

# **CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION IN THE CAMPUS MINISTRY**

**Bob Hall**

**The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

Every person who practices the campus ministry needs to be aware of relevant new developments, to improve competence, to apply ethical principles in a constantly changing work environment and to preserve an appropriate perspective on worklife and not be engulfed by it. These general goals establish an ideal that may never be achieved, but they must be constantly sought in intricate and varied ways.

As yet, the contribution of continuing education to the advancement of our profession and the above mentioned goals have not been fully thought through. Educational institutions within Baptist life seem to be critical of other institutions. Seminaries are often critical about the quality of the earlier education of their entrants and impose demands intended to make that education better. Those who observe the performance of experienced workers often marvel that they could have learned so little as the result of experience. Though some are critical of the shortcomings of educational programs in Baptist life, little action has taken place to design an educational program that will occur during the whole lifespan of the campus minister.

The traditional view holds that our seminaries should focus entirely on the initial preparation of student workers, teaching them only a short span of years but teaching so intensively that what campus ministers learn will be structure for their thoughts and actions ever after.

The challenge that now confronts our profession (if it is a profession, and I prefer to think that it is) is to reconceptualize our view of education as an activity that occurs normally throughout all of life. The seminary should not be seen as the centerpiece of professional

education, but merely as one of its providers. Policy makers and administrators within Baptist life must set a full program of lifespan learning in place. Leaders within student ministry must plan for a progression of developmental educational stages for its practitioners.

Greater collaboration between the agencies of our denomination in the area of continuing education might achieve substantial financial economies and would almost certainly ensure higher quality and comprehensiveness of the service. National Student Ministries should be commended for its efforts to centralize the continuing educational efforts of seminaries, state conventions and mission boards. Even more effort in this area on the part of NSM will diminish competition and factionalism, lead to the sharing of resources and enrich the final educational product.

Let's face it. Too few professionals continue to learn throughout their lives. The opportunities to aid and encourage professional development in the campus ministry are far less abundant than they should be.

The profession of campus ministry can be divided into three broad classifications: the innovators, the middle majority, and an apathetic minority. Some individuals in Baptist student work are innovators, individuals who continuously seek to improve their performances, sometimes in unconventional ways. They are attracted to ideas and practices that are untested but perhaps offer great promise. The desire to innovate leads them to push the frontiers of the profession outward and make linkages with other realms of knowledge.

The middle majority comprises the great body of those who practice any profession, and the campus ministry is certainly no exception. Movement and innovation are gradually adopted among members of the middle majority of our profession. These individuals wait until new practices become generally accepted before putting aside old strategies for doing the ministry.

The final group of active professionals in Baptist student work are the apathetic minority. These individuals learn only what they must in order to stay on the job. When young, they had their eyes fixed on a star; now they have fallen in an orbit of the routine. Their ideas harden;

## 28 *Considerations for the Future*

their old skills deteriorate and they adopt few new ones, usually only by yielding to social pressure.

Those who want to think about advancing the campus ministry as a whole may first need to consider the distinctive educational requirements of each of these hypothesized categories. Shouldn't we offer continuing educational programs that meet the needs of all three divisions of our profession? Innovators need to find ways to explore the frontiers of the ministry, creating new ideas and testing new knowledge. Individuals who are new to the ministry must be given the opportunity to learn normative programmatic standards, and we need to help members of our profession to retain their vision and keep from burning out or lagging behind.

Having more is not always a better way to meet our professional development needs. We don't necessarily need more meetings, more courses, more lectures and more journals. We do need to target the specific educational needs of our colleagues and their developmental levels, and we do need to do a better job of marketing that which already exists.

P. Burgess published an elaborate investigation of "Reasons for Adult Participation in Group Educational Activities" (Adult Education, 1971 b, 22, 3-29). He collected data from 1,046 adults engaged in 54 different learning activities. Through the complex process of factor analysis he found seven basic motivations for adults in the learning process.

