

A Spirituality of Fundraising Guide

For Kitchen Tables and Council Tables

Henri Nouwen's long-standing work, *A Spirituality of Fundraising*, provides not only a theological framework for thinking about the opportunity and invitation that stewardship and fundraising brings, but it also offers a gentle yet compelling argument for how fundraising is central to spiritual health and well-being.

This book is a quick and easy read, making it ideal for rostered and lay people alike, and certainly it should be used at both the council table as well as the kitchen table. After-all, figuring out where you are as a leader when it comes to comfortability regarding financial matters is key to engaging others in an authentic and honest way.

This short guide will provide some reflection questions to go along with each chapter. These questions are meant to provoke conversation, not recall chapter information, and making sure users know this is important because, well, so often we get trapped into the thought pattern that prioritizes "right answer" mentality over "critical engagement."

There is no right answer.

After each chapter there is a short follow-up activity which is optional, but may be the most beneficial for folks new to the topic, especially those within the parish.

Finally, this resource is meant to be "evergreen," and can be used at a retreat setting or as an opener for monthly council meetings. As you go through this work, I encourage you to continually take note of thoughtful questions that arise in your mind, as well as thoughtful questions others pose that are worth remembering.

This work has stood the test of time. It does not deal with tactics for fundraising success, but rather with a disposition and posture toward fundraising as ministry itself. Mine its depths and find the wisdom both within these pages and within the hearts and minds of those who engage these pages.

Pax,

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Session One: The Preface

In the Preface we get the landscape of not only the book in our hands, but also the heart of the author who wrote it.

Discussion questions:

1. Sue Mosteller, CSJ mentions an oft-repeated phrase: “Generosity begets generosity.” (vi) When have you known this to be true in your own life? If you don’t agree with it, why not?
2. Mosteller notes that Henri originally thought that fundraising was a “necessary but unpleasant activity to support spiritual things.” (vii) His perspective changed, though, and he came around to seeing “Fundraising is first and foremost a form of ministry.” Which of these perspectives more speaks to your reality and why?

Activity: Write down or tell someone about a time when you felt that fundraising and giving were most directly related to spiritual health or growth.

Session Two: Fundraising as Ministry

Henri invites us to consider the spiritual side of fundraising.

Discussion questions:

1. Nouwen says, “I ask for money standing up, not bowing down, because I believe in what I am about. I believe that I have something important to offer.” (19) What’s your reaction to the idea of “asking for money standing up?” How have you seen this practiced? In contrast, how have you seen the “begging” side of fundraising, and what was your reaction?
2. Nouwen draws a distinction between a “successful transaction” and a “successful relationship.” (20) How are these two things different from one another? When have you seen either separately, and both done together?

Activity: What is happening in your ministry that you are proud to “ask for money standing up, not bowing down?” Write it out or tell someone about it. Noting what we are most proud of is important for speaking authentically about what we do.

Session Three: Helping the Kingdom Come About

Living into the realm of sufficiency.

Discussion questions:

1. “It is the realm of sufficiency where we are no longer pulled here and there by anxiety about having enough.” (24) What does the “realm of sufficiency” look like for you (if you can articulate it)?
2. Nouwen quotes generously from the Epistles in this section, most likely because the Epistles were not only pastoral letters, they were also fundraising appeals for the Apostles. “Indeed,” he says, “if we raise funds for the creation of a community of love, we are helping God build the kingdom.” How is your community doing that?

Activity: Write down in concrete terms your “realm of sufficiency,” either for you individually or for your church community. How much is enough so that anxiety around finances can be shown the exit?

Session Four: Our Security Base

What does money mean to you?

Discussion questions:

1. Right at the outset Nouwen invites us to consider a deep and difficult truth: “We will never be able to ask for money if we do not know how we ourselves relate to money.” (27) How do you relate to money? How does your church community relate to money?
2. “The pressure,” Nouwen says, “in our culture to secure our own future and to control our lives as much as possible does not find support in the Bible.” (32) While this may be true, economic realities in our homes and our communities also come into play, yes? How do we balance these realities with the idea that God has put us into community to alleviate some of the pressures and strains? How does Nouwen’s quote sound to you? Is it realistic? Why or why not?

Activity: Write down or tell someone an honest assessment regarding your relationship with money.

Session Five: People Who Are Rich

Wealth can create a chasm between people that must be authentically breached if we are to engage people where they are.

Discussion questions:

1. Nouwen highlights that sometimes people with wealth believe that all people see in them is their money. (37) Have you seen this to be true? Do you know this to be true?
2. “Let’s not talk about money right now. Let’s just talk about you,” Nouwen offers in an example exchange with a person of wealth. He’s meeting them at the place of relationship first. How do you as a ministry leader, or you as a council, do the relationship-building piece first?

Activity: What is one way you can authentically show appreciation for those in your community, seeing them for who they are not for what they have?

Session Six: Asking

Asking is not begging, it's inviting people to put their resources toward what God is doing in the world.

Discussion questions:

1. Nouwen notes, "When rich people make us jealous or angry, we reveal that money in some way is still our master and that therefore we are not ready to ask for it." (43) What's your first reaction to that statement? How does it resonate with you, or how does it make you think/feel?
2. We are encouraged to approach potential donors "in the Spirit of Christ." (45) What does this look like to you? How might you prepare yourself to have this kind of disposition?

Activity: Practice an ask. Figure out an actual need that your community has, make a plan to approach someone about it, and do a mock ask. If you're doing this at your kitchen table, perhaps write through the steps that you might take to ask for support.

Session Seven: A New Communion

Fundraising and stewardship draws a community closer together.

Discussion questions:

1. "When fundraising as ministry calls us together in communion with God and with one another, it must hold out the real possibility of friendship and community," Nouwen notes. (49) What are ways you find friendship and community in the places where you share your resources? How does your community intentionally foster community?
2. "Spiritual communion," Nouwen notes, "also reveals itself in a new fruitfulness." (51) What do you think this means? How have you seen new fruitfulness in your community?

Activity: Call someone and thank them for being a part of your community. If you are in a council/board setting, have everyone make a call and just simply thank the person on the receiving end for their support, participation, and generosity. If a call is too intimidating, have them send a text doing the same. Perhaps make this a regular practice for your council gatherings.

Session Eight: Prayer and Gratitude

Gratitude, like prayer, is intentional.

Discussion questions:

1. Nouwen notes that, "Prayer is the radical starting point of fundraising because in prayer we slowly experience a reorientation of all our thoughts and feelings about ourselves and others." (56) How is and isn't prayer the starting point for your fundraising/stewardship? Note that Nouwen isn't suggesting we pray that others have generosity, but that we become generous in our disposition toward others.
2. In Nouwen's view, gratitude glows from a "recognition that who we are and what we have are gifts to be received and shared." (57) How might this definition be shared with others in your community with intention?

Activity: Write a prayer of gratitude that aims to ground the pray-er(s) in a reorientation of heart and spirit.

Session Nine: Your Kingdome Come

In just a few short statements Nouwen summarizes just what fundraising can be through the lens of spirituality.

Discussion questions:

1. Has Nouwen convinced you that fundraising is a "rich and beautiful activity?" (60) Why or why not?
2. Do you see a connection between God's kingdom on earth and the spirituality of fundraising? How do you see it? In what ways is it still unclear?

Activity: Write down your learnings from this book. What things have shifted in your mind and/or the minds and hearts of those you're using it with? How can you make any shifts into concrete practices for generosity and fundraising in your community?