

Continuing Education

and the Campus Minister

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Continuing education is not an elective for any minister. The fact that the campus minister lives and moves and has his being in the academic community only underscores that notion. The currency of the academic market place is the interchange of ideas and information. To be either unwilling or unprepared, in some measure, to participate in that exchange imposes limitations upon one's capacity to function most efficiently and effectively.

It usually requires little time on the job to convince the average campus minister that more skills are needed to meet the demands of the challenge. Some of these skills may be learned in the process of daily experience. Some of our most important lessons come through experience. There are some things which one has to experience in order to comprehend. Like any other learning process, learning via experience has certain shortcomings. Perhaps the most obvious is that of subjectivity.

We tend to remember the good things which happen to us and in the same measure try to forget the unpleasant. This is unfortunate, because some of the lessons for which we have the greatest need may be in the realm of the unpleasant. Those unpleasant lessons may occur when some of our favorite ideas and attitudes are not only attacked, but destroyed and left in shambles. This is not to say that learning is or should be unpleasant. To the contrary, real learning is a thrilling process. But that which is highest and best is always purchased with a price. Great lessons may require great risks. Hence there is a need to enter an environment in which we can exchange ideas with others. Supposedly these experiences are to be found in the colleges, universities, and professional schools.

The campus minister who is able to take courses at the college or university where he or she works is fortunate. The local campus may provide a valuable resource for continuing education. However, there are times when the local campus does not provide us with the

needed technical expertise and we must turn to other sources. Thus the reader will understand that when we are speaking of continuing education we must include all the available avenues of learning.

In this article I would like to comment on at least three areas in which I have become painfully aware of my *need* for greater proficiency. These shortcomings are not mine alone. Colleagues in campus ministry have shared their own feelings of inadequacies which are similar to my own. To some extent they are autobiographical, but in a broader sense they are shared.

All of us in some measure recognize limitations in the area of pastoral care and counseling. The art of administration is a source of frustration and aggravation to others. The application of theology in a practical sense is a third problem.

THE NEED FOR STUDY IN PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING

According to conventional wisdom, Southern Baptists are a people of the Book. A pastor friend of mine related an incident which in some ways is typical. While he was studying at one of the Ivy League theological schools, he had a professor who would at times find himself in need of an exact quotation from the Bible. He would call upon someone in the seminar who came from Southern Baptist ranks for the quotation; so great was his confidence in Southern Baptists' appreciation for scripture. The pastor commented on the number of times this confidence was rewarded with the correct quote. Such an assumption may not be true for the average Baptist.

I fear that the idea of the "Bible Belt" is in actuality a popular religious myth. Though reverence for biblical authority may be greater in the southern region, it does not follow that biblical knowledge and biblical understanding are synonymous. A good example of this is in the concept of "salvation." Our emphasis on salvation has primarily centered on the idea of "soul salvation." There is a great deal to be said for that. We have not, however, laid enough stress on the idea of salvation as inclusive of the total personality. For that reason, many times we encounter serious problems in dealing with mental health. A strange aversion still exists among many folk in regard to psychotherapy.

Just exactly where this aversion has its origins I am not sure, but two reasons seem to appear with unfortunate frequency. Some

people fear psychologists and psychiatrists because they assume that it is an indication of insanity or weakmindedness. Others have been given the impression that if you go to a psychiatrist, then something is wrong with you spiritually. If one is really right with God, then he or she ought to be able to handle any problem. It should be our responsibility to dispel these attitudes.

Personal insecurity plays havoc with the lives of many students. In the early years of their lives, many young people have been deprived of their self-worth. They have little regard for themselves and their abilities. Many times this is reflected in their academic pursuits. Few of us have been as successful at unleashing the latent mental talents in the lives of students as we should. I have seen young people who went from a probationary status academically to the dean's list in only one semester when someone helped them appreciate their self-worth.

