

Professionalism and the Campus Minister

By Charles Lillard

Have you ever filled out a credit card application? Chances are you have, and chances are there were blanks that said, "Occupation or Profession _____" and "Title _____." In the first blank I put "campus minister" and in the second I put "BSU director." This article is in reference to the first blank. Is campus ministry a profession? In recent years Southern Baptist Campus Ministers have formed a professional association. The Association of Southern Baptist Campus Ministers as it exists today has a very ambiguous purpose.

When the ASBCM first came into existence I did not see a need for such an organization. The purpose that was stressed was fellowship among campus ministers. I didn't see how ASBCM could help me improve the good feelings I had toward fellow campus ministers. It certainly couldn't by holding meetings at existing functions and national conventions which I rarely attend. I joined the association mainly because of hard working colleagues who had seen a need for such an organization.

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision the people perish." I believe that unless the ASBCM gains a greater vision that it will someday perish. I make that assumption thinking that the majority of the association members feel about like I do toward the ASBCM. I have said all of this to show that I have no more right or qualification to write this article than any of you who have taken the time to read it.

Allow me to plant a vision in your mind. Give your imagination permission to run wild and let us think of an ASBCM that would command the respect of Christian ministers everywhere. Every campus minister who would qualify as a member of ASBCM would proudly display a certificate proclaiming him or her as a member. It would be next to the seminary degrees and the ordination certificate. Seminary

graduates aspiring to be campus ministers would apply for membership as soon as they became eligible. The journal of the ASBCM would not only be read but copies would be left conspicuously on the director's desk so that others would know he or she was a member. Local committees interviewing prospective BSU directors would want to know not only your testimony, call, stance on the Bible, eschatological views, stance on the gift of tongues, but also, are you a member of ASBCM. A local situation begins to have trouble with program or relationships, the local committee or state director calls in the ethics committee of the ASBCM for mediation. The ASBCM committee goes to investigate. Several campus ministers complain about a particular local situation and after an investigation the local situation is off limits to ASBCM members unless changes are made.

Perhaps you were not ready to let your imagination run that wild. How could the ASBCM become that prestigious? No organization is granted the kind of trust our imagination has dreamed of unless it has proven itself over a period of time. This vision will not become a reality soon, if at all.

The key to this vision becoming a reality is the ASBCM becoming truly a professional association. The situations mentioned in our imagining would not be unthinkable for the American Medical Association, the American Association for Clinical Pathologists, the American Bar Association, or many other professional associations. These associations have gained this trust and prestige because of high standards that have challenged and policed their professions.

Every strong professional association has two things that earn respect for the profession. One is a strict educational requirement and another is a strict code of ethics. Presently the ASBCM requires its members to have a graduate degree or just to have lasted enough years in student work. The degree does not have to be one that necessarily prepares one for ministry; just any graduate degree will do. This requirement would be unacceptable in other professional associations. A seminary degree would be unacceptable to the AMA, yet a medical degree would be acceptable to the ASBCM. I would propose that the ASBCM require its members to have

a degree from an accredited seminary. Such a standard would improve the profession.

I am aware that there are many doing campus ministry quite well without a seminary degree. This does not erase my opinion that the majority of people would do a better job with the training and theological background provided by a seminary education. A professional organization should set the standard which challenges the profession to greater levels of proficiency. Everyone I know of who is truly called to campus ministry believes students deserve nothing less than the best. They certainly need counsel and leadership of the very highest caliber to meet the challenges of the crucial days of college life.

The second mark of a professional association is that there is a code of ethics which guides the practice of its members. The ASBCM has no stated code of ethics and no means by which to enforce a code of ethics. A stated code of ethics which pledges ministry with integrity to students would state to all a genuine professional purpose and serve as a guideline for campus ministers. I would propose a code of ethics which members of ASBCM would abide by. A campus minister's oath might read like the following:

Realizing that my calling is first of all a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, I promise to minister to the academic community with integrity, faithfulness, and love. I will approach counseling with a commitment to the institution of the family, confidentiality when called for, and a belief in the priesthood of every believer. I will approach programming with a commitment to the Bible as God's Word, the student as one deserving the very best, and my denomination which I represent. I will approach accountability with openness, honesty, and a willing spirit. I will approach fellow campus ministers as partners in ministry. I will live my life in such a way as to bring honor to my God, my family, and my profession. I will strive to better my mind and body so that I might be a useful tool of God in reaching the academic community for Christ.

Whether something should be added or deleted from this oath is not the point. What matters is that campus ministers be given a comprehensive code which would keep integrity in our profession.

This kind of professional association would be a first, especially for Southern Baptists. If it could come into existence anywhere, it seems campus ministry would be its most fertile field. Campus ministers are generally supervised by committees and boards, not congregations. We are in an academic setting where professionalism is appreciated. We are on the frontier of ministry where newness is accepted.

It seems apparent that the hospital chaplaincy has made great strides toward professionalism. These strides have come mainly because of the great respect earned by the Clinical Pastoral Education program. CPE has raised the quality of ministry. The National Catholic Chaplains Association and the American Protestant Hospital Associations College of Chaplains are recognized by the U.S. Department of Health as essential to health care. Ministers from varied fields are seeing the benefit of CPE training because of the intense training and experience in crisis counseling. This respect comes because men of vision saw that hospitalized persons needed the very best of spiritual care.

The book, **Professional Ethics and Insignia**, lists the ethical codes for 174 different professional associations. They range from accountants to zoologists but no ministerial associations are listed. One that was listed was the American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors. Their membership is in three categories. They are as follows:

Fellow-member of AAMFC for five years and significant contribution to the field of marriage counseling. This category is honorary, so it is awarded rather than applied for.

Member-professional training and a minimum of five years experience in clinical marriage counseling.

Associate Member-professional training for marriage counseling and a minimum of two years experience in that field.

This particular association has a code of ethics with 18 sections.

Ethical statements by other associations are in the form of creeds, oaths, or pledges. As one reads the various codes and membership regulations it becomes clear that our association for Southern Baptist Campus Ministers has a way to go in cementing the association into a professional association.

Our association has a tremendous task ahead of us. The seminaries are now experimenting with internships in campus ministry. If this program of training could be directed by men and women with a vision for campus ministry, it can raise the quality of ministry. The campus, like the hospital, is a place of concentrated need. The question is, "Do we have the kind of discipline, knowledge, and energy to allow campus ministry to be a model of professional ministry."