

## **It Was Worth The Journey**

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How long do you plan to be in student work? During my three years at the University of Tennessee, and my early years as State Director in Louisiana, I heard that question quite often. I truthfully answered, "I really do not know." Now, after thirty-eight years as a State Director I can genuinely say, "I did not plan it that way, but I am pleased it worked out as it did." During the pilgrimage, I always tried to find God's will in my decisions. Looking back, I know that in student work I found the pearl of great price for my life. It did not come easy, but it was well worth the journey, even with the disappointments.

These are some of the impressions I have had along the way:

There is no typical student for a given period of time. Believe me, they are all different. They want to be treated so, too.

Effective student work has a strong emphasis on missions, both local and international. Missions is often a cup of cold water given in His name. It may not be in our Madison Avenue scheme of measurement, but God will bless the effort in His own way.

Our student conventions, conferences, assemblies and retreats will always be relevant as long as we have programmatic personnel who are contemporary and challenging.

Learn to listen and listen to learn. I have helped students more by listening than by quickly giving advice. Many students begin a conversation some distance from their actual point of need.

Do not let false pride stand in the way of an effective ministry. If I do not know the answer, I'm not afraid to tell a student. If they need medical help, I refer them immediately.

The need for education and experience: continuing education is a necessity and experience provides maturity. If it worked for the apostle Paul, it will work for us.

Always have high moral and spiritual standards for council members and student missionaries. Students like to look on their leaders and representatives with respect. I have noticed that students themselves always set high standards.

Resist the temptation to linger on great accomplishments of the past. We have had them in missions and evangelism, but each student generation must meet the needs and challenge of its day.

Growing strong state student programs is still the best way to enlarge our entire witness to students. Budgets, buildings and personnel come from state convention budgets.

Avoid isolation. I work with pastors, educational directors, music leaders, missionaries, laymen and WMU's. Many of these people are my former students. When I attend a convention or assembly, I make every effort to be present at their meetings. I want them to know that I am supportive of their work and grateful for their efforts.

Remember who placed us where we are. The churches of a great denomination depend on us to do what they cannot do individually. Various programs taken to these churches (large and small) let them know the magnitude of student work.

We should expand our work with black students. Granted, our BSU's are primarily white and middle class, but it is also the typical SBC church. The enlarging fields of missions, music, and evangelism offer increased opportunities and need to be utilized immediately.

Our ministry to internationals can be increased. Our International Student Conferences, Friendship International Houses, language assistance programs and international student social events furnish us open doors for this strategic witness. After accompanying our Louisiana students on several mission trips to Africa and South America, I have long had the dream of various state BSU's bringing an international student to their state for a year of graduate study at a large university where there is a

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strong Baptist student program. These students could be trained in Baptist student work and return to their countries as native student workers. We desperately need to train native people to be student leaders in their own country. University administrations all over the world would prefer to have their own citizens with their students.

We should increase relationships for they expand the scope of our ministry. Formerly, we related mainly to the Sunday School Board. Now we also relate to the Foreign Mission Board, Home Mission Board and the seminaries. Other relationships will come and we should encourage them.

Always, we should realize that the multitude of students who come to us each year represent a lifetime of planning on the part of their parents, friends and loved ones. Even the educational system has anticipated their coming. For each student and for us the future is now.

What we do with the now future will determine the open doors of the distant future. For me, this has always been my greatest challenge.