



COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Fundraising During Coronavirus

By David Duncan

In the midst of a global pandemic declared by the World Health Organization (WHO), we wanted to share a few insights and recommendations for pastors and church leaders navigating these unsettling times.

FUNDAMENTALS MATTER

On March 12, 2020, Major League Baseball announced the suspension of all Spring Training games and postponed the regular season. Up until that time, in Arizona and Florida all 30 Major League teams were gathered for an important spring ritual—the fundamentals.

Each year, hundreds of highly talented, highly paid, elite athletes gather in the warmer climates of our country to relearn the game of baseball. Like youngsters in Little League, they spend hours on end, day after day, practicing the simplest form of the game.

UNDERLYING PREMISES: TAKE HEART

1. The people who love your ministry—who attend, volunteer, pray, give—have not stopped loving your church because of COVID-19. In fact, it is most likely that your best partners really want to know—are you OK? They care about the ministry as you care about them—they are concerned for you, for the work, for the cause, for the people you serve.
2. In addition, those who love your ministry want you to keep doing what you do—and perhaps even do more during this time of crisis. They are open to being coached, guided, disciplined, and clearly shown how they can invest (or further invest) in your vital work, especially now.

FUNDRAISING IN CONTEXT: LIKE A BUILDING PROJECT

Buildings that stand the test of time follow well-established, proven principles of construction. The same holds true for churches and ministries. To be well

Step 1: Dig a proper FOOTING

We are fortunate that in the United States, this footing has been long dug and proven deep and stable. Our fundraising footing is philanthropy.

Americans are amazingly generous. We help. We give. We share. Generosity is imbedded in our national psyche and deeply engrained in our tax code.

We've even coined a term for this generosity—philanthropy. The word comes from the

Why? So that during the rigorous competition of the season, they are prepared to handle anything and everything that comes their way. With the fundamentals well in hand, they can make all the routine plays—and, when necessary, execute extraordinary plays as well.

Below are some of the fundamentals gleaned during 30 years of development work with churches and ministries—they will help you during this challenging season.

3. Crises, by their nature cause us to quickly evaluate our priorities. Think of the instructions given during flight preparation—if we need to evacuate in an emergency, leave the stuff behind and get the people out! In time of crisis, we prioritize and allocate energy and resources to the top of the list. Your ministry is, and will remain, a priority for your best partners/constituents, even during times of crisis.
4. God wasn't surprised by this coronavirus—and He is NOT INTIMIDATED by it.

resourced for your work, follow well-established development/fundraising principles. Here are three steps to get you started.

combination of two other words. Philomeans “love” in the brotherly sense (Philadelphia is the “city of brotherly love”) and Anthropolmeans “mankind” (or humanity). When put together, we have “the love of mankind” or philanthropy.

Who should be better at showing love to humanity than us, the followers of Jesus, especially during times of crisis like this novel coronavirus?

Step 2: Lay a strong FOUNDATION

The foundation for our development activity is from eternally true principles found in the Bible. A simple list of these principles would include:

All resources flow from and ultimately belong to God, who created and sustains them. Or stated as we often hear it—God is the owner of all.

The Bible teaches that God created this earth and all it contains (Psalm 24:1-2) and as the Creator and Sustainer—He is also the owner (Psalm 50:10-12). In the New Testament we read that we have been “bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and that the price was the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:17-19).

God has chosen to entrust His resources to stewards and gives them management control. Or simply put—we are stewards of God’s resources.

God willingly places His assets into our care, expecting that we will seek His best interest (Matthew 5:16)

through the prudent use of our time (Ephesians 5:15-17), our abilities (Romans 12:1-8), and our financial resources (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

God instructs Christian stewards to wisely use His resources to provide for themselves and others and do it so that those watching will—glorify your Father in heaven.

