

**Fundraiser's Prayer Book**

*Insights and inspiration for faith-driven fundraisers*

By Dion McInnis

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning or other – except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles without written permission of the author. Copyright © Dion McInnis 2020.

All scriptural references come from the National American Standard Bible (NASB).



### **Acknowledgements and Thanks**

This book is dedicated with love, respect, gratitude and appreciation to:

**God:** For my gifts and the courage to bring them to the world, for they are His. To God, be the glory.

**Mom and Dad:** Dorothy and James Russell. Gone, but never forgotten and loved every day for their love, their belief in me and their encouragement to be who I am.

**My sons:** Dion, Justin and Cameron. My heroes. Being their dad is my greatest blessing.

**My grandkids:** Six at the time of this publication, they remind me of God's love for humanity and the beauty of hope.

**My wife, Cheryl:** For your love and support, I look forward to growing old together, gaining in love, faith and hope.

**The donors and colleagues** that I have been blessed to come to know, who shared of their hearts and souls in their quest to make the world a better place moment by moment.



## **Preface**

I was never supposed to be a fundraiser. All my life, I knew that I was going to be a photographer and writer. After all, I was a photographer at 6, a writer at 12 and a poet since birth. I was active in chambers of commerce and church; I was a freelancer, a father and a husband. My business plopped in the oil industry bust of the 1980s that exacted a toll in the Houston area. No one wanted to hire a writer/photographer for full-time employment. A visit to the career placement ministry of the parish of my childhood led me to a new résumé format. The new format and consistent prayers – I would say the latter led to the former – resulted in a few interviews and a new job.

I entered the university world in 1987 as a publications coordinator, providing me the opportunity to write and photograph. Conditions changed quickly.

Within six months, I had the green light from the dean to create a college-based external relations office. Everything changed after that. Only by trusting God's ways could this bankrupted writer-photographer, father-photographer transition onto a path that would allow for his gifts to be utilized in ways that serve others in such momentous ways. Never doubt; always trust. In such times it is hard to not be anxious.

I became quite busy in my new career path and, though I believed I would be in the university world for only three years, I remained there to serve four institutions over 27 years. While enjoying all the roles in my life, I also became more prayerful and active in my church. Every activity, challenge and success continued to shape my faith and career. Among other things, I was becoming a fundraiser.

Isaiah 6:8 declares, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" I am confident that each career move, each life move – whether "successful" or not – was actually a response to

feeling called, often for reasons I knew not at the time. In 2001, I accepted a job at what would be my last university assignment. As I sat in the moving van in my Albuquerque driveway, ready to return to my hometown of Houston, my then-9-year old son brought out a clear plastic sandwich bag with grass from our front yard. He said, "Here dad, so you can see if the grass is really greener there."

In 2017, while interviewing with a nonprofit, their vice president commented that my myriad experiences – personal and professional, vocational and avocational – likely enabled me to connect in meaningful ways to almost anyone. I believe she was right. I also believe that everyone who pays attention to their own life can find ways to connect to others with authenticity and love.

Connecting with authenticity and love enables fundraisers to empower donors to accomplish their goals in concert with the nonprofit's, not compel them to give to satisfy the objectives of the fundraiser or the organization. Fundraisers can help inform and inspire decisions to be made by the donor's free will. It is the donor's money. They can do with it whatever they want. They can give to an organization or not; they can hold their donor-advised fund monies for as long as they want (we know not their plans); they can bequest it or not (data reveal that most people don't bequest – they don't have wills). Such is exactly as it should be: Their treasure, their choice.

A quick scan of the Bible for "freewill" yields dozens of references to freewill offerings. It matters to God that those who share do so out of personal decisions to use their free will in distributing their treasures to the causes and needs they believe in.

As fundraisers, we are blessed with opportunities daily to help organizations by inspiring potential donors to give freely to organizations whose causes matter to them. Whether we are working in annual fund, planned giving, or anything in between, connecting to and listening to donors is paramount.

I believe we can, and should, look to our faith and faith-based guides more so than to fundraising gurus or experts. Thomas Merton shared meaningful insights that instruct us how to develop meaningful relationships with others. He said, "If you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I am living for, in detail, ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for." And what is one of the early stages of the donor relationship development process? Identification.

As we learn these things, we grow in wisdom and in love. And then we are able to connect to more people in meaningful ways. The cycle continues.

I doubt that anything about fundraising will be included on my epitaph. That's okay. I do know, however, that in my quest to use the gifts God has blessed me with, in ways that serve Him while empowering others, fundraising has been part of what I am here to do. Saint Frances of Assisi wrote, "I have done what was mine to do; may God teach you what is yours to do."

Finding out what is ours to do is a lifelong journey of increasing clarity along the way. I pray that you find the clarity, courage and compassion to be the type of fundraiser God can help you be.

It started with a pink phone message note on my desk. A donor wanted to talk about funding a scholarship in honor of their deceased daughter. With a bit of research before my return call, I discovered their daughter was a young teacher who had been strangled on the grounds of her apartment complex a few years earlier and had passed away after lingering three days. I returned the grieving parents' call and requested an opportunity to meet them in person to discuss honoring and memorializing their daughter.