All of us have had to deal with young women who allow themselves to be taken advantage of sexually in search of affection. For one reason or another they were deprived of physical affection as children. In an attempt to fill that vacuum they allow themselves to be sexually abused because it provides a constant source of physical attention. Helping that student find a wholesome solution to the problem is an important part of our work.

Depression, both severe and in its milder forms, is another area of concern. Having the wisdom to observe the symptoms of depression is a worthy skill in itself. I must confess that if I had been more diligent in my own study in this area I could have been much more effective in helping students.

It goes without saying that all sexual difficulties do not come from insecurity. We find ourselves dealing with people at a time in their lives when they are experiencing their maximum sexual desires. Attempting to counsel some students about sex is almost tantamount to throwing gasoline on a fire to extinguish it. Just talking about the problem can be a source of arousal. Admonishing young people to refrain from sexual fulfillment when their desire is at its maximum is certainly a source of frustration for them.

Despite many efforts in the area of sex education by our public schools, young people still suffer from sexual misinformation. At a recent retreat a student observed that it was the first time in his life that he had heard some honest talk about sex.

While serving as a campus minister in another state, I would be called upon to lecture to the health and safety classes about sex. I found that on the average only one student in sixty received their basic information about sex from their parents. Their many questions indicated a significant lack of information on the subject. Dispelling sexual misinformation and dispensing healthy alternatives for sexual frustration is an important part of the job of a campus minister.

One of the most critical needs that students encounter is for information about healthy, creative, positive information regarding marriage and family life. Much is being written about the problems encountered by today's nuclear family. Great mobility has caused a certain rootlessness. Working mothers present a unique set of problems. The urbanization of our society has resulted in alienation and a sense of isolation. Liberal divorce laws make it far easier for marriages and homes to be dissolved. Child abuse is either growing or undergoing greater exposure. The public schools are, in numerous instances, becoming surrogate parents. The recent surveys which tell us that fifty percent of all marriages are ending in divorce and that seventy percent of the people surveyed would not marry the same person again are, to say the least, alarming.

The need to provide help is without doubt. Just exactly how we should attempt to meet the need for help is a problem unto itself. This one area of our ministry alone could occupy a person full time. Even if we cannot develop an expertise in the area of family life, we can increase our awareness of resources which may be available. Knowing competent resource persons to whom we can send students is a step in the right direction.

Although little will be said about vocational guidance, it does not follow that it is an item with a low priority. A growing number of students are encountering confusion regarding vocation. What response should one make to a student who manifests near genius capabilities in the field of mathematics, but finds her greatest fulfillment working in a bookstore? What does one say to a young man who is graduating with a degree in engineering, but has no interest in pursuing that as a vocation.

Anyone with even the most rudimentary skills in psychology and counseling or clinical pastoral care will recognize that numerous problems have been omitted. Suicide, the second leading cause of death among college students, has not been mentioned. The proper handling of conflict resolution, and drug abuse, have received no

acknowledgement. These along with numerous other problems exist. My interest is not in cataloging the range of mental and emotional problems. I have attempted to underline our need for continuing education in the area.

It would be fortunate if the need for continuing education existed only in the area of counseling. Difficulties of equal dimension present themselves to us in that portion of the job which might be labeled as "administrative." Again the casual observer will recognize that the word is being used in its broadest sense.

THE NEED FOR STUDY IN DEALING WITH ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES

Does a monthly report form exist which is satisfactory in all respects? State directors are probably much more sensitive to the problem than one might suspect. Numerous experiences happen each day in the course of the campus minister's routine of work which resist all efforts to describe. Work done the previous year may bear fruit one, two, or even three years later. How does one describe the difference between a casual introductory visit and one which has a depth experience involved? The problematic element in monthly reports will persist, but it should not cause us to overlook their potential value. Properly used and interpreted, they may be of great benefit.