Our material resources are available for us to bless others (2 Corinthians 8 & 9; Galatians 6:6; Ephesians 4:28). Sometimes we do this systematically—in 1 Corinthians 16, Paul instructed Christians to set aside their desired offering, saving it up as it were, until he arrived to receive it and deliver it to the needy saints in need in Jerusalem. Other times we can be the answer to someone’s prayer through a spontaneous gift that will make an immediate impact.

Step 3: Build an appropriate FRAMEWORK

Buildings that last share the common aspect of an appropriate framework (or superstructure) made of quality materials and follow architectural and engineering principles. Note that each building can look different on the outside—but to last must have the underlying framework.

If we carry our alliteration further, then over the framework will be finishes and inside the building will be

fixtures and furnishings. These latter three are what make your ministry unique. But to last—to have the resources you need to continue (even multiply) your impact during a time of crisis—you must have an appropriate framework, built upon a strong foundation, laid upon a solid footing.

APPROPRIATE AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

For our current purpose, let’s consider just the framework of appropriate and effective communication during this unprecedented time of this coronavirus crisis.

Communication must be:

CLEAR, CONCISE, & COMPELLING

One way to ensure clear, concise, and compelling communication is to filter it through The 3 Development Questions—a fundamental in the nonprofit ministry world. Whether they realize it or not, your partners and

prospects (church members, attenders, givers) are all most comfortable giving or investing in the work when these questions have been answered to their satisfaction.

Question #1: What need do you meet (or opportunity do you seize)?

This gets to the heart of your existence as a ministry. It is the “why do you do what you do?” It is your mission—your vision to bring about change, your passion to serve God and others.

During this crisis, your communication must clearly show that the ministry is, perhaps more than ever, relevant and

addressing the most pressing needs and opportunities in your service area. This is a time for creatively serving, even expanding, in our area of expertise and passion. The need remains. The opportunity is ripe. We press on!

Question #2: How do you meet the need (or seize the opportunity)?

Short answer—differently than we did last month at this time. Operations have changed. The plan has, of immediate necessity, been modified.

During this crisis, we must do things differently. But we can, we are, and we will continue to do the most

important things. And, post crisis, we will have sharpened skills, increased knowledge, more efficient systems, more effective services. Post crisis, we will have met needs, seized opportunities, served well, and made eternal difference.

Question #3: How can I help (meet the need or seize the opportunity)?

Generally, for the ministry help is expressed in three ways:

- Prayer—where the gift of intercession before God is given freely.
- Promotion—where the gift of credibility (expressed in volunteering, inviting others to participate, sharing a testimony of impact) within a circle of influence is offered.
- Provision—where the gift of financial resources (cash, gifts-in-kind, complex/non-cash assets) is

given, perhaps both now and through planned giving strategies.

During this time of crisis, consider that your ministry friends want to know about the organization, about the people in it, and about the outreach (operations) that you do. Filter these updates through The 3 Development Questions and you will be well on your way to providing clear, concise, and compelling communication.

WELL-DELIVERED

Communication with partners and friends can be delivered through one of three methods—print, public, and personal.

Print

The communication is intended for many or all and is typically consumed by one person at a time. It may be ink on paper or pixels on a screen, but this method relies upon the recipient choosing to read the communication.

Print is used to reach many people when time and cost must be considered as limiting factors. Immediate feedback is not possible.

Public

The communication is intended for many or all and is delivered verbally or via multimedia presentation. The most obvious public communication would be a church service or gathering. Of course, what was possible pre-coronavirus is not possible now. Public communication has gone virtual, meaning our gatherings

are now content being viewed (listened to) by individuals or small groups.

Public communication is used to reach the masses and may be broadcast, livestreamed, pre-recorded for online viewing, or delivered via DVD or other medium. Immediate feedback is generally not possible.

Personal

The communication is intended for one person (or a very small group) and is delivered face-to-face for greatest impact. During COVID-19, this most effective of all forms of communication must also be modified. If actual physical proximity is not possible, then a personal communication can still be delivered via telephone, video call, text, email, letter, or note.

