

The Training of the Campus Minister

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Unfinished business heads the daily agenda of the campus minister. Much of the fascination and frustration of this ministry is that so few of the activities may be marked "Completed." Each day contains a conversation that will help shape the future of some searching person. Each day reveals an area in which the campus minister says, "I must learn more." The training of a campus minister remains unfinished business.

A Baptist campus minister begins training during college days in relationship with the campus Baptist Student Union. This initial exposure may begin in a desire for fellowship and expand to include leadership roles in both campus and state BSU. It may include seasons of spiritual crisis and the unfolding of the mysterious call to ministry. Even if the experience has many negative factors, it will provide an introductory familiarity with the qualities that will contribute to effective ministry. A year spent in campus ministry internship, or appointment in a two-year mission program, may provide invaluable experience, as well as insight into the requirements for ministry.

A graduate degree is an important milestone along the route of a campus minister's training. The minister functions as a peer with pastors, faculty members, administrators and staff persons. In that league, the ability to do graduate work is fundamental. The minister's academic involvement should lead to the most advanced degree desired. Both ambition and determination come into play. In this era of specialization, is there any reason that one should not aspire to a doctorate?

A Southern Baptist seminary is a logical place for a Southern Baptist minister to earn an advanced degree. Most of those seminaries offer some courses designed for the fledgling campus minister. My bias, however, does not demand a major in campus ministry. I prefer that seminary studies lead to the master of divinity degree, although

the master of religious education is an acceptable program. The seminary curriculum offers an opportunity to develop a solid theological foundation and to become competent in Biblical studies and understanding. The years spent earning the basic seminary degree may be the only possible time for the minister to develop these qualities.

The fundamental task of the Southern Baptist campus minister is to serve people, to minister in the name and spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. In such service, no speck of information is irrelevant, no sliver of insight is insignificant, no facet of experience has been wasted. The minister will never accumulate sufficient wisdom to understand every human need or to establish rapport with every needy person of the community.

In the public mind, a minister is the local expert on religion. Nothing will substitute for a solid theological foundation if the campus minister is to fulfill this role expectation. The minister must be a born again believer who is making a determined effort to learn much about God and to remain vitally related to the Almighty.

The minister also is expected to be the resident biblical expert. This does not suggest the ability to recite from memory and in proper order the names of the Kings of Judah and Israel, nor does it require the accurate answer to every peculiar factual question that some sophomore may ask. But is it too much to expect an understanding of the broad historical scope of the Bible, and a detailed grasp of information about the life Jesus? Perhaps it is equally important that the minister understand how the Bible has been collected and preserved in book form, how it is to be interpreted, and how its message may be communicated within the context of the academic community. That requires a theological education, whether it is gained in private study or in the classrooms of renowned scholars.

The campus minister cannot limit his knowledge to the Christian faith. Contemporary cults and historic world religions form part of the campus scene. Some familiarity with the beliefs and practices of non Christian people (as well as of persons in various Christian denominations) is essential if one is to interpret the current scene and the trends in church and religious movements.

The Southern Baptist campus minister is expected to believe in the church and to be an active member of a local congregation. While the campus minister normally will function as a lay person

in the congregation, giving appropriate deference to the pastor, the background of ministry training should provide a valuable resource for the church. Exposure to church history, ecclesiology, and a study of Baptist polity provide a background from which helpful suggestions may emerge. Study of the history and the structure of the Southern Baptist Convention may provide answers to questions by church members. Personal acquaintance with leaders of the state convention and the SBC gained by attending some of those conventions can be the source of fresh information to be shared during church projects. The campus minister will strengthen the church by increasing and sharing knowledge.

To accept appointment as a Southern Baptist campus minister is to commit oneself to a ministry to students. Involvement with students may be peripheral in the campus ministry program of some denominations, but at least among Baptists in Tennessee it is at the core of ministry. The campus minister works every day to equip students for their ministry. The Baptist Student Union is the structure for this involvement. Before seeking an appointment in campus ministry, a person should have a clear understanding of the philosophy and purposes of the Baptist Union and a deep personal commitment to the concept of a balanced ministry to the whole person, recognizing the importance both of Christian growth and of Christian outreach. Constant attention should be given to sharpen the abilities to "do BSU." Surely one new idea can be developed each day to improve the method of content of Bible study; to strengthen the evangelistic outreach and to provide evangelism training; to encourage students to develop the life of prayer; to reach out toward internationals; to improve the effectiveness of the local mission program. In areas such as these, the campus minister is the artisan. Here the campus minister polishes the details as a professional. With expertise in this specialized area of ministry, there is no competition. Ministers who serve in other specialties stand back to admire, for this is the bailiwick of the campus minister.

