

# The Campus Minister as Counselor

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Through the years, the role of campus minister as counselor has developed from an incidental one to one of the central foci of the vocation. In the early days of the "BSU secretary," and later, the BSU director, the role was understood to be program planner and producer, enlister and even evangelist, but few people ever thought of the campus minister as counselor. Whatever counseling was done was initiated by the personality of the campus minister, rather than the recognition that this ministerial function was a part of the office itself. It is unfortunate that, in some areas where the campus minister is still not seen as a part of the ministerial team, there is still some resistance to the role of campus minister as counselor.

Today the campus minister is called upon for a wide variety of counseling. Since the campus minister functions in an academic setting, the first line of counseling is generally **vocational**. Many students are concerned about God's will in their vocation and see the campus minister as God's spokesman. In addition, they feel that the campus minister should be able to help them bring order out of the chaos that often accompanies entrance into college and the attempt to find a life direction. As a consequence of this expectation on the part of students, the campus minister must keep abreast of vocational trends and vocational-interest literature. In addition, the campus minister should be prepared to help interpret vocational interest counseling in the light of the Christian faith.

Counseling to help persons in other kinds of **self-realization and/or self-actualization** is becoming increasingly important. Often, one of the major problems encountered by college students relates to not having been encouraged to explore their own personhood during their formative years. These persons arrive at college, away from the structured environment of home for the first time, with no sense of who they really are. The campus minister has a major opportunity to help these students discover their own personhood in the light

of the gospel message of "freedom to be." Once a student begins to get a grasp on who he or she really is, then it becomes the campus minister's privilege and/or responsibility to help the student to actualize his personhood and feel comfortable with that role. Probably nothing is as important at this point as constant affirmation of the positive attempts to assert one's personhood.

From counseling for self-realization/self-actualization it is natural to move into counseling for **interpersonal relationships**. Loneliness is a great problem on the campus. Much of it stems from the inability of persons to interrelate with other persons. The campus minister's opportunity in this type of counseling receives a boost from the availability of the campus ministry program. The student can be encouraged to become involved in this program as a means of learning to interrelate. The "core group" of the campus ministry program can be led to see their responsibility in helping such persons become involved and thus learn to interrelate. The local church should also be a good vehicle for this type of counseling.

Logically, the next step after learning to interrelate with persons in general is the matter of relationships with persons of the opposite sex. While it seems almost impossible that modern students would need any "coaching" in this area, reality shows a desperate need. Not only is there a need for counseling in the "social graces" of this type of relationship but also for a clear statement of the Christian principle of respect for the personhood of the dating partner.

Success in counseling for good relationships with persons of the opposite sex may easily lead the campus minister into **premarital counseling** with some of these same students. With the popular American view of "love," the demands for premarital counseling continue to increase. To help students face the reality of the marriage responsibility before they get into it and to help them understand that only the love and grace of God lived through them is sufficient to stabilize the relationship are the challenges to the campus minister at this juncture.

Where there are married students or former students who are married, there will sooner or later be the need of **marriage counseling** by the campus minister. The stress of the combination of school, work, and marriage often begins to take its

toll. At this point, the campus minister may be called on to walk through stormy days with the couple. Consequently, the campus minister must be prepared to affirm the relationship and explore methods of healing the hurts.

It seems obvious to say that the role of the campus minister includes counseling for **religious commitment or witnessing**. Students with no Christian commitment and students whose Christian commitment has been shaken by college life often find their way to the campus minister. This may also be the only type of counseling in which the campus minister can go out and look for counselees. Along with this "salvation counseling," there may also be "salvage counseling." In areas where certain campus religious groups promote neo-legalism or neo-pentecostalism, this type of counseling is especially needed. When the systems that these groups are espousing fail to produce the promised results, the students often get angry with God, drop out of religious life in general, and may crack emotionally. At these times, the campus minister as counselor may be able to declare the whole Gospel.

There are, of course, other types of counseling which are peculiar to certain areas or campuses. Each campus minister will "fill in the blanks" with these challenges.

If campus ministers see themselves as counselors, there must be a recognition of both the opportunities and the limitations of this role. The major opportunities have to do with the availability of the campus minister and the different dimension of counseling which the campus minister can offer. The limitations have to do with the lack of formal training in counseling among many campus ministers and the time limitations which are a part of the campus minister's job.

In considering the opportunities of campus ministers to serve as counselors, availability must be one of the most obvious assets. The campus minister is the representative of Christ and His church on campus. The very fact that he is on campus puts the campus minister in an advantageous position. Often, the student will not tend to regard the campus minister in the same way that he regards a "preacher" or pastor of a church. For that reason, the student may be willing to go to a campus minister for counseling. In addition, when the student finds a minister in the midst of that student's own little world, it is more natural to turn to that person for help.