The key is that in personal communication, one person is crafting and delivering a message designed specifically for another person. Immediate feedback is both possible and expected. This method is used to maximize effectiveness with those who can make the greatest impact in the timeliest manner.

SEGMENTED FOR EFFECTIVENESS

Your entire constituency needs to hear your answers to The 3 Development Questions—soon and frequently. But to maximize the effectiveness of your communication and to steward your available resources, you need to consider how you will communicate with the critical segments of your ministry partners.

For example, those who are “most highly invested” via the use of their time, talent, and treasure should become a “segment” that receives the most personal communication you can achieve. It does not make sense that church elders would be informed in the same manner as the casual attendee. Nor does it make sense that the top one-third of your givers would receive a general and impersonal print or public message. Seek to communicate with your most highly invested partners, through the most effective means—personal—so their questions can be answered, their advice received, and their relationship affirmed.

Segmentation is the prioritization of human and financial resources. It allows you to get the highest level of personal communication to those who are most highly invested in the success of your ministry. This is not showing favoritism—this is wise stewardship of your resources to achieve the objective of ministry during this time of crisis.

As an example, imagine that you have 1,000 constituents who need to know about a project opportunity to make immediate, significant ministry impact—but it will cost \$100,000.

An examination of the 1,000 constituents reveals that about half of them rarely, if ever, give money to ministry. Approximately one-third give from time-to-time. And the rest, maybe 15-20% give regularly, and some give large amounts. In fact, this last segment accounts for 60–70% of your total income from giving.

Now, consider your human, financial, and communication resources—how will you allocate them to achieve the highest likelihood of raising \$100,000 in order to accomplish the ministry opportunity?

Using segmentation, you will prioritize personal communication (the most effective method) with your most highly invested (time, talent, and treasure) constituents. Print and public methods of communication will allow you to also reach the masses with the project information and opportunity to be involved. Typically, your \$100,000 will come primarily from the group contacted personally, but you’ve provided all 1,000 an opportunity to invest in the project.

RESPONSE-ABLE

When an individual receives a well-crafted communication and is moved to respond (via prayer, promotion, and/or provision), make it easy for them.

If you're asking them to pray—give them specific and frequently updated items for consideration. And don't forget to tell them about specific answers to prayer.

If you're asking them to promote—give them specific volunteer tasks (with job descriptions) of importance, provide them with detail to share with others about services, report on impact so they can share within their circle of influence.

OTHER IMPORTANT MATTERS

Synchronized Communication

If you are the primary leader of your ministry, then you merely need to incorporate the fundraising message into your communication strategy. If you are not the primary

If you're asking them to provide (money)—make it easy with online/digital giving, pre-addressed envelopes for checks, a drop box or collection point for checks, a “pick-up” service for their checks, or whatever other creative tools you have at your disposal.

It is a well-known fact that impediments make the response more complicated or difficult and will lower the volume and amount of response. During this time of crisis, we hope all our partners will be flexible and understanding, but we will serve them and our ministry well if we can make sure our request is “response-able.”

spokesperson for your ministry, then be sure that your development communication is synchronized with that of the leader.

The Ministry of Fundraising

Your ministry partners are impacted by this crisis also. Your largest givers (often entrepreneurs, business leaders, and professionals) may be inordinately impacted by the economic ripples caused by the crisis.

Your first communication with them needs to be “Are you OK?” The opportunity to encourage, pray for, stand beside, and empathize with your key financial partners is

never greater than during times of crisis. This is the time to function in the ministry of fundraising!

If you have not yet communicated your concern and care with those in this key constituency—do it today. And do it before you tell them how the ministry is impacted by the crisis.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Peter Drucker, often thought of as the Father of Management Thinking, said, “The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

Remember:

- trust God (remember, He's not intimidated by this coronavirus)
- practice the proven fundamentals of fundraising
- communicate well and often with our most highly invested partners

Then we will be creating a future where our work remains vital, effective, and well-funded—all to the glory of God our Father. May it be so.