

## The Place of Development in the Christian Institution

According to your mission statement, where does ministry “happen” in your organization? If you are a school it may be in the classroom or faculty office. For rescue missions it may be in the chapel or over a hot meal or in an addiction recovery class. For camps it is likely around campfires or in small group tent meetings. For some ministries it may be in pre-natal counseling sessions for single mothers who choose life, or in one-to-one meetings on college campuses where the gospel is presented to coeds. It may be in countless countries around the world where food and the gospel are shared with the poorest of the poor or through the broadcast and print media that bring Christ to the nations. Whatever your ministry, it is likely that you can easily identify the primary places where ministry “happens.”

This short paper is a challenge to Christian ministries to consider an additional place where dynamic, vital ministry takes place every day in the heart of your organization, namely, in the battle that is fought through the work of your development department.

The past thirty years has seen the rise of the professional fund raising office as a necessary component to a viable Christian ministry. The term ‘development’ has been used to define those activities that serve to raise the funds required for Christian schools, colleges, camps, missions, and countless other organizations.

With this new status and role has come the recognition that without good fundraising a great majority of ministries would cease to exist. The importance and value of the development office is seldom in dispute. Most ministries understand that, like it or not, their fund raising department is a vital part of the health of their ministry.

However, in my experience I have discovered that far too few ministries would identify the development department as a primary locus of *ministry*. In fact, many view development work as more of a ‘necessary evil’ which they are willing to tolerate in their midst as long as the funds continue to roll in. It is not uncommon for ministry leaders and even boards to see the development department as spiritually disconnected to the rest of the ministry. That is, while the rest of the staff are dealing with “spiritual” issues relating to ministry, those development folk deal in the more “worldly” arena of wealth and how to beg for it respectfully.

This is not an exaggeration. I have had numerous development professionals confide in me that the prevailing attitude in their organization is that the development department is tolerated solely because of the importance of its product for the health of the mission. As a result, development professionals feel isolated, disengaged and even quietly denigrated because of their association with money, asking and wealth.

In true kingdom terms, however, the exact opposite may actually be the truth. As shocking as it may seem to many, there may be no place in your entire organization where ministry is “happening” in a more dynamic, counter-cultural way than in your development office.

There are several reasons why I would make such a claim. The first is that we live in a culture that worships money and all the power and prestige it can buy. Money defines us. It gives us power and control. We are satiated with appeals for all that money can buy and we are reminded countless times daily that true happiness and meaning in life come by way of what sound investing or the lottery or a better job can buy us. Christian development professionals walk into this cultural onslaught every day when they challenge God’s people to be obedient, generous stewards.

The second reason is found in the church's failure to identify and confront this thirst for the material and the lust for the power it brings. Instead of addressing it head-on as a major spiritual issue which demands a place at the heart of the church's preaching and teaching, the history of the church's dealing with these issues is abysmal. It is easy to conclude that the church of Jesus Christ has, for all intents and purposes, turned the entire matter of money, possessions and power over to the enemy. We don't teach it in our seminaries, preach it in our pulpits or study it in our Bible classes. Pastors don't like to talk about it and parishioners don't like to hear about it. Despite the fact that Jesus talked more about money than any other single issue except the kingdom of God, we are reticent to deal with it in other than superficial, once-a-year, apologetic ways.

And so the donors to any Christian ministry are left to make their stewardship decisions in the thin air between the overwhelming cultural pressure of consumerism on one hand and the deafening ecclesiastical silence on the other. It is no wonder we have so few true stewards in the church. There is an intense battle for the hearts of God's people when it comes to godly stewardship. The enemy is powerful and the battle that must be engaged to call Christians back to holistic, one-kingdom stewardship is hugely challenging.

Into this fray everyday we send out our intrepid development officers. Their job, if they are to be faithful to their calling, is to win back the hearts of donors and raise up godly stewards for the kingdom of God. The enemy of all Christian development work is well-equipped, fully entrenched and unashamedly aggressive. The Christian development professional's task is to minister to people with regard to their decisions concerning their wealth, the very wealth that the world uses to define them, which secures for them power and prestige and which guarantees them a sense of worth and value. The Christian development professional's calling is to minister to the donor in such a way that they take this precious Mammon and decide to simply give it away- *joyfully!* If it were not for the amazing power of the Holy Spirit, the enemy would surely laugh them out of existence.

The people working in your development department are nothing less than warriors. They march into battle everyday whenever they take on the church's accommodation to a consumerist culture. They deal with people's most intimate issues and challenge them to carry out courageous and selfless acts for the benefit of your ministry.

For these reasons, these development warriors must be the most spiritually mature people you can find. They must be lifted up in prayer daily. They need encouragement and they need allies. They need to be well-equipped, routinely trained and constantly supported. They are on the front lines, and their work is ministry whose effects reach far beyond the bottom line dollars they secure for your organization. Their work is kingdom work and as such it has eternal value.

My plea is for every ministry leader and every board member to understand and embrace this view of development work. In doing so, I challenge CEO's and board members to cultivate within your ministry a mindset that affirms the work of your development team as ministry. Pray for them, encourage them, partner with them, and ensure that your entire organization moves beyond the misguided dualistic notions of 'ministry' and 'fund raising' and fully embraces this work as kingdom work.

My plea to every development officer is to be a steady and clear voice for holistic stewardship in your institution. The transformation of an institution to one that embraces stewardship begins with the transformation of the chief development officer into a holistic, godly steward. It spreads from there to the entire development team. As you allow the Holy Spirit to work this transformation in you and through your department, you can hope and

pray for the larger transformation of your entire ministry, and from there to your donors and your mission. It starts with you, today. It is your ministry, your privilege and your calling.

May God grant you the wisdom and courage, humility and grace for this holy and worthy vocation.