gifts for their own good and the good of others whereby we offer to God the prayerful acknowledgement of His sovereignty. The powerful scene of the Last Judgment in Matthew’s Gospel reminds us that the Lord will judge us according to the measure of how we used our possessions as means of love and charity. Do we utilize the lens of faith in fund raising to see Christ literally in those of behalf of whom we appeal for help and assistance?

The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World from Vatican II urges all people to recognize possessions as “common property in the sense that they should accrue to the benefit of not only themselves but of others.” (Paragraph 69) In helping the poor, this same document teaches that people “are obliged to come to the relief of the poor, and to do so not merely out of their superfluous good.” (Paragraph 69)

The Gospel and the teaching of the Church make radical demands. However, upon reflection, they could not do otherwise. Stewardship within the Christian community today is not an option: it must be a way of life. The vocation of the fund raiser is to challenge all people to stewardship as the basis for Christian generosity.

Justice and Charity

A reflection on the virtues of justice and charity offer a further insight into the implications and challenge of fund raising in the Christian community. According to the 1971 document from the Synod of Bishops, “Christian love implies an absolute demand for justice, namely a recognition of the dignity and rights of one’s neighbor. Justice attains its inner fullness only in love. Because every person is truly a visible image of the invisible God and a brother (or sister) of Christ, the Christian finds in every person God himself and God’s absolute demand for justice and love.”

The relationship between justice and charity is important for fund raisers. So often appeals are made in the name of charity, but Christian stewardship calls for the appeal also to be made in the name of justice. Charity and justice are intertwined for disciples of Jesus. An appeal for help in the name of charity is an appeal in the cause of justice. Justice calls us to fulfill basic obligations, but hopefully in our service and care for others, we are motivated by Christian charity. What we preach to others in various forms of fundraising and stewardship, we ourselves must live in our own lives.

St. Paul offers a good example of not only personal witness to justice and charity, but an appeal to others in the name of these same virtues. The 8th and 9th chapters of Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians are an example from the early Christian community of how Paul appealed for resources to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem. The countless appeal letters for funds today could well look to the appeal letter of 2000 years ago as a model.

St. Paul begins by offering the Corinthians the example of others—the Macedonians. Despite what would be equivalent to a severe recession today and the experience of poverty, the Macedonians responded to the need with abundant generosity and even in a spirit of joy. Paul goes on to remind the Corinthians of their own giftedness in so many areas of human experience and that their generosity should be characterized by that same spirit. But then in a simple but powerful statement, Paul offers the example and model of Christ who made himself poor, though he was rich, so that they might become rich by his poverty. Jesus himself is the prime example for sharing one's gifts. Yet, that very statement offers a challenge to fund raisers today. Are we hesitant to share our appeal in the name of Jesus? Are we hesitant to name the Lord as the basis for our appeal?

Paul then becomes very practical in his appeal. The gift should be in accord with one's means. He reminds the Corinthians that they too may need the charity of others. The classic phrases from the New Testament on the rewards of generosity bring the appeal to a conclusion with the recognition of God's love for the cheerful giver and the promise of reward for one's generosity.

Paul's appeal is rooted in justice and charity. He does not make the response to the appeal a matter of law, but he presents an ideal with human and Christian motives. The development of resources in the Church today must also present the challenge to Christian generosity in the same way.

The Mission of the Church Today

The Church continues the mission of Jesus. After almost 2000 years, that mission has become more complex and demanding, especially in the need for the Church to develop resources to fulfill its mission. A primary purpose of the mission of Jesus is not only the maintenance of existing structures and programs, but to be caught up in a sense of mission, an experience of evangelization. The essential mission of the Church today is to evangelize all people, to share with them the liberating message of the Gospel through Word and Sacrament. The constitution on the Church in the Modern World from Vatican II states:

“...the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longing, and its often dramatic characteristics.” (Paragraph 4)

Fund raising and stewardship must be aware of the mission of the Church in today's world. The Christian community in turn must challenge those who develop resources to direct their efforts towards responding to the signs of the times and to respond to the mission of the Church. Most Rev. Robert Morneau, Auxiliary Bishop of Green Bay, in an article entitled, “Toward a Theology of Stewardship,” reflects on the mission of stewardship in the context of the life of the Church.

