

## **GRATITUDE, DEPENDENCE AND HOPE**

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In attempting to take a brief look at Student Ministries, what we seem to be doing right, how we might do it better, and what we might dream for in our future, I would choose to center attention on three words: gratitude, dependence and hope.

First, gratitude for key decisions and directions which have shaped this ministry and which have proven to provide solid foundations for this complex and ever-changing work to which God has called us. For instance, the decision early in our history to focus on the student as we seek to work in the academic environment. Obviously, the campus and community afford many possibilities for extensive ministry with others...administration, staff and faculty personnel, church workers-with-students, pastors and associational officials... any and all of whom are included in our orbits of concern. Yet, Baptist Student Ministries have consistently sought to major on the student, believing that the needs of students demand a specialized ministry for them, to them, and through them.

Additional examples of the wisdom and insight which guided our student ministry forefathers in formative days are seen in the ties which bind our work to local churches and to our Baptist denominations. We are the arm of the churches at work with students, and we should be grateful for that fact! One needs only to study at length the rise and fall, the coming and going and the cooperative strengths and weaknesses of other approaches to Christian ministry with students to substantiate the basis for this opinion. Providing an intricate, but strong, series of checks and balances in our support patterns and in our opportunities for service, this "Baptist family" relationship continues to be a strength for us, "warts and all." True, none of us is

perfect... as an individual, as a church, nor as a denomination, but as Dr. Kenneth Scott Lattourette, the renowned Baptist church historian once said, "the single, most evident strength of your Southern Baptist Student Work is your continuing relationship of your campus work with the local churches."

Gratitude for these key decisions which have helped determine our course must also include the decision to provide a broad and varied program for students. Baptist Student Union has by design been organized, structured and programmed to offer students varieties of opportunity for spiritual growth, training and development, and exposure to local, national and world service as Christians. Although leading with missions and evangelism, Baptist Student Ministries have wisely sought to help the individual Christian student grow in all areas of life: social, civic, spiritual and personal, and has provided a democratic organizational structure to give every student a place of service.

Second, dependence upon God's strength and wisdom to continue to help us to recognize areas in ministry which need improvement and "shoring up" to be most effective. At the risk of neglecting those many aspects of Student Ministries which are currently in good shape, look with me at some aspects which seem to be currently in good shape, look with me at some aspects which seem to be specifically in need of closer scrutiny.

One crying need is for us to address more specifically the growing materialistic bent in today's students. Almost every student poll reveals the "what can I get?" mentality and the desire for the highest paying job with the least risk possible. If we are to best speak to the needs of this world, we must concentrate efforts on instilling more of a "what can I give?" attitude in students as they consider both their relationship with Christ and their calling to serve. The enormity of the problem of secularism and the stripping away at some of our moorings may have forced us, as student ministers, to conveniently ignore the large problems of society which envelop us, too. Perhaps, we too, have been far too concerned about our "place in society" and strive to get the most which we can (even in salary!) instead of seeking that freedom of abandon to

God's will which rests upon Him who provides for all of our needs!

Another primary area in Student Ministries which could use a breath of fresh air is the whole area of personal and group ethics. On most campuses and in many Baptist Student programs, issues such as honesty and integrity, pre-marital sexual promiscuity, the basic work ethic, prejudices: racial, social, political and personal... are rarely addressed. What were some of the high profile issues in the 50's and 60's have become the forgotten issues in today's student world, and virtually nothing has been substituted in their place. If we are not to be concerned about AIDS, alcoholism and drugs, apartheid and economic injustices, where will our leadership be? How long has it been since our programming reflected Biblical insights into these moral and ethical concerns?

Problems within our own Southern Baptist Convention are reflective and symptomatic of another glaring deficiency in the training and preparation of Baptist students and other young people... denominational and historical illiteracy (in most respects!). In other words, we as Baptists have done very little for decades to help young people to know who we are as Baptists (history), why we do things the way we do (polity), and what are the primary tenets of our religious heritage. Encouragement to learn Biblically-based principles concerning the priesthood of the believer, the authority of the scriptures, the Lordship of Christ, the autonomy of the church and other foundational Baptist perspectives could be instrumental in helping us minister to God's world and spread the gospel of Christ in a more loving and caring way!

Third, hope for vision and insight from the Holy Spirit should be instrumental in strategically shaping the future through Student Ministries. Perhaps the most satisfying aspect of Baptist Student Work has to be the privilege of playing a part in that which is yet to come as we guide, direct and motivate students in determining the direction of their lives.

One area of direction concerns the "new kind of missionary" who will be able to "go into all the world" in the 1990's and in the 21st century. We are told that 83% of the world's lost population will, by 2000 A.D., be in

nations closed to conventional board or agency-sponsored missionaries. It is imperative that we begin now to form strategies and procedures to prepare young people as they consider vocational pursuits which will take them into those places with the Gospel. Programs of special training, institutional curriculum changes, and special emphases in BSU programs should be involved. Coordination between Student Ministries, Foreign and Home Missions Boards, Women's Missionary Union and Baptist Men's work at local, state, national and international levels will be necessary. Redefinition and expansion of our traditional approaches in ministry with internationals, especially Christian internationals, could be intertwined so that all possibilities for exposure to the gospel would be exercised.

A second major area for future concern in Student Ministries must be the continuing necessity for informed, competent, trained leadership in our churches. All roles, whether pastoral, staff, educational or managerial will increasingly require individuals with 1) a definite calling from God, 2) a commitment to excellence, and 3) a desire to reach the maximum in servanthood. We play very strategic parts in "calling out the called" and must be sensitive to this need. Our hopes and dreams for much of the future will depend upon this type of leadership.

As we consider the future, often we have a tendency to think that only new and innovative methods, procedures and programming will keep us abreast of the times. If we've learned anything from our past and present, we must admit that we are where we are today because, in addition to new approaches, some tried and true features of Student Ministries should still remain intact.

The spiritual growth needs of students may fluctuate to some degree, but basically will remain the same. We will find that our core areas of worship and study, missions and ministries, evangelism and outreach, churchmanship and fellowship, world issues and social concerns should be included in a stable program of Student Ministries. There will always be a need for a Christ-centered, Bible-honoring, church-based, student led program to enlist students in opportunities for growth and service.

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Gratitude for key decisions in the past, dependence on God for evaluating the present and resting our hopes for the future in His hands can serve to inspire us to greater heights in Student Ministries!