

Spiritual Leader of the Baptist Campus

By Jerry B. Cain

For several years now I have tried to determine what every Southern Baptist campus minister tries to determine: (1) How can I be more than an activities director and best meet the spiritual needs of my students, and (2) How can I tie my students more closely to the local church? All kinds of models and programs have been considered and even tried with varying degrees of success. A new model is emerging from my experience which holds promise in achieving these goals.

The model of which I am dreaming might be helpful for other campus ministers on Baptist campuses as they consider and adapt strategies to meet the needs of their unique campuses.

I. The Baptist Campus Situation

Each of our forty-two Baptist colleges have stressed from the beginning the importance of a quality spiritual atmosphere on campus. Traditionally this was to be achieved through two programs. Bible classes were required of all students to acquaint them with the cultural and historical importance of Christianity. Also, chapel was an integral part of the spiritual life of these Baptist schools as an attempt to expose students to the devotional and personal side of faith. Chapel was generally required of all students. It served as a gathering of the entire campus community for announcements and helped expose campus guests to the best side of the student body. Chapel was often used as a public relations program to give a potentially good impression of the campus.

Thus until the sixties most campus ministers on Baptist campuses were mainly involved in teaching Bible and orchestrating chapel. But in the last thirty years two influences from state campuses have forced a reassessment of the minister's role on the Baptist campus.

In 1952 for the first time enrollment in state supported schools surpassed the enrollment in private schools. Baptist youth were now attending state schools and demanding spirit-

ual guidance and growth on these campuses. The Baptist Sunday School Board responded by accentuating what is now called National Student Ministries. The program of work, called Baptist Student Union, was vibrant and attractive to students attending state universities. This program also highlighted Bible study and worship.

Baptist students on Baptist campuses soon learned about Baptist Student Union from their friends on state campuses and discovered that BSU Bible studies required no home work nor grade for the transcript. Baptist Student Union worship was free and non-coercive in contrast to chapel on the Baptist campus. The Baptist Student Union director was receiving special training for his job from the Baptist Sunday School Board and special materials were printed to assist in his work. He organized small group activities dependent on personal relations and often was endowed with a building all his own in which to gather his flock. His Baptist students developed a strong identity with T-shirts, intramural teams and attractive activities much like the Greek fraternity system flourishing on campus. As a leader he was seen as a coordinator of activities.

The turbulence of the sixties was also traumatic to the campus ministry program of chapel and Bible classes on Baptist campuses. Students demanded freedom and questioned the validity of required religion. Most Baptist schools changed their chapel traditions to accommodate students and to appeal to a widening circle of non-Baptist clientele.

Thus, the structures of the traditional religious programs at Baptist colleges remained but with the added trappings of the National Student Ministries Baptist Student Union program. Neither mold was appropriate. The legalism of the pre-sixties was chaffing. Yet the Baptist fraternity feeling of the BSU limited the campus minister from involvement with the entire campus.

In the midst of these changing times it might be appropriate to take the oldest New Testament model for Christian leadership and apply it to the Baptist college situation. The Baptist campus is primed now for a pastor.

II. The Baptist Campus Pastor

The staff member responsible for the spiritual climate of the Baptist campus should be called the Campus Pastor. Students at a Baptist college have a preconceived idea as to what a pastor is and would be able to relate to this person in a positive manner. They have not been exposed to a chaplain and have only a vague idea as to what a chaplain does. He probably is connected with a hospital or the military and is comparable to Father Mulcahy on M.A.S.H.

Baptist Student Union director, coordinator of religious activities, dean of religious life, and all other titles connote administrative mid-managers rather than spiritual leaders. Baptist colleges should take advantage of the symbols which students have already inherited. Good or bad, strong or weak, they come to campus with "pastor" as spiritual leader and will go back into churches where the same terminology is used. Baptist colleges should take advantage of that symbol.

Worship Leader

Each Baptist college values their regular time of worship whether it be called Chapel or Tuesday Night Break, whether it be liturgical or folksy. The campus pastor must take the leadership role in this worship experience to assume the place of spiritual leader for the flock. He/she should be the proclaimer at least half of the time that the campus gathers for worship. This frees chapel from becoming a parade ground on which to display area pastors or visiting evangelists and singing groups passing through the area.

As proclaimer the pastor claims his rightful and most potent responsibility as spiritual leader. He is released from the job of orchestrating and entertaining. Such a role requires him to be read, prepared, and practiced as he models appropriate preaching to his flock. This positive display of worship leadership would greatly affect the future church leaders who spend four years under his pastoral leadership.

Robert G. Kemper reminds the pastor, whether he is in a parish setting or campus setting, that the impressions made while preaching are the most important:

Their first impressions of the kind of person you are will come by experiencing your preaching. With the passage of

time they will expect to have their impressions reconfirmed by hearing you speak to them from the pulpit. In the jargon of advertising, through preaching you create an image of who you are, what you believe, how you relate to people.¹

The type of preaching a pastor does sets the tone for the rest of his ministry. If one preaches abrasive sermons, he may gain respect but be held at a distance in personal relations with his campus or congregation.* Should one preach gentle sermons he may be personally loved but instill reservations about his forthrightness.

