Are All Seasons Good Seasons for Fundraising?

Is there ever a season that's not good for fundraising? Could all seasons be good seasons for fundraising? In July 1995, I arrived at the Catholic Diocese of Belleville in Southern Illinois and joined with Bishop Wilton Gregory, a remarkable leader and person, to restore peace and to rebuild trust among the people of that diocese. Sadly, about ten percent of the priests and deacons of the diocese in the preceding several years had been removed from their places of ministry because of serious allegations of one form of misconduct or another. Bishop Gregory decided after a year or so in Belleville, to hire a Director of Development. As I considered accepting the opportunity, I thought that if I failed because things were impossible to improve, people would certainly understand and not hold it against me should I seek another job. On the other hand, if I could help Bishop Gregory succeed in restoring the trust and confidence of the people of the diocese, I would have a great story to tell potential future employers.

I accepted the position in July of 1995 and got seriously to work. During the following ten years, the development operation grew from a half-time person before I arrived, to a fulltime staff of seven when I departed. We established a robust annual giving appeal. We prepared and led the first comprehensive campaign for the diocese. We created several giving societies which inspired parishioners to give generously. We formed the first foundation for that diocese. As it turned out, this role proved to be a remarkable opportunity for me to do good for others and to do good with this leader and with this diocese.

Some years later in August 2008, I began working as Vice Chancellor for University Advancement for the University of Missouri-St. Louis. I was hired to bring a campaign public in my first year. The campaign was three years into a seven-year campaign. When I started the job, I was feeling excited and optimistic, but shortly thereafter, the great recession broke upon us and our economy was in near collapse. All those invested in the stock market and across many other markets lost significant value in their holdings. No one knew what the future held and were deeply shaken. It was in that environment that I advised the Chancellor that we should go forward with this campaign. I had been encouraged by an article I read during my deliberations that stated that, during the great depression, some organizations had raised more funds than before it. I thought that UMSL could be one of those success stories despite the unfolding great recession.

We worked hard and during that first year, we raised 54% more than any other year in the history of fundraising for the university. We went on to exceed the hundred-million-dollar goal by $54.3 million during a very difficult period for the economy. **All seasons can be good seasons for fundraising; it's what we do with what we've got.**

If we represent an organization that is accomplishing good and has respect in the community, we can take heart regardless of our current circumstances. If we have a meaningful case that we can share with people who would be supportive of it, we have reason to remain confident and hopeful. If there are prospective donors who would step up and contribute as generously as they can we are in position to succeed. Then, we must be willing to work wholeheartedly, relentlessly for as long as necessary, to achieve the goal we set out to accomplish.

Undertaking great fundraising challenges, even more so during challenging times, tests our commitment and convictions. Whether it's the wrenching difficulties of a diocese or a severe economic downturn, **every season can be a good season for those of us who pursue wholeheartedly the necessary funds for organizations that are accomplishing significant good for others and for our world.**