

Because I Am,

We Are . . . To Minister

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Call To Ministry

To be in student work is to be a most privileged servant of God. It is also to be in a most perplexing and frustrating ministry. We serve in an area where nothing is stable—the positive attitude here would be that nothing is stagnant—our parishioners have a high and predictable rate of turnover. The campus constantly reflects the changing mores and circumstances of society. We have seen in the Sixties and Seventies the students being bounced from an intense commitment to most causes, to feelings of apathy toward nearly all causes. Therefore, we must be flexible and willing to adapt ourselves, our programs, and ways of relating to the campus. It would be easy to feel there are more simple and lasting areas to give ourselves to if it were not for the belief that God has called us to minister to students.

Being called to student work, as to all areas of ministry, has as many forms as there are campus ministers. For some it is a growing conviction and for others a sudden realization that this is what God is asking one to do. My call came with a suddenness and clarity that I have always appreciated. My times and areas of doubting spiritual matters and God's leadership have been many, but not my call.

My call came as I was sitting in a student convention as a volunteer worker with students and suddenly had the strongest impulse to write on a piece of paper that I felt God was calling me to work with young people. I passed this over to my husband who gripped my shoulder so hard that I almost cried out. God was speaking to him in exactly the same way. I remember who was speaking but haven't the slightest idea what was being said. What will be with me forever is my vivid memories of my feelings at that moment. In times of discouragement I've been thankful for the knowledge that God really did ask me to take on this ministry and the assurance that He is with

me. After that experience nothing happened magically or instantaneously, and a long period followed before God defined for us and led us into that exact area of ministry, but I knew He was going to.

Because of this call to mission I am convinced of the privilege and uniqueness of ministering to students. One cannot help but be aware of the potential of these young adults who have a lifetime before them to put into action what they gain from their involvement in Baptist Student Union.

One motivation for ministering to students and involving them in ministry, is the reality of the world being smaller in terms of accessibility and vaster in terms of the masses of people with which we are to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

My ideas of ministry coincide with the concept put forth in the Baptist Student Union logo; that is, a combination is needed of looking outside of one's self and looking inward. These dual purposes are accomplished with both structured programs and becoming involved with individual students.

A couple of my student director friends are very careful with the term "my students", feeling the emphasis should be upon "God's students". On the other hand, if we are to accept the responsibility for the students within our territory, they do become "our students". With this acknowledgment comes the concern necessary to get involved with them and "make a difference" in their lives.

I deliberately use the term "make a difference" because that is precisely what I think ministry is all about. If we can truly "make a difference" in the lives of students, they will go about making a difference in the world. Of course, the difference I refer to is because of Jesus Christ In Us.

Because I do not serve on a campus in the Bible Belt and my BSU Center is a very non-traditional one, my ministries may reflect this. However, I did grow up in the Bible Belt, and that along with being on many campuses and interacting with students on a national level leads me to believe that needs do not vary that much geographically. The university that I am responsible for draws students from all over the continental United States. The core group of students in our organization are from areas where Southern Baptists are predominant and have strong organizational structures. Therefore, my experiences in this ministry should have enough parallels to speak to directors wherever they minister.

Vision of Ministry

In ministering, vision becomes a critical factor. This vision must help us be realistic about our strengths and weaknesses as a director; not all of us are equally qualified for some aspects of leadership, but there is no doubt that in the calling of us, the Lord had in mind to use certain abilities and inclinations that we do have. Getting in touch with these and refining them could almost be called a ministry to ourselves. Developing a positive self-image has such long range implications in what it does for us, and what it does for the students we lead. Recently a student was teasing and suggested that I had an over-developed self concept, but it was evident that the student thought it was a positive part of my ability to relate.

In addition to recognizing our strengths, the other important factor in designing a ministry should be determined by the needs we encounter. In working with students, some of these needs are just going to be "givens".

I propose that our vision should come from these two areas: developing ministries we are most qualified to lead and doing our best to fulfill the needs of the students who come our way. It has been said so often that love should always be the motivational factor in all that we do, but we sometimes become so bogged down in trying to fulfill all the expectations of ourselves and others, that love tends to get obscured in all the activity we generate. We should never lose sight of the One who is our ultimate model for all ministry. Jesus Christ obviously interacted with people in a beautiful outpouring of love in such a way that lives were changed everywhere He went.

