

# **Twenty-First Century Campus Ministers**

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It is scary to realize that folks I helped bring into the profession eighteen years ago may be campus ministers in the twenty-first century. Those who sit in seminary classes with me now, if they are fortunate enough to get into the field, will be in leadership positions in the year 2000. I will probably be off the scene; some of you who read these pages may still be local campus ministers then; there may be state programs for some of you to direct.

In a fairly pedantic manner, let me spell out what I see as important dimensions of the life and work of an effective campus minister in the year 2008—and in the twenty years between now and then. I am aware that anyone who tries to gaze into a crystal ball should be prepared to eat glass. Nevertheless, here is a mixture of wishful thinking, convictions and predictions.

## **A Few Assumptions**

I assume several things: finances will be tight; buildings may be unaffordable; the churches, although perhaps more vital than today, may be made up of a smaller percentage of the population; our society will be more heterogeneous; higher education will continue to be important in our nation—though perhaps more closely tied to industry and technology will continue to advance very rapidly. You, the reader, may want to argue with some or all of these assumptions. These are not, however, the focus of my attention; I note them simply to let you know the context of the ideas presented below.

## **Some Continuing Essentials**

Some things will not change. I think that the effective campus minister in 2008 must, as today, be a lover of

God, self, and others. Jesus' summary of the great commandments will continue to be the heart of Christian faith. Many other good people who want to contribute to those in higher education will be doing campus personal development work alongside Christian ministers. The experience, commitment and discipline of being Christian will not be assumed, however, in this cadre two decades hence. Baptist Campus Ministers will be Christian. I am speaking of ministers whose service is rooted in and oriented around the God made known in Jesus Christ.

The role and shape of institutions (including the divine/human institution called church) may be different in twenty years. My theology, ecclesiology, and sense of history push me to emphasize that a committed, loyal and educated church person will have the best chance of effective campus ministry—whatever those days hold! Stubborn patience with and often pained love for a frail and imperfect church will be pretty important—to keep the minister humble and powerful. A sense of history—the 2000 years and more during which God's stubborn patience and pained loved spelled G-R-A-C-E —will be essential to keep the minister from being upended by change more rapid than we can imagine now. An openness to the voice of God, spoken often in the idiolect of fellow Christians, will be critical to balance the self-assured persuasive authority of leaders or the certainty of one's inner light or both.

There is no choice; it will be essential for each of us to be a student of students. With the increasing variety among undergraduates and the until then unthought of new types of studenthood, that task will be even more necessary and more difficult. What will be the needs and conscious or unconscious concerns, for example, of the home/work oriented "TV and computer" learner whose major is social psychology or modern religion? What are significant developmental tasks for her in light of never having been a member of any stable aggregate of people?... or since she does not show up at some function or become easily accessible to our programs, do we simply ignore her?

Commitment to and understanding of higher education with all of its limitations are, I think, going to be continually important for the effective campus minister. I

am talking about respect for the institution and the process which make the terms student or faculty member or administrator apply to certain people who live and work primarily in that institution. The time investment may be different—in amount or percentage; the process may be radically varied or the nature of relationships may vary. As now, it seems to me that effectiveness in 2008 will be dependent in part on the integrity of the minister who, because s/he inhabits that world, knows about and is committed to it. Without commitment to and concern for academia, we cannot understand, critique with integrity or minister within it effectively—now or next century.

And now, I think that there are some less usual characteristics necessary for the twenty-first century campus minister.

### **Practitioner of Administry**

The alternatives available within academia and our larger society for variation in lifestyle, usage of time, courses of study, religious expression and almost everything else will triple or quadruple in the next twenty years.

Those of you who are practicing campus ministry in 1988 will find your vocabularies and thought patterns and conceptual faculties strained or overwhelmed by the specializations, universe-views and assumptions of those who teach and learn when the children who enter first grade this year, graduate and enter college.

Let me attempt to build a case for “administry” as a probable major role for the future campus minister.

By this pseudoword I refer simply to your use of administrative and enabling skills to involve peers (often lay people and increasingly intentionally bivocational ministers) in some aspects of the work which has been assigned to a full-time minister. This is nothing dramatic or new for some of you. I think that it will become a generally accepted campus ministry role within the next few years. If our seminaries do not teach it, we will be frustrated, but—I venture—effective campus ministers will learn the role.

“Administry” involves, of necessity, some loss of control and lessening of personal contact with some recipients of the ministry. Interaction with those who are

functioning as ministers in one's stead, moreover, will be necessary and will increase record-keeping. Among the more obvious advantages are broadened ministries, varied personalities who can attract and communicate with different constituencies, an increase in the unit's creativity, broadened ownership, and a chance to develop some additional of the campus minister's gifts. For those of us who may be employed primarily by an institution distant from the locus of our work (problematic, some would say), the chance to enlist, educate and demonstrate the concrete need of local people will be very significant.

