

Local Fundraising in the Philippines with Zenet Maramara

Dr. Zenet Maramara's journey of setting up local fundraising in the Philippines, where it has never been done before.

Introduction

Rob: Welcome to today's podcast. Sponsored by the book, [When Money Goes on Mission: Fundraising and Giving in the 21st Century](#).

I'm here today with Dr. Zenet Maramara of the [Asian Theological Seminary](#) in Manila, Philippines.

Welcome.

Zenet: Thank you. Thank you, Rob.

Rob: Now as way of introducing her, I'm gonna go back about four years when I first met her.

I think it was four years ago at the Stewardship Summit in--

Zenet: 2014 six years.

Rob: Six years. Okay. Six years ago. During that year, I was on an assignment from First Fruit in preparation for writing the book.

To write a daily blog of whatever I did that day. So whatever I was involved with, and the powers that be at [First Fruit](#) wanted to see if I had any writing ability at all.

I wanted to prove to them that they were crazy trying to get me to write a book.

So I wrote these blogs in a very kind of whimsical way and tried to say something serious, but I didn't think this would ever come out to be a book, but nonetheless it did.

And so, here's the one I wrote on that day that I met Zenet so permit me just to read this. Useless Bay Post, number 31.

You can find these by the way, on the First Fruit website. "A real life Walter Mitty."

There's a movie coming out inspired by James Thurber's classic book, [*The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*](#).

It's about an ordinary man who daydreams he can do extraordinary things. I was deeply influenced by Thurber's writing when I was a child.

So I may ask you to permit me a moment of daydreaming. If I could be anyone else for a day or even a lifetime, whom would I choose to be?

My answer as I write this might surprise you. If you guessed that I would wanna be a quarterback of the Seahawks, juking and on charging linebacker to score the winning touchdown, you'd be close but get no cigar.

Maybe you would guess a US president who makes our enemies friends and solves endemic poverty once and for all.

Closer, but still, no cigar. Not even the wrapping.

No today, I'd wanna to be a diminutive Filipina, Zenet Maramara standing in front of a group of academics and authors and thought leaders, who have been at the forefront of encouraging stewardship among American Christians.

There she was, four foot 10 in heels explaining how she had established a stewardship movement.

Complete with a center in Asian Theological Seminary while also establishing a center for corporate responsibility and now for good measure, is about to reinvent herself as an environmentalist.

She says she reinvents herself every seven years. She's a real life Walter Mitty.

In a previous iteration, she had established the first development department at the seminary, and taken it from a US and European donor centric dependency to a paragon of local resourcing sustained by Philippine stewardship.

She gave the concluding paper at the Stewardship Summit that I've been attending, and she had a complete command of the room.

Her story of what she had accomplished in her homeland, was the stuff that had been the dreams of those in the audience for years.

When she finished, they asked how they could follow her. She demurred, and avoided answering.

Earlier she had said, naming several of the writers in the room, "You were all my mentors and you didn't know it."

Pressing further, she was asked how she takes on such big challenges. And she said, "I eat the elephant one bite at a time." Always humble.

She was at times a Spitfire, a humorist, and an exhorter. For me, she's a living example of the embodiment of what I hope to see happen throughout the majority world.

I'm not a winning quarterback or a president they'll build monuments for. But I've seen a daydream become a reality and that's good enough for me.

So welcome Zenet.

Zenet: Thank you. Rob that's the first time I heard of that blog you've written. You didn't even share it with me.

Rob: No. I didn't know how you'd react.

But today I decided to, well what the heck, I'm at the end of my career, you're at the end of yours.

Zenet: But, coming from you it's such an accolade.

Because I consider you our godfather in the resource development movement. Are you--

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Setting Up Local Fundraising at Asian Theological Seminary

Rob: Now I'm gonna demure. Well Zenet, thanks for being with us here this day.

And so, let's begin with the story at [ATS](#). And what that was like when you got started.

How did you take that on? Many of our listeners and viewers may be facing, may be in a dependency situation right now, one side or the other of it.

They may be in an American mission that is responsible for a seminary somewhere in the world.

Sending adjunct professors, sending funding, raising money here in the United States for that seminary, scholar-shiping and all the rest.

Or they may be an emerging leader who is leading a seminary or a Bible school in some a somewhat small part of the world that hasn't been noticed yet.

