

## THE 1988 PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

### SIX THINGS I WANT TO SAY

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After a year as President of the Association of Southern Baptist Campus Ministers, I felt like there were six things that came through to me that needed saying and that I hope others will pick up on and respond to.

1. *Baptists don't realize how good of a thing they have in BSU.*

How many times have you heard someone point to a Non-Denominational Campus Group and say "Why can't BSU do that?" The answer is pretty simple: "Because we don't want to cut back, that's why." I received a fund raising letter recently from a non-denominational student ministry claiming to be the largest Christian student ministry. They reported being on 700 college campuses with 28,000 students involved. That does not even come close to the 1,042 campuses and number of students being reached with a BSU ministry. I wrote the president of the group a letter stating the BSU story and received a very cordial response saying he didn't realize how strong and large BSU is. Put simply, Baptists are reaching and touching more college students on more college campuses than anybody else. Should we do more? Yes, but let's do a better job of telling our story to Baptists and never hang our head when compared to anyone else.

2. *Baptist student ministers need national involvement and communication with each other.*

One reason I started going to ASBCM meetings was to be involved with people who had a different perspective from mine. Sometimes, it made me nervous to find everyone did not see things like I did, but it helped me to evaluate my own position. I am better because of that sort of contact. Therefore, I want to sound an alarm against Regionalism. In these days of shrinking budgets and other frustrations, it is easy for us to draw in and just get with those who are in similar situations to ours and who see things just like we do. Just as regional workshops can address particular concerns, they leave out others. Sometimes, they may be more comfortable for us, but they do not stretch us as much. We need a National Workshop held on a regular basis to help us learn from each other and be confronted by those who think or do it differently than we do. The current proposal for a National Workshop once every ten years is inadequate because many Student Ministers would never have an opportunity to attend such a workshop during their ministry. Also, the more infrequently these meetings are held, the more unlikely it is that Directors from different parts of the country can develop and maintain on-going relationships.

3. *Realize there is no one way to do student ministry and BSU.*

Different situations call for different strategies just as different budget and staff resources call for different approaches. There are principles that we can learn from each other, but we can't all do it exactly the same way. This also means realizing that there is no "Top Ten Directors" list. I often hear speculation about who the "Top Five" or "Top Ten" are in Student Ministry. Often this is a way of recognizing those who have served long and well in some very large and visible situations. But, I

want to say that the best Student Ministers might be on some campus no one ever heard of where their leadership changes every year and that holding it together is a miracle every semester. I may be the director of a larger program than some, but I see situations where I could not even survive and yet, the one who is there is continually impacting the lives of students.

4. *We have lost our sharp focus nationally on campus ministry to students.*

Unless this national strategy changes, I fear that Southern Baptists' ministry to students will be splintered and will decline. Let me state my credentials: I am a church person. I go on Wednesday night and I go to Training Union. My wife and I were at Wednesday night church supper on our Anniversary in June. All BSU Directors I know are church people. One of my goals is for my students to be church leaders and doers and I model that to them.

But, as long as our national strategy is to help churches who have as few as six students be a college church, we are in danger of losing the thing that has made Baptist Student Ministry, which is the ministry of the BSU on campus. Many churches are hearing today's emphasis on a word that it is better for everybody to do their own thing than to cooperate in one strong ministry. We will not reach the campuses of this country by scattering our efforts in trying to help every church be a college church. Non-cooperative Baptist churches are being encouraged by our current philosophy. BSU works; let's not lose it!

5. *BSU can model communication between Baptists who are at different points.*

I have students out of churches who identify themselves as moderate and fundamentalist

churches. It should be that way. Some of the students know nothing about the labels; others use them and don't understand them. In BSU they talk and learn from each other in both formal and informal situations. Often, they find they are alike and wonder what the big deal is. Maybe, after college, they will talk to each other, too. I really believe that our Student Ministries can help break down some of the walls that are developing in Baptist life as we help future Baptist leaders talk to each other.

6. *Life calling emphasis has helped Baptist Student Ministry.*

Baptist Student Ministry has benefitted immensely from our emphasis on Student Ministry being a life calling from the Lord — not just something you do until you can get your own church. Many are investing their lives in this and it has enriched the quality and depth of our ministries. However, if we are going to ask people to stay a lifetime, we must have the salaries to go with it. BSU Directors' kids have to pay to go to college, too. One disturbing trend has been for some State Conventions to give larger raises to younger directors. The idea is to get the smaller salaries up quicker, but fails to take into account the growing expenses of the one who has older children coming to late high school and college age. If we want mature professionals, and we say we do, then we need to pay for mature professionals.

I had one of those shaping experiences one night at a BSU program. Standing at the back as a program was beginning, I was just about to be seated when a girl came in by herself. I sat down with her. She was attractive and a talented singer and had just recently gotten serious about her relationship to the Lord. No sooner were we seated

than in came another girl and took the empty seat on the other side of me. If the first girl had everything, and many said she did, the second girl had nothing. Her roommate had been in the day before to say she was her last friend and she was about to give up. Her family had sent her to college to get her away from them. Since being at school, she had alienated everyone who had befriended her. Her roommate said she didn't know how much longer she would hang in there. Here I sat between Miss Everything and Miss Nothing, to use campus labels. As I sat there, I thought, "What other group on campus wants both these girls?" The answer was none. BSU was the only group trying to reach out to both.

I hear Christian groups today say, "We reach athletes." Other groups say, "We minister to campus leaders." But, I do not know anybody that is doing as well as BSU does and that is reaching out to all kinds of students and seeing them respond. If BSU does not reach out to both these girls, who will?