Theological education is not the only route of preparation for a campus minister. Universities also offer graduate training to develop the skills needed in the daily routine of campus ministry.

Regardless of the academic degree achieved, the campus minister will be faced with a necessity for continuing education. An unending process of training will be required to sharpen, expand, and clarify the qualities that are demanded in effective ministry, as well

as to allow the minister to explore vistas that were not academically accessible even on a pass/fail basis.

Continuing education may be both personal and formal. Professional seminars, such as those offered through National Student Ministries of the Baptist Sunday School Board, as well as those required by state denominational offices, allow the campus minister to investigate knotty problems while in the company of sympathetic colleagues, some of whom will be able to share valuable insight. There will be occasional opportunities to enroll in a course offered at a local college. A degree-oriented study level, highly welcomed, may afford opportunity to implement well planned progress. In the area of private, informal continuing education, disciplined reading rates a high priority. Annotated bibliographies exist in abundance to help the minister just entering this phase of development, and books can be borrowed by mail. Records and tapes are helpful supplements to reading, as are carefully selected shows on television, movies and theater. Travel, that broadening experience, is available to nearly everyone. In learning through travel, who could be more fortunate than Southern Baptist ministers? Just think of the many conventions we get to attend, all as a part of our work assignments!

A clear sense of identity is strategic to the work of campus ministry. It is important to understand as much as possible about self and others. The campus minister is likely to spend much time in counseling sessions, both group and individual. Counseling skills may be learned, practiced and improved. It is imperative that the counselor recognize limitations and resources, and be ready and able to refer persons who need additional assistance.

Administering a program is part of the routine of most campus ministers. Administrative skills must be learned and developed. Consider the havoc that can result from a simple activity, such as taking a musical group to a scheduled performance. With poor administration, three of the singers can get to the right place at the right time, while the accompanist has gone to a place in the next county, two singers are convinced that the performance is scheduled for the next day, and three stayed in their rooms because they had not heard about it. With proper administration, everyone was present for a good performance and few realized there were even possibilities of problems. The minister's work with the leadership group of students, especially with the executive council or committee, requires skillful administration. Many persons must become involved in designing

the program and in sharing responsibility. The budget is another area which demands administrative attention. Normally it is the responsibility of the campus minister to design and control the budget and to use accounting procedures from which an auditor may answer any questions about the use of funds. Many tasks may be delegated, but the responsibility for administration of the program remains with the campus minister.

The ability to communicate effectively ranks high in the list of the minister's qualities. The personal relationships that are necessary for pleasant workdays may depend upon the ability to communicate through speech and writing. The minister is a teacher and the teaching deserves clear presentation. The minister is a preacher who seeks to touch the deep emotions of persons in the congregation. Fumbling speech expressing faltering ideas will not get the job done.

The professional competence of the campus minister obviously can be judged by the level of training and skill in this lengthy (but not totally inclusive) list of qualities. It is equally important to consider several qualities which may not bear so directly upon professional competence. One area which deserves special training is the development of certain manual skills. Surely it is not beyond the skill or below the dignity of a minister to drive a nail, adjust a thermostat, change a furnace filter, type a letter, or cut a stencil and put it on the machine.

The minister's education should include an awareness of current events — local, national, and international.

The minister should cultivate an appreciation of music, art, and literature. It would be well to dabble in languages, and perhaps to develop reading ability in several, and conversational ability in one.

The minister would do well to devote attention to a hobby, and to develop expertise in an interest area only remotely related to ministry.

The minister must give attention to personal health and physical conditioning. There must be an adequate and regular exercise program, if it is no more than disciplined walking. The ability to minister effectively is directly related to health, conditioning, and stamina.

The training of a campus minister is a continuing lifelong experience. There is no point at which it can be marked "completed," except when the ministry has been closed.