Perhaps the greatest challenge we face with regard to monthly reports is in the matter of attitude. If they are approached as paperwork which must be done in order to satisfy the state office, serious limitations will persist. If, on the other hand, the monthly report becomes an opportunity for serious reflection on the work done, it may provide one with some answers to important questions. Consider these:

1. In the light of the reported statistics, which programs and events are providing the most efficient and redemptive use of human energy?
2. Does the leveling off of attendance at certain events tell us that a subtle stagnation is occurring? Or perhaps they point to the need for additional staffing.
3. Are we reporting numbers only without looking at the makeup of those participating? This may lead us to ask a further question. Are we reaching the people we need to reach?

4. Do we have any real goals in mind or are we simply "keeping the store?"

The name of the seminar and course number in which one learns to develop the best of all attitudes toward report forms is difficult to discover. Surely someone has written a book on the use and abuse of statistics. Of equal certainty is my own acknowledged need to read the same. Admittedly there exists the possibility that some insightful professor attempted to teach me that lesson in seminar and my own distaste for administrative work prevented me from learning that important lesson.

Dealing with the concept of "power" is an essential task of the campus minister. The vulnerability of our own profession causes most of us to assume that we are persons of the most limited power. While this is true in some respects, failure to comprehend the implications of power in the local campus ministry program is serious.

Several definitions of power exist. The definition which has been most helpful to me is the one which defines power as "the ability to enter into the meaningful decision-making process."

Arriving at the place where we will allow students to enter into the meaningful decision-making process is an act filled with tremendous emotional overtones. In essence what it demands is that we will allow the students with whom we work to have final say about the program. This does not mean that we will jettison the value of our own past experiences. Neither does it mean that we will, in the name of the democratic process, withhold our opinions. It does mean that we will allow the students to express their own perceived needs and that we will be responsive to their requests for answers to those needs.

Perhaps the point of greatest peril is that of our own egos suffering a bit. To admit that a student may have insights of equal, if not more value, is difficult. Does not experience and training count for nought? The answer is a resounding "yes and no." The very purpose of education is to provide one with an additional inventory of experiences with which to enrich life. Those insights and experiences ought not to be allowed to diminish opportunity for students to openly express themselves. In so doing young people learn that their voice will be heard and heeded; they develop a feeling that it is their program. Wise counsel tells us that persons are much more willing to involve themselves in that which they know to be theirs. The sharing of the decision-making process becomes, then, an activity in which one learns the very essence of power

Courses in public administration, political theory, and political problems have been extremely beneficial to me in this respect. It would appear that additional study in the areas of organizational theory and management would prove to be equally helpful.

THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THEOLOGY

"You will not receive a theological education at seminary. We attempt to provide you with rudimentary skills with which you will hopefully allow to continually enlarge your knowledge of God and his will for us." Those words are not precisely what a seminary professor once told his class, but they do represent in substance what he was trying to communicate. Over the years this writer has come to understand the import of those words.

The college or university campus is one of the places where new ideas are introduced into society. The past decade has seen a number of ideas, ideologies, and fads thrust upon us. The demonstrations of the 60's and early 70's bore witness to that fact. Although the campuses are much quieter now and students seem pre-occupied with getting a degree in order to obtain a job, it does not follow that there is any subsiding or diminution in the growth and development of knowledge. In point of fact, not only is there a continuing development of thought, but the speed with which the information is gathered and disseminated is increasing. The question might well be asked, "How could one afford not to make some attempt to broaden her or his understanding?"

Issues such as abortion, women's rights, gay rights, and world hunger call our attention to the field of ethics. The refusal of many countries to accept missionaries, in addition to the growth of eastern religions in the United States, challenges us to rethink our missiology. Emphases on evangelism, the electronic church, discipleship, glossolalia, and the parachurch movement present themselves for a hearing. Now as in the past, we find ourselves in need of substantive theology of an enduring nature.