If love is to be our motivation, we can count on a great draining of our emotional and physical resources. As we well know, particularly from the great Love Chapter in Corinthians, love really doesn't have limitations, and that is a scary thing when we consider what we are getting into. We have to become a part of the students' lives and let them become a part of ours. This causes me to believe that ministering really becomes a lifestyle.

Willingness To Minister

At this point let me share a little about my particular ministry. As co-directors at a military academy in what Southern Baptists consider a pioneer area, we have had to devise some rather unique ways of relating to students. We also have the responsibility of ministering to other students in the area, which includes a state university,

a community college, a small private college, and several trade schools. This has given us great variety of background which, particularly for the cadets, has been wholesome. Ministering to a military academy has its disadvantages, as our counterparts at the other service academies will attest, but it is a stimulating situation in that we truly are having the opportunity to influence people who will go all over the world in places of leadership.

One of the disadvantages of ministering to the Air Force Academy is that a civilian has few privileges on campus, so most of our personal interacting with cadets must be done elsewhere. For that reason we have designed a ministry that uses our home as a student center. The time frame of our ministry differs from more traditional BSU setups in that we do not have the same sort of weekday activities, such as noon day gatherings. Actually we have two separate programs; one for cadets and one for metro students, but once again the metro program has to be designed to accommodate students from all over the city. So this structure may be different from your structure, but again these students have the same "givens": problems with self-identity, relating to peers, and particularly those in the areas of developing spiritually.

Like most good BSUs, the heart of ours is Bible study. The weekly study at the Academy is the single strongest growth and outreach factor our cadets have. The study at the Center for metro people has an entirely different but equally vital character. From the Bible studies comes the awareness of God's direction for their lives now and later.

The next most important area of BSU life is "becoming a family". At this point, our structure may show the biggest difference in that we have weekend guests, multiple weekend activities, and a very large gathering for Sunday dinner after worship in local churches. We plan all our growth activities such as council meetings, choir practice, group encounters, share sessions, outreach and community ministries in this time frame. This "becoming a family" has been most instrumental in developing a strong BSU and individuals' growth within it.

Because of this lifestyle of ministry we are exposed to our students in large doses. As we and the students spend large blocks of time together, one of the things I see happening is that students who begin being serious about service do some modeling of some of the things they see us doing. This is definitely a form of ministry and can

also be a scary thing. I have had students who felt called into student ministry go out and begin home-type centers and even go so far as to buy a station-wagon like ours to use in their interacting with students. This can be a big ego trip, but it had better be a vivid illustration of our responsibilities of leadership. Our progeny, those who go out to serve, has always been crucial in the Christian movement, but let us never take it lightly or misuse the trust placed in us as models for serving the Lord.

How do we best minister to the individual student? By developing their God-given potential we can help them be both productive and happy people. One of the ways of doing this is in loving the unlovely. As campus ministers we all know our basic disinclinations to do this, and if we in our questionable maturity have difficulty, it is even more difficult for the students to do this for one another. Helping someone with a very poor self-image to realize they are special and have a unique contribution to make can be one of the most satisfying experiences we can participate in. To do this, we must help our students to accept people as they are and to look for undeveloped potential in everyone. Several years ago a former student who had been very difficult to be around wrote, "I'm finding even ugly little weeds have flowers. Now that I have got the roots right I can turn my attention to what kind of plant I'm going to be".

One of the areas of acceptance for BSU may be in relating to students from other religious and denominational backgrounds. Many students are hungry to be involved in a vital Christian fellowship without feeling that they are expected to become Baptists. BSUers perhaps need to realize that they are privileged in that they do have a caring denomination and that many Christian students do not have such an organization to relate to. By our students being open and accepting, they can see God doing things in students' lives even though not every one will become a Baptist.

We can also benefit by being involved with many different beliefs and backgrounds in that this prepares students for the "real world" and gives them opportunity to strengthen their own beliefs and commitments while we are there to be supportive of them as they go through this process.

A well rounded ministry to students should include grounding in the scriptures, an active prayer life, leadership training, outreach, churchmanship, opportunities to develop socially, increased self-

awareness and self-confidence, and direction and preparation for their lives after they leave the campus.

At this point I'd like to emphasize Outreach and Self-Development. These are the two areas we perhaps struggle with the most. By their very nature, these programs must be designed for each group of students and their area.

