

Personal Ethical Issues for Campus Ministers

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Your students studied, or at least hopefully read, from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in English literature. In "The Clerkes Tale" they faced this interesting question: "If gold rusts, what will iron do?"

The ministry carries certain expectations with it. People expect ministers to live and act ethically. And rightfully should they expect ethical behavior from ministers. After all, as Christian ministers we serve a moral God who gives standards of morality for believers to follow.

As a specialized form of ministry, campus ministers are expected to live by the same standards as all ministers. Unfortunately, these standards are hardly codified so the campus minister can check off how well he or she measures up in particular areas. A Code of Ethics for campus ministers would not be a bad idea. Individuals can compose their own code of ethics for personal use, for that matter.

While true that all ministers are expected to live ethically, the campus minister receives little specific guidance in what ethical behavior is for him/her in the ministry on campus. Often it is just assumed that the minister will always know what to do. A basic assumption, of course, is that the campus minister, as other ministers, will be sexually moral and financially responsible. Consider some other areas of interest in person ethical issues for campus ministers.

Integrity

Foundationally, ministerial ethics is a matter of integrity. The minister's personal integrity is the basis of ministerial ethics. The minister should be a person of integrity.

The word integrity is derived from the mathematical term *integer*, whole. Integrity, then is a matter of wholeness. The person who lives with integrity is a person who has a unity, a wholeness about life. They have it all together. In campus ministry, as in all ministry, integrity is the starting place for ministerial ethics.

Since the campus minister serves in an outpost of ministry, the supervisor may not be close at hand and the supervision of the person's ministry may be rather loose. As a matter of integrity, the minister on campus should manage time wisely and well. The hours served should coincide with the hours expected to be served and reported as served. Contact with students, and their ministry, is made through drinking coffee, playing games and showing up on

their turf. But these can be carried to excess. And the campus minister may discover that most of the time is spent drinking coffee, playing games, and attending functions with little actual ministry being performed.

Integrity and honesty go hand-in-hand. What is reported on the monthly report should accurately reflect what was actually done, not just what you wished had occurred. If monthly reports are required, personal integrity demands that those reports be submitted, submitted in full, and submitted on time.

Intentions

From integrity, now on to intentions. Ministry should always be intentional. A ministry that is intentional has purpose and direction.

Think of intention in terms of your ministry on campus. Are you a campus minister by intention or by accident? Did you choose to serve God in a campus ministry? Some campus ministers serve as a campus minister while waiting to serve somewhere else, as a pastor, a professor, or a missionary perhaps. Other campus ministers serve there because that is where they had an opportunity to serve at the time. Others, perhaps, consider campus ministry a stepping stone to another ministry. If you landed a campus ministry more by accident than by design, you still must give that ministry your best attention, dedication, and effort.

To serve effectively your campus ministry should be intentional. You should have a purpose in that ministry and a direction in mind about what can be achieved through the ministry. While it is true that in any ministry we must always be open to the unfolding, developing will of God, any valid ministry should be conducted with intentionality.

But what are your intentions toward those with whom you minister, the students and faculty on your campus? Persons must always be viewed and valued as persons, not pawns. The group meetings, the individual counseling sessions, the incidental encounters are not just fodder for reports. Each student, no matter how plodding or how filled with potential, is a person created in the image of God and for whom Christ died. Each person should be valued as a person and treated with respect. At times you feel as though you could get your ministry done if it just were not for people. People are your ministry.

You will have the opportunity to recommend former students for positions or to furnish references for them. Be honest in references. Neither the former student nor the prospective employer are well served by a reference that makes a person seem better, or worse, than they are. Good intentions toward students translate into accurate appraisals of them.

Consider, also, your intentions toward your family. A strong, stable, committed family life is immensely important for campus ministers. Because the times that students have to spend are unusual, even bizarre times, the

campus minister operates on a unique timetable. Families must be able to adjust to that timetable. And the campus minister must be creative enough to find ways to spend quality time with the family at other times. More than one campus minister's family has fallen apart because the family could not adjust to the times and the constant crowds of students. The family was lost. Then because the family was lost, the ministry was lost. Pay attention to your family. Let them know they are important to you. They are.

Inquiry

By the very nature of the case, the campus setting is a place for free inquiry. Students are encouraged to look at issues from different angles, to make comparisons and contrasts, to weigh and examine conclusions, and to learn to think for themselves. Times and situations may occur, however, when the exercise of free inquiry runs counter with the prevailing mood of the sponsoring organization.