And they're wondering, how do I find the real funding I need to build the classrooms, to build the infrastructure and serve the church that is growing in my country?

So tell us, how did this all start for you?

Zenet: Well let me begin by giving you a little background about ATS.

Asian Theological Seminary was started by American missionaries in 1969.

So like all American-led institutions, we had American leadership, American teachers, American funding and funding from Europe as well, UK.

But after 20 years, the seminary began to nationalize, the American leadership was turned over to Filipino leadership and we had a first Asian president, a Filipino, Dr. Isabella Magali.

And while we were nationalizing leadership, sending our Filipino faculty to obtain their PhD.

And we also wanted to nationalize funding as well. Because at that time, about 70% of our income, was coming from the United States and UK, and about 30% from local sources.

So I was a graduate of ATS and because I took Communications Degree in college after graduating from the seminary, I was taken in as a staff to do promotions, marketing.

I didn't know about fundraising, but nobody was doing fundraising at the time.

So we'd do a little bit of fundraising sponsoring special events. And after seven years of doing that, weaning fundraising actually, I took a sabbatical to study fundraising in the US.

So I took my second masters, at Regent University in Virginia Beach. And there, the Lord met me.

I had my second conversion. It was a conversion to stewardship.

I realized that God owns it all. God owns all the money I am fundraising.

And that made a big difference. It's a game changer for me. It liberated me from the burden of having to be responsible for raising the money for ATS.

Knowing that my job as steward, is just to be faithful in what my hands find to do.

And because God owns it, therefore I just have to trust him to provide for it. That was in 1999.

I came back after my studies and set up the local fundraising department. It wasn't easy.

I was a one woman shop because like, I think many Christian organizations can relate to not having resources to afford a full time person to do fundraising. But it has to be done.

And I think that's one of the major factors why we were able to succeed in the goal of reversing the ratio of 70, 30, 70%, local and just 30% international funding because there was a commitment on the part of the seminary leadership from the board to the president.

And here I was a full time person, although I was multitasking. Eventually I needed somebody to help me.

So I took in an assistant to help with fundraising. I met several challenges such as people were not ready to fundraise.

And in the Philippines, unlike in the United States, where you have 200 years of philanthropy, funding or institutional fundraising was just a new thing.

Rob: Hadn't been done.

Zenet: Hadn't been done before. So we were trailblazing in this area.

And in fact, I remember, one alumni we wrote, 'cause we were writing letters telling them that we need this money in order to raise leaders for Asia.

And I remember one alumni of the seminary was angry why we were asking them for money.

So we meet these kind of obstacles along the way, along the journey. But I think one of the characteristics that they tell me, that I am tenacious and persevering.

So I just pressed on, just pressed on.



A Paradigm Shift in Fundraising: Transactional to Transformative

But you know, fundraising although, what is the number one important thing that is needed, is a shift in the paradigm.

Whereas before, many people think fundraising is begging for money or it's an embarrassing humiliating act, but because we think fundraising as a transactional activity.

But when I realize that it's God's ownership of all things, and that this is a ministry that when I come to you to invite you to support the ministry of ATS, it's really an invitation to participate in what God is doing through our organization.

So I will not be embarrassed to do that. And in fact, like Henri Nouwen says, "I will not ask you for money, if it will not be good for your soul."

So ministry fundraising is connecting people to God, connecting people to their resources.

And that really what emboldened me and what kept me going over the years. Because if you don't have that kind of a mindset, then fundraising is just another job.

And it's a hard job because there are lots of details involved, a lot of every day activities you need to do. It's a year, a whole year calendar of events.

And in fact, in the US, I think the burnout rate for development officer is three years and they burn out.

But if you have that strong sense that this is God's calling for me, and that this is a ministry, and I'm helping people to connect with their resources, then it does something else. I'm blessed.

You are blessed and everybody is blessed.

Rob: And it becomes a strengthening rather than a deleting kind of thing in your life.

Zenet: There has been joy after that. I mean, transformational fundraising is joyous.

Rob: So today, what's the situation at [ATS](#)?

Zenet: Well, from 70%, we're now on 99.5% locally supported in terms of our operational expenses.

It doesn't mean that we say no to foreign gifts.

Of course we still need a big amount of money for capital expenses like library acquisition, computerization, still sending faculty development for higher education.