### **The Context**

Let me enumerate some of the facts of life to which "administry" might be a productive accommodation and some of the needs it can address: 1) general suspicion of religious professionals, which will probably increase in the next years; 2) exploding variety among persons on campus; 3) limited funds for ministering with that variety of individuals; 4) growing insistence on the part of committed laypeople that they be involved in or have control over the ministries they support; and 5) aging of the cadre of campus ministers.

Wait! Don't leave me! We are not necessarily "aging out." I am not suggesting that one loses ability to work with students as s/he gets older. We do get more "set" in our ways, however, and I am convinced that our general style tendencies are often at least a little exaggerated. More importantly, with limitation of energy, many of us will not want to keep up with the increasingly varied activities and thought-patterns of our constituencies.

This points to the sixth fact of life which I think will be with us to an even greater degree at the turn of the century: 6) the continuing and even increasing need for specialization among those who attempt to serve and learn from even more narrowly specializing sub-groups within academia.

There may be, in addition, 7) a continuing and increased local church interest in doing something for students (primarily easily available single undergraduates), with the accompanying richness and competition in programming

for the kids who are easiest to reach. Someone may need to be relatively neutral in that competition in order to encourage some specialization and/or focus there. Wouldn't it be great if we could help churches discover and use their gifts in ministry with the increasingly difficult-to-reach people?

Finally, 8) more and more of the students who have some experience in a church (a smaller percentage, you remember I am suggesting) will have been exposed primarily to authoritarian and propositional religion. This will have been termed "real Christianity" and may not sustain many of them in the new pressures and temptations they face. How do we help these students deal with the Gospel in critical teachable hours? How do we help them live with the ambiguities of life? It will require a personal experiencing of grace, forgiving/forgiveness, caring and confronting community, and the development of inner spiritual resources that will take time, love and energy beyond that available through a few full-time campus ministers.

### **Some Difficult Areas**

When many of us consider broadening our ministries, especially in the light of overtones we attribute to administration, several problems surface immediately. Again, I only list those I see as most significant.

Some of us lack administrative skills; others may feel that administration is not an appropriate function for them; a number of us mistrust the results of work not done primarily by us. The fact is, in addition, that many of us want and need to be the one who loves and is loved consistently by "our" students. These may be hard words, I am afraid they are true.

Let me be very clear on this last "problem" or issue. Each of us has needs and few of us would be in ministry if we did not need to be needed. I am acknowledging that long-term relationship with some group of persons who respond personally and directly to the campus minister and must be a part of his/her life. Assure yourself of that privilege with some segment of your community! Then, please, please consider "administry" as a viable way to

enhance your ministry. Plan on growing toward that style if you are going to be around when the 1900's are not.

### **Enabler of God Worship**

I will first reiterate some facts and themes which I feel will be part of the new century's beginning in this country. A lot of religion will be focused primarily on the finding and using of resources within each of us as human beings. Much so-called "Christian" doctrine will, in fact, emphasize accumulation of possessions or glorify national strength. A lot of so-called "Christian" experience will be under an authoritarian pronouncement-maker and will be heavily propositional in orientation. A good deal of so-called worship will have made spectators out of the majority of participants and/or set up an expectation that God's word will come only through the mouth of the preacher himself.

Although I will not spend a great deal of time fleshing out my understanding of this critical role, the effective campus minister must, of necessity, function as Enabler of God Worship. Enabling implies refusal to be the authority and maker of pronouncements; enabler implies participation in some community life out of which are drawn (for leader and other worshipers) the offerings made to God in contrition and response. The enabler will be more concerned about what happens within the worshipper than about the image the minister is able to project.

The insertion of "God" in the phrase refers to a quiet insistence—overtly through teaching that is taking place in the community and the assumptions or spirit of the service itself—that the God who made Self known through Jesus Christ is God and expects ultimate valuing in the hearts of worshipers. We are tempted to worship a nation elevated to the position of god; we are seduced toward worship of possessions which have graduated from being the fruits of god—to being the god itself. We can no longer even be satisfied with people's positive response to us as leaders! Then as now the Christian community will worship an Other of Primacy and Mystery who still looks like the Father to whom Jesus Christ turned.