In promoting outreach, we are all caught in the "lack of time crunch". Yes, this does reflect the students' setting of priorities, but it seems the current generation of students are not much given to making commitments of any sort. The question is how do you cause students to get outside themselves and use their energies and creative abilities for others? Sharing the biblical injunction, showing them they are needed, and at times, even a little pressure are all part of it. If we can cause them to have a vision at this stage it will probably be with them the rest of their lives. It seems to take a combination of the director doing a lot of ground work and being the catalyst that cause the students to get excited about what they can do to serve on and off their campuses. Outreach just has to be a priority because of all the growth it engenders.

There are many programs, growth groups, etc., that facilitate self-development, but nothing takes the place of individually relating to a student. As we do this we can be aware of where they are spiritually, how they are relating to their peers, what their leadership abilities and potential are, and begin to devise situations to channel them into. In doing this we will become involved on a very personal level and incur responsibility to each student. As we relate in this manner, the student is going to believe we care about their lives and what's happening to them. I find this very time consuming and draining but have a firm conviction that this is truly the way to "make a difference" in a student's life.

Of paramount importance to my students is how they feel about themselves. One of the critical areas is that of sex. I am not finding them nearly as much caught up in the revolution of changing male and female roles as that they are still struggling to understand their own sexuality. BSUs, like the church, tend to avoid addressing themselves to this area. To marry and who they will choose, or not to marry, will have such a lasting effect that we really must develop programs to help prepare them for this aspect of their lives.

If only we were granted the wisdom to develop and meet all the needs of our students! The tension will always be with us of

wanting to do our job well and taking care of our own needs. Perhaps greater wisdom would enable us to manage our time well enough to do both, but this is a struggle for me and I perceive that all my fellow campus ministers feel this bind.

Christ's example in Matt. 14:15, and 14:22, speaks to me at this point. If He, with the tremendous pressures of carrying out His ministry in the time frame He was in, felt it essential to take time to be apart to replenish His physical and emotional energies, then how much more I need it. In all my business, meditating to receive direction struggles to be a priority item and usually loses. When this happens I just have to accept the fact that I am putting in lower quality time and energy. If since I am truly convinced that I am to minister to others, then I must begin that ministry by freeing up and causing myself to take time for restorative measures for my inner being. God grant me the grace to follow Christ's example in this area too. Let my call, my vision, and my willingness to minister to my campus be an outpouring of joy and gratitude because Christ is in me.

Response

Ms. Gurney writes very inspiringly on the scope and challenge of campus ministry. Her article makes you feel that it is great to be there where the real action is and great to be builders of the future through these students.

The article helped me recall what was said by campus ministers 20-30 years ago—"I'm working in a unique situation." The ministry in Colorado Springs may be more unique than some, but all of our ministries have a uniqueness to them. This uniqueness is determined by the personality of the campus as well as the person of the campus minister. These, along with the campus ministers' philosophy of student work will determine the ministry of a particular place. Even though there are differences, we have many things in common—students, churches, the Bible, basic needs of young people, etc.

I reacted rather negatively to a number of overkill statements such as: "We serve in an area where nothing is stable," and "Student work is a most perplexing and frustrating ministry." If nothing is stable, I can see why student work would be frustrating and perplexing. God is stable, Church is stable, I hope the campus minister is stable, and I hope there is a stability in God relating with persons.

I rejoice in Ms. Gurney's experience. However, I am a little uneasy with the note of finalness in the call. Even though God calls now to this role in this place, there is a possibility that later it can be in another place or another role.

The concept of BSU life as "becoming a family" is refreshing and beautiful. The implementation of this is both challenging and difficult.

There is a real danger that the campus minister becomes too central and authoritative within the family structure and there is the danger of developing into a small family clique. A small family group can afford a sense of belonging to students in a meaningful group. It is helpful if there are many such family groups and there is a sense of belonging for the smaller groups to the larger group.

I react negatively to the centrality of the campus minister in the program described in the article. Our ministry is too large for any of us to be totally involved in every aspect of programming. I myself, go the other extreme, the student is central in programming and leadership. My experience is so different from Ms. Gurney's in her observation that "students are not much given to making commitments of any sort." This year, as in the other 21 years of my campus ministry, I have seen great commit-

ment by a large number of students. Our executive council members have made commitment to God and the BSU. Out of this commitment they encourage others to commitment. Whenever students have made a commitment to the Lord, and see the opportunities and the needs in and through the BSU, and given the freedom of leadership and responsibility, they will develop programs to meet the needs of students. The campus minister can lend encouragement to them as they develop programs and ministries that meet need and in doing this they are being trained in Christian leadership.

I agree with Ms. Gurney in the challenge and the glory of campus ministry. And I rejoice that God uses us unique persons in a unique ministry to unique people.

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