How far can students be allowed or encouraged to go beyond the accepted wisdom of the sponsoring group? This, of course, hits directly upon the issue of whether higher education, or any education for that matter, is indoctrination or education.

Take the issue of abortion, for example. When the sponsoring group has taken strong stands against abortion, how much discussion and inquiry may the campus minister allow about abortion? In some cases, the campus minister may consider that subject off limits and allow no discussion about it. In other cases, a quiet discussion may be allowed. And in some student centers the campus minister may encourage free and open discussion on any issue raised.

When such free inquiry conflicts with the "politically correct" language of the sponsoring group, how does the campus minister deal with it? At times the campus minister may frankly state to the committee, committees, or supervisor that supervises that ministry that such free inquiry is going on. At other times, the campus minister may allow the discussions but not publicize them to the constituency. Some may even deny ever having had those kind of discussions.

Each campus minister makes his or her decision on that matter. Honesty and integrity should always be practiced. Certainly denying what has been done to protect oneself is not proper. To stay only in the safe areas without ever venturing into the areas of inquiry that may bring disagreement would hardly satisfy the inquiring student mind. To find some method that allows students to examine the issues but to be certain that the accepted side of the issues is presented fairly and with clarity, still allowing the students the freedom to form their own opinions and to draw their own conclusions, is reasonable. No one can live off someone else's convictions.

This touches the personal beliefs of the campus minister. How far can the campus minister diverge from the accepted beliefs and stances of the sponsor-

ing body and still serve with integrity? Believing in the priesthood of the believer, some divergence is expected and even encouraged. The very place of ministry, the campus, demands an approach to some degree different from the totally traditional. Each campus minister also realizes that when a position in denominational life is accepted a certain amount of personal freedom is forfeited. If the campus minister reaches the place where his or her beliefs or behavior are diametrically opposed to the accepted beliefs or expected behavior of ministers of the sponsoring group, integrity may demand a resignation. This could occur when one's beliefs become either more conservative or more progressive than the constituents. Differences in basic approaches and divergence from accepted practices, securing financing for instance, also fall into this area. No one should fly under false colors. No one should represent himself or herself as something they are not. No job is worth compromising one's personal integrity to keep.

Inquiry is never without its price. While maintaining an atmosphere for inquiry and allowing for personal growth and development, campus ministers also have a certain amount of responsibility to those who sponsor them. Each person is free, but each person must use freedom responsibly in Christian ministry. Freedom is not flaunted. Freedom is cherished and maintained by its responsible use.

Involvements

As campus ministers you usually have responsibility for a budget. Some funds are normally handled in some way, if nothing other than collecting the money for the ski trip at semester break or the mission trip at spring break. Fiscal responsibility is essential. An elementary form of accounting will insure that the campus minister can account for all funds at all times.

For the campus minister to become involved in the misuse of funds or even failure to account properly for funds can be fatal to that ministry. The sponsoring group and those who put money into student programs will expect fiscal responsibility. The fiscal involvements are important.

Physical involvements, obviously, are to be avoided also. The campus minister serves in a sex charged atmosphere. Physical attractions, romantic involvements, and sexual encounters must be avoided for an effective ministry of integrity.

In the few studies of improper sexual behavior by ministers, ministers have a higher percentage of improper behavior than doctors or counselors. Campus ministers can fall prey to these same statistics.

Most of the improper sexual actions taken by ministers either happened in counseling situations or as the result of personal counseling. Campus ministers do a lot of counseling, both formally and informally. The minister is usually not well trained in counseling. They may not know about the common problems of transference and counter-transference in counseling and

how to guard against them. The counselee is in a vulnerable position when being counseled. When a person has power over another person the possibility of sexual misconduct is always there.

Campus ministers generally are no better equipped for counseling than other ministers. The recognition that all humans are vulnerable must be made. Ministers should be mature. Home lives and personal commitments should be secure. Care should always be exercised and common sense safeguards should be practiced in any counseling situation.

Campus ministry is an exciting and exacting ministry. Campus ministers have a valid and worthwhile ministry. You have some peculiar and particular personal ethical issues before you. As a minister, ministerial ethics are both as important and as essential (maybe more essential since you deal with young people and on a campus that may be secular) for any other minister. After all, "if gold rusts, what will iron do?"