“The Church Jesus founded is called to do many things: to worship and pray, to share values and vision in education, to foster a faith community, to provide strong leadership, to reach out to others in justice and

charity. Though related to all areas, stewardship is more visible in the act of reaching out. History records how different functions of the Church are stressed during different periods. In the latter part of the 20th century, we are keenly aware of the need for the Church to be a good steward because of the limited resources that are available to us. But it is important always to relate stewardship to the other aspects of Church life lest it lose its proper perspective and become a distortion.”

Bishop Morneau raises the basic question: does fund raising serve the Church or does the Church serve fund raising? A theology of fund raising and stewardship demands that we place our efforts within the mission of the Church.

Our sharing in the mission of the Church is but a consequence of our identity as disciples of Jesus. This sharing involves not only faith and worship, but also the sharing of time, treasure and talent. Fund raising to develop resources to continue the mission of the Church need not be approached hesitatingly or apologetically: rather fund raising offers the members of the Church the opportunity to fulfill a basic responsibility.

Practical Implications

What are the practical implications of these reflections based on stewardship, the virtues of justice and charity, and the mission of the Church? I believe they would include the following:

1. Fundraising within the Church is a vocation of service. As such, it is an exercise which helps build up the Body of Christ. Those involved in this vocation are servants of the community and must see their service not as an end in itself, but as a contributing factor to the life of Church which responds to the agenda of the Church today.
2. Fund raising provides people with the opportunity to fulfill a responsibility and obligation rooted not only in charity, but also justice. Fund raising must communicate a catechesis of stewardship to the entire Christian community. Stewardship must become the life style of each person. The success of fund raising will be determined not by reaching or surpassing announced goals through the extraordinary generosity of a few, but by communicating the reality of stewardship and its obligations to as many people as possible.
3. Fund raising and the development of resources is an essential component of the pastoral ministry of priest, religious and lay persons. Leaders and members of a community cannot dismiss this activity as irrelevant or not personally satisfying and shift the responsibility exclusively to the Bishop, religious superior, pastor or the development office. The pastoral minister must preach the challenge of stewardship and the obligation all people have to share time, treasure and talent.
4. Just as fund raising is based on an understanding of justice and charity, these same virtues should characterize all efforts of fund raising and stewardship. Accountability for the resources developed, accumulated and expended is not an option: it is a required expectation. Accountability and responsibility must characterize all fund raising efforts at every level of Church life. The Guidelines for these efforts developed by NCDC are an excellent resource to help fulfill this accountability and responsibility.
5. Modern technology has influenced fund raising methods and procedures through the every-increasing presence of electronic equipment, word processors, and computers. Yet, despite these new approaches, appeals for assistance should try to retain an awareness that help is

being asked of people with names, faces, and identities rather than in terms of a “cold list” or the chosen elect whose names might be found in a “golden book” or its equivalent. Fund raising must not become so professional that it contradicts the Gospel values of personal human dignity and worth.

6. All fund raising activities should re-examine on a regular basis the needs for which help is asked. In light of the signs of the times, is the purpose of the appeal consonant with the ministry of Jesus and the mission of the Church today? Is the appeal continued because it works or has existed so long that it is taken for granted? Do we ever raise the question whether the appeal should be discontinued? Fund raisers should develop an ecclesial sense which places their efforts within the needs of a larger awareness of Church in a community, diocese, nation and world.

Conclusion

The Church today exists in a world with new expectations and challenges. The Church needs resources to fulfill its mission. Fund raising helps the Church respond to this need. A theological reflection on fund raising gets to the heart of its value as a human and Christian enterprise because theology asks if in all the efforts expended on behalf of fund raising, *do we discover the mystery of God's presence*. The answer to that question makes what we do a grace or a curse. Thank you to all those involved in NCDC and the Stewardship Council for helping me see what you do as a grace.

The late Most Reverend Thomas J. Murphy, S.T.D., DD, died of acute leukemia, while serving as the Archbishop of Seattle, Washington. At the time of his death he was also the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Stewardship of the US Bishops' Conference and Episcopal Advisor to the National Catholic Development Conference. He was instrumental in the writing of the US Bishops' Stewardship Document. This paper was first presented at the joint Annual Conference of NCDC and NCSC, September 19, 1983 in Orlando, Florida.