Needless to say, there is another side to the coin of availability. Since the campus minister is so available, care must be taken not to allow the student to abuse this availability. This is particularly true of the time "after hours" (if such time exists) and the time when the campus minister's family may be adversely affected.

The other opportunity which the campus minister has as counselor is to present a different dimension of life than that which can be presented at the campus counseling center. If, as has been stated, the campus minister is indeed the representative of Christ and the church on campus, this fact must affect the quality of counseling. In other words, if one cannot offer a distinctly Christian dimension in counseling, there is little reason to assume the role as counselor. This does not mean that one should be able to offer religious panaceas or to quote (or misquote) a scripture verse for every problem. Rather, it should be the awareness that the campus minister is guided by the Spirit of God and that He has a vested interest in the problems of every student receiving counseling. These concepts can be transferred to the students as counseling proceeds. It is not unfair to say that every member of the college counseling team is (at best) limited from presenting this hope, regardless of the counselor's own Christian conviction.

Any campus minister who is truly a counselor will be able to recognize and accept certain limitations. The first of these limitations is the lack of training. Since the role of counselor is one which, like Topsy, "jest growed," in most campus ministry situations the campus minister is not a trained counselor. At best, he or she has had a few counseling courses in college or seminary. A few others may have had CPE training, while a very few may have undergraduate or graduate degrees in counseling.

Given this limitation, the campus minister should recognize his or her own inadequacy. This is not to say that students should be turned away because the campus minister is not a trained counselor. Rather, it is to say that one must recognize and admit the amount that can be done for a student who comes for help.

The real temptation in this situation is to feed one's own ego or to be controlled by a messiah complex. It must be admitted that there is something enormously flattering about

students coming and "baring their souls" to the campus minister. There is also the real temptation to keep the relationship going, whether or not anything positive is being accomplished. After all, who has never wished to be recognized as a **guru** with a devoted following of those whose lives are being "straightened out."

One campus minister, whose training in counseling is extensive when judged by the average, reports that he quickly assesses the impact of his counseling on the student's progress in solving personal problems. If the student has not given genuine evidence of progress by the third or fourth session, he terminates the relationship, generally by referral to someone more likely to be able to help. This campus minister further stated that it is sometimes possible to tell by the first session whether or not he will be able to help the student. This decision is generally based on the types of problems and the attitude of the student. If it is evident to the campus minister, even at this early stage, that his services will not be of any real help, the relationship is terminated.

It is possible to overcome at least part of one's limitations in the area of training. In the first place, one can include good volumes containing basic counseling skills on an active reading list. A volume which the author has found helpful is **On Becoming A Counselor** by Eugene Kennedy (New York: Seabury Press, 1977, 337 pp. \$12.95). Other volumes may be suggested by the college's counseling department or by campus ministers who are trained in counseling. While reading a few volumes on counseling certainly will not make one an expert in the field, it may serve to make one more competent to deal with some of the situations that arise.

Almost every school will have courses which will sharpen counseling skills. This should be a real opportunity for the campus minister to become more competent in the role of counselor. Those who get study leaves might use them to attend seminars or conferences or to take courses in counseling.

When the limitations of one's counseling skills have been exceeded by the counseling needs of an individual, referral should be instituted. Three things are necessary here. First, the campus minister should be familiar with the referral services in the area. It is not enough to know just what or who

the agencies are; one should know something about their philosophy and work.

The second necessary step is to accomplish referral with grace and dignity. Some people who will accept the campus minister as counselor will rebel at the idea of "professional help." So it becomes the responsibility of the campus minister to help the counselee to understand that the campus minister is acting as part of a team and that this new counselor is also a part of that team.

The final step in this referral process is often the hardest. When the campus minister has referred, he must turn loose! It is natural to be concerned about a person with whom one has been counseling; however, to continue to hold on confuses the issue for the counselee and lessens the ability of the new counselor to function. The exception to this rule is when the new counselor requests the continued involvement of the campus minister. Perhaps, in a kind way, one needs to be able to quote that pithy statement of Jesus to Mary in the garden on the morning of the resurrection, "Quit hanging on to me!" (John 20:17).

For the campus minister, the most difficult part of being a counselor is to balance this role with the other ministry roles. Few professions cause a person to wear as many hats as the campus ministry. Each of them is important in its own way, and time must be allowed for each. One-to-one counseling can be a heady experience, but it can also be a very time consuming experience. Care must be exercised to make sure that it does not cause the campus minister to neglect other roles. There is also the danger that spending inordinate amounts of time with one or two persons will tend to alienate others to whom the campus minister should be ministering.

In this brief discussion, it has been impossible to cover all of the areas that are pertinent to the role of the campus minister as counselor. In summary, let it be acknowledged that pastoral counseling is a legitimate function of the campus minister; then, let the campus minister approach this exciting opportunity for ministry with wisdom and humility.