Response

Yarbrough's article outlines the fairly typical educational pilgrimage of most Southern Baptist campus ministers. And that is precisely where it goes astray. While most campus ministers are at least adequately prepared for the "spiritual-theological-biblical-program-administrative" duties of their work, they are, for the most part, totally lacking in their understanding of the complex nature and workings of the context of their ministry—*higher education*.

In fact, we have often sought to assiduously avoid such understanding lest understanding beget involvement in ministry beyond our traditional and limited purview—the undergraduate population. We have all too often retreated to our student centers (or hide-away) and assumed that the university can run itself quite well without our understanding or caring.

Historically, Southern Baptist student ministries have maintained a church relatedness not typically characteristic of many other campus religious organizations. Perhaps this is a key reason we require our campus ministers to earn the Master of Divinity degree in preparation for their work. This is, of course, the same program required of those preparing for the pastoral ministry. To be sure, the M. Div. provides an excellent *beginning* for the preparation for campus ministry. I use the word *beginning* for two reasons: (1) learning is a *life-long* commitment and (2) the M. Div. is lacking in an *essential* ingredient. Yarbrough addresses the matter of continuing education; I will address the missing ingredient.

For the campus minister to walk onto the college campus with a seminary degree devoid of a strong background in higher education, is to go to work only partially prepared. It would be similar to a pastor assuming a pastorate with no background study in the nature, structure, organization, and functioning of the church.

All too often, Christian groups assume that they have an inalienable right to function unhindered on the college campus. The fact is, they are present as "invited guests" of the institution. That invitation is extended primarily because the institution sees the organization as making a significant contribution to its educational objectives. The drafters of "The Philosophy and Objectives of the Program of Student Ministries SBC" at least implied that kind of relationship when they said: "Because the university is engaged in the search for truth, of which God is the source, the Christian perspective is essential to the realization of the ultimate purpose of higher education."

Indeed, the university has every right to expect an organization such as Baptist Student Union and the Baptist campus minister to join in the rigorous search for truth and to guide students in that search from the perspective of faith. If we fail in that task, we lose our right to be on campus. The other tenets of our philosophy and objectives address basically religious and spiritual concerns of the church. I suspect that a good case could be made for denying all religious groups the right to hold meetings for strictly religious purposes on a state college campus on

the grounds of separation of church and state (such has happened at the University of Delaware).

We must, therefore, justify our presence on campus to the university in terms of its objectives—not merely our own. Thus, if the campus minister is going to be effective, he/she must move into the context of their ministry with more than a seminary degree. I am speaking of training with a much greater breadth than Yarbrough outlines. Further, I am suggesting that the campus minister must be a student of higher education and conversant with all of the issues—social, political, administrative, psychological, ethical, etc.—confronting today's university. This implies participation in the American Association for Higher Education in addition to the Association of Southern Baptist Campus Ministers. It implies reading *The Journal of Higher Education* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as well as *The Campus Minister* and the *NICM Journal*.

I am suggesting that the campus minister must understand and appreciate every aspect of university life—intellectual, political, cultural. The campus minister must gain an appreciation of those vast problems within the university related to the total structure of education—often seen as irrelevant issues to the campus ministry by Southern Baptists, but which in fact have *everything* to do with that ministry.

Southern Baptists have, for over fifty years, been committed to a ministry which is basically oriented toward the undergraduate student. Ours has been a commitment to a “student-led, Christ-centered, church-related” ministry. We have assumed that the basic M. Div. was the primary prerequisite educationally. I have no quarrel with that notion—all of these things we should be doing! But, we can ill-afford the luxury of leaving the “other undone.”

Such a model for the training of a Southern Baptist campus minister does not presently exist. All six seminaries offer at least one course related to the work of the BSU Director/Campus Minister and (maybe) a survey of various approaches to the campus ministry. None, however, offer any depth learning in higher education. Again, I have no quarrel with the courses offered (and even most of the assumptions which seem to be behind their being offered) but I am convinced we must do *more*. To fail to provide and require the campus minister to be a student of higher education is to send the campus minister onto the campus without *all* of the necessary equipment for his/her ministry.

“You should do all these things without omitting the other!” (Lk 11:42)

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