

Response to "Spiritual Leader of the Baptist Campus"

By Jim Wilson

Each Baptist campus is different and various strategies of ministry must be formed. Hopefully, some of the view shared here may find common ground or else cause an anti-theological reaction that may be in itself a creative spark.

It is important to be a spiritual leader who does not disregard fellowship activities. Jesus met the people where they were in their marketplace world. If their needs were physical he met those needs without begrudging their plight and in meeting those needs he was able to reach their emotional needs as well. The desire to be recognized as a spiritual guru who speaks with authority can become a pitfall. If this is taken to the extreme one could find himself like the sterile Pharisees who had a deep allegiance to God but because of their position would not humble themselves to find common ground (even fellowship activities) with sinners. On the other hand, as the author stated, ministers must know how to move beyond (but not neglecting) recreation to a more mature fellowship under His lordship.

The role of the student minister on a Baptist campus should not be discounted if he is in a traditional or "fraternity" style of leadership. Both roles can work quite well if kept in the perspective of the goal of BSU (developing maturity both in personal growth and service). Even mandatory chapel can be made creative, enriching, and a positive discipline. It can also provide a common shared experience that many Baptist campuses (who have dropped mandatory chapel) have lost as they experience a fragmentation similar to that of state campuses.

The administrative titles used on Baptist campuses (such as dean of religious life, religious activities director, Baptist chaplain, BSU director, ec.) may connote a sense of sterility. These titles sometimes point to the minister's low self-esteem and need for an authoritative identity in order to relate to faculty or to demand some distance (respect) from students. The title of campus pastor is better, but the title director of campus ministries (campus minister) is preferred because it

indicates a very important concept of shared ministry. The director of campus ministries is one of many ministers on campus, both faculty and students. The term "pastor" implies an important undershepherd concept but in a sense he is a leader among leaders and not the only undershepherd. On a campus where many will become pastors and church leaders, it is important to model a lay involvement in order to show what the "priesthood of the believer" means in body life. The campus minister should be an enabler who does not demand the "spotlight" constantly (whether it be in preaching, leading Bible study, etc.) but, at the same time, he should not withdraw from taking an active leadership role.

The campus minister should be able to proclaim the Gospel enthusiastically through preaching and should not apologize for the positive thrust of his Gospel message. He can be intellectually honest in his sharing, but he must be able to center down to the simple faith of the Good News. There is a need to "pick the bones of the gospel" as with eating fish but the more central task is in producing the meat. "Picking bones" alone is tedious and not very tasty but produces some nourishment (new insights) occasionally that adds to the main course. The campus minister needs not apologize or be distracted from his main task of being that voice of hope crying in the spiritual wilderness.

Part of the problem of identity as a campus minister on a Baptist campus is due to the lack of evaluation of his responsibilities by the college administration. Most Baptist campuses bind the hands of their campus minister by placing various other job responsibilities upon them. When churches grow in numbers, the pastor who was education, music, youth, administrator, and Sunday school director all combined in one becomes part of a multi-staff ministry. Many Baptist campus ministers still have combinations of some of the following jobs joined with their main task of ministry: professor, administrator (lots of committee work), student activities director, church relations director, etc. To accomplish the task of campus ministry the administration should provide as much freedom as possible for the campus minister to relate to the students as a spiritual leader in their joint venture of Christian ministry.

In summary, there is a need for a “preaching, teaching, ministering pastor” but the emphasis should be on being a minister among ministers. One should not look to create distance (respect) at the cost of being personal but can generate authentic respect by being a confessional minister among ministers. He shows himself as a fellow struggler who has found the well of living water and is more than capable as a minister to share his good news.