

Raising money for a bigger cause

When national disasters strike, it helps to know that such an overwhelming crisis could be turned into an opportunity to build goodwill in the community

Hurricane Katrina was one of the worst natural disasters to hit the United States. Churches all over the country must be asking themselves, “What does God want us to do?” Every church may have a different calling.

For many hurricane victims, their faith and their church community is what’s giving them hope through this crisis. Throughout Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi, churches were on the front lines and opening their doors to hurricane victims in areas the American Red Cross simply couldn’t get to.

What we have learned from national disasters such as the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks is that many people don’t want to give to a national organization. They want to give locally, many through their church. If your church wants to have a fundraiser for hurricane victims, tell your parishioners why you feel called to give.

As one of my coaches, Sharon Ervine, tells her faith-based groups, “Tell donors that God has called us to take care of our neighbor and to love and help each other.”

Focus on abundance

Raising money for hurricane victims can be a blessing in many ways. Not only does it help hurricane victims and is a part of your congregation’s mission, but it helps build goodwill in the community.

I’ve been touched by nonprofit groups not directly affected by the hurricane, but who are helping with the relief anyway. Within a week of the storm, a couple of our alumni groups wrote to us sharing what they were doing for hurricane victims, even though they have their own fundraising needs. Two groups in Louisville, KY, have really brought home the meaning of abundance. The Cerebral Palsy K.I.D.S. Center held a Cajun luncheon to raise money for hurricane victims, and Summit Academy, a school for children with learning disabilities, had students bring in pennies one day, then nickels, dimes and quarters to raise money.

“While it was money for them, it was building community for us,” says Jim Littlefield-Dalmases, director of marketing and development for the K.I.D.S. Center. “We had staff, board, volunteers, donors, society members. It just helps

us remain part of their lives. I hope it inspires others and keeps them focused on abundance.”

Extra source of new money

Loyal donors don’t slip away in a crisis. They seem to have a special “extra pocket” out of which they give for disaster in addition to their regular giving to their favorite organizations.

In its latest report on the state of philanthropy, Illinois-based Giving USA found that last year’s tsunami in Southeast Asia had a negligible impact on fundraising in this country. As Jon Guy, the major gifts officer for American Refugee International in Minneapolis noted, when kids came to them with a wad of \$20 bills for tsunami victims, this was new money raised, not money diverted from another cause.

Many of the donations to hurricane victims may be from new donors, who may want to get more involved with your church. Remember to have a way (such as a sign-up card) to capture everyone’s name and follow-up as best you can with every attendee to thank them for coming. Ideally, your donors would receive a call from a pastor or associate pastor.

Fundraising basics

When raising money for hurricane victims, as for any cause, it’s important to remember the three basics:

Really know the need: Aim to share three basic facts about your cause. You want people to know exactly where the money is going.

Tell a story: Give an example of how someone has been helped by your cause. Tell this person’s story before, during and after they received help. The more you connect with someone emotionally, the more they will want to give.

Be passionate: Remember how important the work of your organization is for the greater good.

Terry Axelrod is the founder and CEO of Raising More Money, a Seattle-based organization that has trained and coached more than 2,000 nonprofits to build sustainable funding from individual donors.



By Terry Axelrod