Harvard Divinity School dean Krister Stendhal feels that the campus pastor's sermon should be a sermon and not a lecture:

I start from the conviction that every campus has its fill of lectures. Thus the sermon on campus needs to be more religious, more overtly and consciously a part of worship than sermons in any other setting. In style, content, spirit, the campus sermon needs to be distinctively religious. Please, give us a break from "being lectured at"! Moral discourse—valuable as it is—is not enough.

I would like to set the criterion this way: the campus sermon needs to be particularly God-centered; it needs to be an integral part of worship, and true worship is by nature Godward, an act of becoming conscious of our being in God's presence.²

Thus appropriate spiritual leadership on a Baptist campus requires that the pastor preach. The images inherent in our Christian faith and in our students demands this of the leader. Chapel services at Baptist colleges will remain, some with coercion and some without. Chapel at a Baptist college must be removed from the public relations sector and be made a viable spiritual experience. Vital spiritual leadership on a Baptist campus requires a preacher who is expected to preach to his campus.

Crisis Minister

The spiritual leader of the Baptist campus will also serve as crisis minister much as a local pastor does. He will attempt to meet personal crises of his students, faculty and staff when sickness, death, and despair becomes realities for them. Visits to the school infirmary should be regular as well as hospital calls and follow-up visits.

The college community faces the same emergency crises and developmental crises faced by the rest of the world. But the spiritual leader must also exert his role in times of national and international crises. His campus community is attuned to world events and feels the urgency of these situations more keenly than does the parish layperson. War, world poverty and injustice are crisis events to which the campus spiritual leader must speak with insight and compassion. He/she should mobilize the campus for times of prayer and specific actions in times of international crisis. The campus pastor must truly know both the Bible and **Newsweek**.

Teacher

The main objective of Baptist colleges is not evangelism or missions or social action but teaching. Thus the campus pastor should do an acceptable job in the classroom and be respected as a teacher. Paul combines the roles of pastor-teacher in Ephesians 4:11.

As a classroom instructor he/she can identify with other teachers and build a common ground for ministry with them. He/she supports the mission of the college and unites ministry with academic activity. The spiritual leader serves on committees with other faculty members and thus serves as a policy maker for the school. The campus pastor advises students and is involved with the academic purpose of the school in areas that touch all faculty members' lives. Training in both an academic area as well as in the Christian ministry should be modeled in the spiritual leader of the Baptist campus.

Robert McAfee Brown reminds the campus pastor-teacher that "the classroom must be a place where all sides of an argument get a fair hearing, where any position can be granted its full rights in discussion, and where piety is never confused with learning."³ In fulfilling his role as teacher the spiritual leader must be guided by four themes in the classroom: (1) He/she must admit to the class that neutrality is impossible and that material presented is biased by the pastor-teacher's personal commitments. (2) Opposing points of view must be presented fairly and sympathetically. Readings should offer firsthand positions not held by the pastor-teacher. Outside lecturers should be invited to present alternative viewpoints.

(3) No penalties for disagreement, no points for agreement, must be the rule in the classroom. The intelligent skeptic who struggles with assignments should do better than the believer who tries to ride on piety. (4) Out of the classroom the pastor-teacher becomes a friend and hopes that the students exposed to his character choose to follow his Christ.⁴ The spiritual leader on a Baptist campus, the pastor-teacher, is free to be schizophrenic at this point.

III. The Future Situation

Spiritual leadership on the Baptist campus is ready for new models and new meaning. A Committee on Campus Religious Activities was appointed in 1979 by the Association of Southern Baptist Schools and Colleges to offer guidance concerning the changing religious programs at Southern Baptist colleges. It is still at work and reports regularly to the Association on its progress in making the program fit the needs and the times. Good guidance will come from this effort.

Yes, the Baptist campus must have its share of religious activities—retreats, parties, dorm Bible studies, ministry teams, etc. These are important and will continue to be needed vehicles for spiritual and personal growth for our students. National Student Ministries continues to provide strong leadership in these areas.

But on a Baptist campus, to meet our goals of spiritual growth and church relatedness, the campus spiritual leader must serve as pastor to the campus. He/she must preach. He/she must preach often. He/she must preach well. He/she must minister with compassion and insight. He/she must teach with authority and openness.

Thus the Baptist campus would more successfully bridge the gap as a student leaves a church with a preaching-teaching-ministering pastor, enters a college with a preaching-teaching-ministering pastor, and goes back into a local congregation with a preaching-teaching-ministering pastor.

Footnotes

1. Robert G. Kemper, *Beginning a New Pastorate* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1978), p. 109.
2. Krister Stendahl, "On College Preaching", *National Institute for Campus Ministries Journal*, 5:4 (Fall, 1980), p. 66.
3. Robert McAfee Brown, "The Boundary Area Between Biblical Perspectives and Religious Studies", *National Institute for Campus Ministries Journal*, 6:3 (Summer, 1981), p. 80.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-82.