1. The desire to know: "a desire to gain knowledge for the sake of knowing; to grow in qualities and intellect and appreciation, to derive pleasure from learning, and to remain in command of learning skills."
2. The desire to reach a personal goal: "the desire to gain knowledge in order to achieve a personal goal which the knowledge gained will make possible."
3. The desire to reach a social goal: "a desire... to learn certain knowledge or skills which will assist an individual to perform better the necessary functions as a contributing member of society."

4. The desire to reach a religious goal: "a desire to learn in order to meet felt obligations to a church or to a religious faith."
5. The desire to take part in social activity: "the desire to take part in a social activity because the activity is enjoyed for its own sake regardless of what is intended to be taught."
6. The desire to escape: "the desire to escape from some other activity or situation which is unpleasant or tedious."
7. The desire to comply with formal requirements: "a desire which may be to earn credit required by an employer to meet certain conditions required for membership by certain groups, or of some other authority."

What motivates campus ministers to learn? If Burgess' figures are to be accepted, the great majority of adult learners have other orientations toward learning than the seeking of personal or social goals. What research has been done toward the highly distinctive learning orientations of campus ministers, and how would the results of these studies impact National Student Ministries marketing strategies? Should other desires toward learning than the attainment of a religious goal be acceptable as an orientation toward learning in our profession? Is it better to use the carrot or the stick in motivating campus ministers toward continued learning strategies? NSM should take a leadership role in determining what motivates campus ministers to learn and adjust their marketing strategies in light of the results of such a study.

Before moving further, I should stress that learning deficiency is far from universal among present campus ministers. Many current practitioners have worked out patterns of continuous learning for themselves that precisely suit their needs and desires. Despite limited resources, particularly of time, these professionals are constantly observing, reflecting, reading, discussing and taking part in organized programs of instruction. Every state director knows of a local campus minister who is doing a good job of personal growth and development. These optimal learners should be identified by state

### 30 *Considerations for the Future*

directors, asked to lead seminars on the subject of continuing education and generally affirmed as role models for colleagues less assiduous in learning.

Much of what we accept in our profession as continuing education usually consists of listening to a lecture. National Student Ministries frequently acts as though participation in a seminar or workshop is enough. The learner is never required to demonstrate increased competence or performance; indeed it is sometimes thought that it would be undignified to suggest that he or she should have to do so. The craft of evaluation has not found its way into our classrooms. We must discover creative ways to measure the effect of teaching on the quality of actual performance. Only if our continuing education effects to actually improve the practitioners' accomplishments in the field can they be said to be wholly successful. The counting of hours of exposure to instruction, the achievement of passing scores on theoretical and practical tests, the accumulation of reports of successful experience, the favorable results of peer and supervisory reviews must all be considered to see how they fit into a comprehensive system of continuing education for our profession.

Finally, the primary responsibility should rest on each of us as individuals. Each campus minister should feel a deep and continuing concern that his or her education be carried out at a high level throughout a lifetime of practice. Professionals must feel a need to reach their full potential with a special sense of urgency. We must try to learn from each new situation, no matter how familiar, by viewing it creatively. We must collaborate actively with other professionals who are also trying to maintain the life and vitality of their thought and practice. We must participate in groups and associations like ASBCM to provide new ways to scrutinize and improve practice. We must remove ourselves from the practice of daily campus ministry from time to time for intensive periods of study. State directors should encourage and assist local directors in taking sabbaticals. A greater acceptance of the sabbatical concept within the campus ministry will help local directors not merely acquire new knowledge but also gain a broader

perspective, and upon returning to service, will view matters in a new light.

In short, those of us in the campus ministry must use every means of continuing education available so that our work retains the dedication, the lucidity, and the freshness of its early years. As a profession we have the collective responsibility to honor and foster a zest for learning in all of our members. It is our collective obligation to help all of our colleagues develop the ability to learn, through formal programs, the setting of personal examples, and the provision of as many alternative systems of education as possible.