A wonderful couple, they were more than pleased to share stories about their daughter who was acknowledged in her school district as an outstanding early childhood teacher in her first year. They shared how they purchased her a rocking chair so she could provide comforting, rocking hugs to students; how she loved teaching and how they provided her funds to purchase supplies for her class; and, many stories of their family life. Throughout the conversation, light jazz music played softly in the background. They shared that they were interested in a proposal based on a \$50,000 contribution that would be invested and spent out over time.

The proposal that I personally delivered a week later included a special day of visits for them to tour campus and meet with some of their daughter's former professors (without any fundraisers or administrators in attendance), attend a jazz concert led by the professor who taught their daughter and attend a home football game in the near future.

At the football game, the husband pulled me aside and asked for a few tweaks to the proposal. He also let me know that their contribution would be \$300,000. "My wife's first good day since our daughter's death was the day she read your proposal." The scholarship and a post-graduation stipend to help the recipients purchase things for their classroom reflected the legacy of their family and their daughter.



Months later, at an event where the parents were able to meet the first scholarship recipient, I was shocked to see how much she looked like their daughter. She presented the donors a small, white wicker basket containing Gerber daisies, unbeknownst to her that their daughter's favorite flower was Gerber daisies.

When I announced my departure from the university, the mother sent me a thank you note where she revealed that she was now able to serve at her church on a ministry for parents who had lost a child to violence.

**Proverbs 2:2** Make your ear attentive to wisdom,  
Incline your heart to understanding...

**Proverbs 15:13** A joyful heart makes a cheerful face,  
But when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken.

*Help me, Lord, to listen with an ear for understanding.  
Help me to use that understanding to serve and to love.  
Help me to hear pain and pleasure, fear and confidence, grief and  
joy, brokenness and strength,  
And when I hear  
And when I understand  
Guide me to loving service.*

He was more than a member of the faculty; he was more than a donor; he was more than a friend...he was a collaborator and creator of projects that had meaning and value. He initiated the annual Veterans Day event at the university we worked at; it soon became so big that my office took it over and he served as the emcee, inspiration and volunteer lead. We built a friendship of mutual respect and shared values, so when he dropped by the office to share his newest "why not?" idea, I knew it was going to be a good one.

"I was watching a show the other night about the American Revolution and the Liberty Bell," he said. He was a professor in legal studies and a lawyer; he was a scholar in, and champion of, the Constitution. His curiosity about how the Declaration of Independence and Constitution came to be was insatiable. "What do you think about us getting an exact replica of the Liberty Bell for campus? The foundry in England that created the original – and there was actually more than one – is still in business." And so the seed was planted.

The potential to incorporate the Liberty Bell into campus life and across all colleges inspired us. We collaborated on the proposal which was presented to the president and the provost; they weren't supportive. After he described the academic potential, I weighed in on other aspects, like how the project would position us uniquely among universities anywhere, much less in the Houston area. He and I shared how the fundraising would inspire existing and new donors. The president inquired about the project being completed solely on private funds. "Yes," my friend and I said.

The foundry had some staff challenges along the way and the project took longer than we expected. Every day of the multi-year project, I wore an American flag tie; actually, I wore one out and the second one is haggard, too.

For my retirement from the university, he gave me a framed set of images of the bell. They serve as a great reminder of persistence, friendship, collaboration and projects founded on beliefs.

He is now retired, but he remains my friend. Though the campus did not embrace the Liberty Bell across all academic areas like we envisioned, he reminds me that we did good work and made a difference. He is right. We are blessed in the fundraising world to engage with such people that we grow with and because of.

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-10** Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.

*Thank you, Lord, for the exceptional people You have placed in my life and for this field of labor in which we can serve others while strengthening and being strengthened. You created us to work together, to serve and to love, and in this profession we have the blessing of others as we lift each other in Your service.*

The university had a new president, someone who had served there for a few decades. He had touched many lives during his path from the classroom, through the ranks and to the chair of the president. Many were grateful; I was fortunate to meet many of them.

One, who I had not met, committed through back channels that he was going to make a \$1 million contribution to honor the new president, but the gift would be made anonymously. There are many reasons why a donor could prefer anonymity. For whatever reason, their request must be abided, particularly as the world becomes less safe for wealthy people.

A rumor somehow got started that the donor's last name was Smith. A student working in the media relations office that reported to me wrote a "humorous" editorial in the college newspaper speculating about who a donor by the name of Smith may actually be, even suggesting maybe "Smith" was a drug dealer. In the college town, the newspaper was sent to many local residents, including the donor's liaison on the gift.

I called the student into my office and explained that he was about to have his education furthered on the topics of integrity, professionalism and due diligence. After the meeting, I called the donor's liaison, apologized for the "editorial," and conveyed the gist of the meeting that I had with the student. He appreciated the call and said the donor would be fine with the situation and how it was handled.

The donor's name was Smith, and now a building on campus has his full name.

In the process of developing a trusting relationship with donors, and their advisors and liaisons, we must put ego and personal credit aside to respect their wishes. Thanks to their generosity, many great things are accomplished, and sometimes they don't want the news of their support to be shared.

**Mark 1:40-45** And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, and He said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.

*Dear Lord,*

*Provide me the strength to tame my ego and refrain from sharing inappropriately the things I know as a quest for my own glory and acclaim. Help me fight Evil's temptation of pride and hold private the stories and wishes of those who do not seek fame or glory for their acts of service or generosity. Enhance my ability to listen, but still my urge to speak.*