So it's kind of an interdependence. But I'm happy that local Filipinos are now supporting ATS so we're able to get our--

Rob: Wait this is the idea that we've been exploring in these podcasts.

And I tried to explore in the book of sustained interdependence.

That is, you're not dependent on these larger gifts that might come in for infrastructure needs and faculty development and such like that, but those gifts become complimentary to the fundamental work that you're doing.

Fundraising in the local Philippine from the church and the members of the church that are being served by the graduates of the seminary.

So, fundraising today really is from everywhere to everywhere.

Zenet: Right, right.



Philanthropy in the Philippines

Rob: And so in the process of doing this, have you seen a philanthropic tradition now beginning in the Philippines?

Zenet: Well that's what I would like to see.

That's why, even now that I'm almost retired, well I retired full time from ATS and no longer the fundraiser.

So there are young people doing that now and I just teach fundraising. I still would like to see, the Philippine church giving, sharing and letting go of their resources for the greater kingdom so that the work of God can flourish.

We want to see more Filipinos, giving to institutions because Filipinos are givers.

They give to the church, they give to their family, to the extended family. But giving to institutions is still a fairly new concept.

I'm glad there are institutions in the Philippines like [World Vision](#).

They also started local fundraising about 15 years ago and they're one of the World Vision offices around the world that is producing local support.

Rob: And I think Ruth Colanta's work as well. The---

Zenet: [Center for Community Transformation](#).

Rob: Probably the largest best run micro-finance program in the world today.

Zenet: And it's not just they started out as micro-finance, but they've now grown to be 10 companies.

And some of them are run by the very people that they were serving.

Former street people whom they have empowered, built skills and now they run some of the organizations like the camp site South of Manila, is run by the former street people as a cooperative.

Rob: And also, we know that Filipina missionaries throughout the Gulf region that are, and others are being sent by Philippine mission organizations.

So you're sending missionaries out across the world as well.

Zenet: We have 10 to 12 million Filipino overseas people around the world.

Many of them are serving, not just in professional capacity as medical practitioners, but also domestic helpers.

And now, there's a new trend in mission. Where you go out as a professional. You are a missionary, but you're a professional.

You're an architect, a doctor. Where as before, you have to be a full-time supported by your family and church and full-time missionaries.

So there's a changing face mission.

Rob: It's the work place mission.

Zenet: Yes, work place mission.



Lifelong Fundraising Lesson: Have the Right Biblical Foundation

Rob: Well now that you are coming near the end of your career, as we wrap up this podcast, let me ask you just a couple of more questions.

So, what are some of the things that are lifelong lessons that you've learned that you're imparting now in your classes and in your speaking engagements and others? Other things?

Zenet: Thank you for that question.

Well, for any ministry fundraising to succeed, it's important that you have the right biblical foundation.

Meaning you understand and appreciate that it's God who owns all the money, all the resources.

And from that paradigm, work out the strategies. And also you need to be persistent.

The person that the fundraiser is very important.

He needs to have or she needs to have that kind of a mindset, that kind of a transformation that I experience before you're able to ask people for money, otherwise it will, like I said, it will be just a transaction.

And then in this journey of a steward, you have to understand that you need to be patient because I learned that lesson the hard way.

I was already here. I was way ahead of everybody in my steps and I felt like there was a time, I felt like I was pulling everybody in my organization to be on the same step as I am.

And I learned that not everyone is walking on the same step as you are. Some are before us, others are behind us and that we need to be patient because the work of transformation takes patience.



Thoughts About the Future

Rob: And as a final question, as you look out to the future, what are your hopes and what are your thoughts about the future?

Zenet: I really would like to encourage young people to consider a ministry or career in fundraising.

We call it resource development, mobilizing resources. Because not many people understand what is ministry fundraising.

They think it's begging, asking for money. I really would like them to have the kind of a mindset that it is a wonderful ministry and it's like a ministry of helping, a ministry of discipling.

And if we can get more people doing that, and get more people giving and sharing, and then we can have a revolution in generosity.

If we have a revolution in generosity, then the Lord will come. And wouldn't that be nice?

Rob: That would be. And on that note, let's end. Thank you so much Zenet for this time.

Zenet: My pleasure. My pleasure. Thank you Rob for this opportunity.

Rob: You bet.