It will be necessary, I am convinced, for the Baptist Campus Minister of the next century to have continuing open relationships with ministers of other Christian groups—if, in fact, they are also at work on campus. My intent is not interdenominational ministry; my concern here is for the demonstration of mutual respect among Christian groups and the possibility of minimizing overlap in a place where all available ministers cannot reach the whole. One authentication of God-worship, I contend, is the acknowledgement of that one's claim on and power among all God's children.

Finally, true worship will continually have "in solitude" and "in community" dimensions. Worship will draw from and enrich daily living; it will encompass the thinking, feeling and willing dimensions of our humanness. Then, as now, authentic worship will draw from the music, poetry, movement and words of past and present in order to help the Lord's people live now and this afternoon (we are not sure about tomorrow!) as God's people.

### **Facilitator of Community**

Some will minister alongside of us because we are faithful "administrators." Some students who move in and out of "our" world need Christian community. The effective campus minister will be facilitator of Christian community among the people who inhabit academia and, perhaps, among some church people who are not experiencing it in their institutions.

Let me emphasize the Christian dimension. I seldom use that term as an adjective, but it here appears appropriate and necessary to define a quality of community to which I refer. The context and orientation is God, as suggested above in the notes on worship. There may or may not be a great deal of verbiage about God; there will be God-orientation. This will result in the respecting, valuing and growing of persons. They, in turn, will respect and value and enable the growing of those persons in the image of God.

Authentic community has to do with mutual accountability and freedom; it includes both support and confrontation; it lives out of a past which is deeper than

itself, in a present which is broader than itself, and in light of a future which may not include itself.

The effective campus minister will do some facilitating of such community, living and working out of a love which is deeper than self, searching always for vision which is broader than self, and in light of a future which will place self in true perspective.

### **Cross-Cultural Communicator**

I have spoken several times about an increasing variety among the people with whom we must relate. I am not sure all that the term implies. Let me point toward a few of those implications. Our glib references in the 80's to "the third world" in reality refer to the two-thirds world, underdeveloped, non-white—and growing in power. Our country, by 2008, may well be hosting official or unofficial missionaries of all religions and world perspectives. Some of these, thank God, from Africa and Asia and Latin America, will be deeply committed and concerned Christians. Campus ministers can and must be hearers and interpreters of the truth these messengers embody. International students will continue to be present on our campuses. A small, but perhaps significant, symbol of our attempt to be cross-cultural communicators might be the disciplined developing of fluency in at least one non-English language. The person who reads only "made in the USA" material may be forfeiting the right to credible communication with the world around.

Knowledge of many technologies were new to Americans in 1948. My guess is that the acceleration of development in technological fields will bring in the next twenty years at least double the change we have experienced in the last four decades. Many BSU'ers who graduate this year will have children in high school; many will have to be "re-tooled" or change careers at least twice; the sub-sub specializations will make it difficult at best for them to think together about major parts of their lives. These children of the alumni/ae will soon be in colleges where industry, the government and academia are together exploring still newer frontiers. Someone has to be able to help these worlds learn from each other. That may be impossible, but does the campus minister have any choice



other than to try? I plead with those of you who serve now in the nerve centers of technology to encourage some of your students to consider campus ministry—or explore an intentionally bivocational career!

In the next twenty years we either will have developed in society and/or the churches a black-white mutuality or we will be divided into hostile and armed camps. In the latter case we will have experienced a good deal of bloodshed and violence. Mutuality is more likely to have developed in the churches; the reader can contemplate that probability. In any case a major task of campus ministry will be cross-cultural communication. We must hear, learn from and attempt to love each other!

Read back over the first three paragraphs of this section. If one-third of what I suggest becomes fact, what type of minister can be and do and tell the Good News with credibility? Can authentic evangelism be racist? What happens if lives are bifurcated along work/thought and relationship/emotion lines? What happens when and if such divided persons encounter the One God? How is Spirit and Truth to be envisioned and—not explained, but—responded to? Do we first get folks to check out our Book in that cacophonous library—or do Christians who out-think, out-live and out-die others have the better chance to communicate the Gospel?

Some in campus ministry in the next century must, of necessity, be apologist-communicators. The Biblical story will not be part of the memory of many who come on campus. They will have other points of reference, thought patterns and assumptions. Only the readers, only the doubter-believers, only the thinker-ministers can, in the context of community and the meeting of real needs, struggle productively alongside these pilgrims whose primary concerns are rational. If we can encourage spaces, solitude and silence in the frantic pursuit of useful knowledge and skills—and then be prepared to listen carefully, think clearly and communicate openly with those who ask the difficult questions, we may all be surprised by God's presence in that dialogue. Not every campus minister can fill this essential role; if you cannot, exercise the "administry" role and locate an apologist.