Consider for a moment the emphasis that is being given to discipling. Few indeed would debate the need for Christians who have a deeper commitment to and a better understanding of the Christian life. That particular need is fraught with all kinds of implications and questions. Let us consider a few of the questions without attempting to discuss the answers.

1. How does one assist students in the discipling process with-

out either accidentally or purposely engaging in the manipulation of persons?

2. How can we avoid the danger of developing theological systems which are in reality too simplistic?
3. How does one derive a program of discipling which will avoid the pitfall of the reduplication of one mindset?
4. What is the best way to involve ourselves in the discipling process in order to avoid creating dependent personalities who cannot function without the aid of some sort of guru?

These questions and others might lead us toward a reactionary posture which would reject the idea of discipling. Such a posture would be not only unwise but contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. Without doubt we are called upon to develop the best of all possible systems in order that the Christian might be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The three areas of concern discussed in this paper touch only a limited number of needs. By and large, they are autobiographical. No apology is offered for that limitation. But it is hoped that the autobiographical has been tempered with some degree of objectivity. If some other person had spoken to the subject, different areas of need might have been discussed. There is every possibility that a wholly different set of needs might be spoken to with equal validity. Though the needs might vary, we may anticipate that there would be common agreement on one thing. That is the importance of continuing education.

Whether one chooses to engage in that process by personal study or in the more disciplined atmosphere of the classroom, it must be done. One thing is especially troublesome. It is impossible to keep up with the developments in any one field, much less several at once. Moreover, to keep well informed in any discipline virtually assures one's limitations in the other disciplines. Again no apology should be offered for it is an inherent weakness in the process. Whatever the weakness, whatever the limitations, it is important that some avenue of continuing education be pursued.

Continuing education must not, however, become an end in itself. It is a means to one particular end. That end is to provide students with a better disciplined and more competent campus minister. The purpose of that competency is to provide the academic community in general and the student in particular with every possible assistance during one of the most critical times in their lives.

Response

Dick has brought into sharp focus the major problem areas of campus ministers, as well as pastors, that demand keeping abreast. I could not wish for a clearer picture of the need for professional up-grading than Dick has given.

The question the article again prompts me to ask is, "Is it actually possible to concentrate in all three areas of pastoral care and counseling, administration, and theological application?" The answer I come up with is, "It cannot be done." I believe at least one area has to go lacking. Sometimes I think the 'continuing education' course we need most is one in common sense. By default and out of our own insecurities and ego needs, I feel we have taken on and allowed ourselves to be pressured into taking on much more than we can effectively handle.

For me the troublesome member of the trio of areas in which Dick proposes campus ministries need continued help is administration. Because of time consuming administrative responsibilities, I, more often than I wish, must give my lesser self to the other needed areas. I do not see my problem stemming from ineptness. I am not speaking of trying to do everything myself either. In fact, shared leadership is the name of the game here at The University of Alabama where other than I, there are an associate, a secretary, graduate assistant, resident couple, and maid on staff, not to mention the president and her council and other program directors. I am talking about administra-

tive matters that actually by present design must have my attention.

As far as the duty of monthly reporting goes, I question the long range value of the procedure as I know it and understand it to be in other states. I believe campus ministers neither can nor need to do in-depth or thoroughly detailed reporting evaluating, and goal setting every thirty days. I do see the need for extensive annual evaluation and priority ranking, with more simplified information submitted periodically to state directors.

I do not yet have a workable solution to the administrative problem area of campus ministers, only hunches. I think more could be done with an administrative secretary — a possibility I believe not as unattainable as it at first may appear. A campus minister with such a person on his or her staff could be released to give more of him or herself to pastoral care and counseling and the application of theology, the two areas in which ministers by gift, calling, and training are equipped to minister. I also think the time has come for us campus ministers, as well as pastors, troubled by administrative demands to confront churches and denominational leadership regarding their pressing us into a role that easily in itself could be fulltime and determine to major more in our field — pastoral care and theology and in continued growth and education therein.

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