### **Experimental Educator**

The effective campus minister must be enabler/teacher, helping others move toward thinking, feeling, willing and doing as Christians. The dimension of personal modeling in all these areas has, in this article, been alluded to only. A part of that modeling had to do, I think, with reflecting upon experience in light of Biblical themes and truth. An understanding of Christian history, world events, previous experience, our community, and our culture is also important for productive reflection on life. The provision of experience, and opportunity for reflection on the experience, which must be part of real learning, will be authenticated by such modeling.

### **Toward Missions**

I think there will be, for example, among whatever dimensions of our program which survive into the first decade of the 2000's, a missions component. We would not be who we are without it. Those experiences are—at least can be—Christian education.

Spring break experiences may give us a clue to better understanding of how we learn. They are a combination of ongoing Christian community, preparation through theoretical and Scriptural study, conversations in the midst of ministry, solid prayer preparation, expectations on the part of the participants, other BSU'ers and home churches (who often pay some of the costs), and—what else? The result is often life-changing for all involved. This is experimental education.

I underline the obvious here: learning occurs most often when those who go to help also walk the paths of service as self-conscious learners. The wise minister sees the task as both serving and learning from the recipients of care. We must learn how we learn—and invest sufficient time and energy in that process.

### **Toward World Citizenship**

Yes, Internationals among us have and will have needs in the spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions of their lives. Yes, Christian students can and should invest time and energy in helping to meet their needs and sharing faith and experience with them. One of the most dangerous

limitations of any group's understanding of God's power and love, at the same time, is the very human and totally unChristian assumption that God is somehow more concerned with or primarily interested in the fortunes of folk (who can be made) like them.

A significant part of campus ministry, even if we survive and grow toward one world by 2008, will be the reminding of ourselves and the enabling of our constituencies to learn that a God's-eye view of the world does not assume the perspective of any single culture, nation, economic system—or upwardly mobile economic grouping! There will be among us, then as now, myriad teachers—Internationals who bring experience as well as need and affirmation in addition to loneliness into our communities. Some will press upon us questions about our lifestyles; some will offer Christian alternatives to our expressions or understandings of faith; a few may be primarily learners who push us to articulate what we have assumed only fuzzily; more and more Internationals will assertively seek to evangelize us.

Continued responsible strategic planning for a learning/serving relationship with all of these Internationals in our midst can be a freeing agenda item for us individually and collectively.

### **Toward Dying**

Is it too much to hope that those of us who will be past retirement age by the year 2008 can help students accept and cope with mortality, deterioration of body, death and being out of control a little better than we have done?

There are needs among those who are older—and they will be increasingly in or near our campuses; there are ways in which students can encourage and witness to serve them.

There are also, as we minister to and learn alongside the elderly, many chances to learn. We can glimpse truths about being more than what one does, respectful non-worship of the body, and letting go. This perspective is essential to embracing fully Life as Christ offers it. It is easy to do something for people. The more demanding and elusive task is the building of relationships strong enough to become bridges for insight, aging and death. This may

be, for us Americans, the most feared and most denied dimension of life.

Campus ministers, some skeptics would insist, are the least of all Christians to acknowledge and put into perspective the facts of growing old, losing control and dying. By intentionally developing serving/learning relationships with the elderly we may open ourselves and the younger adults with whom we work to even this type of growth.

### **Toward Learning to Decide**

In what is otherwise a fairly terse article, I need an illustration to open up this area of discussion. Some time ago our campus ministers' group had two speakers, a devotional leader who enriched us through the sharing of some of his pain and experience, and an ethicist. One morning our eyes were filled with tears as the first person told of holding his child as that teenager died of a genetic disease. We breathed deeply—and turned to listen to the ethicist. He began by saying, "...and if your son had been born today, you might have heard him ask, as he died, 'You knew before I was born that I would die this way, why did you let it happen?'"

Some facts will reverse in time. In the next century we will have to be careful about teaching answers. Could my grandfather have conceived of smoking as a moral issue? Already, with the developments of breath-and-heart continuing technology, some are having to re-think the issue of planning one's death. Tomorrow will bring enough new power—in knowledge and possibly in "mind over matter" techniques—to make it absolutely imperative that we teach our learners how to think theologically and how to make ethical decisions in a world we can only dimly comprehend.

### **Conclusion**

The task is overwhelming—but exciting, and potentially both fun and satisfying. The unknowns are alarming; the known factors, staggering. A few exceptional women and men, mature and skilled and broad-visioned, will be called to serve in the next century.

May God give you the courage, help you dream, keep you laughing, be Your Security in tomorrow's ambiguity—and provide for you companions on the journey.

May God bless and comfort and guide you as you multiply and integrate.

Go in peace!