

Campus Ministry: A View from the Campus

by Paul P. Fidler

Recently I had the opportunity to return to my alma mater to celebrate with fellow alumni the 35th anniversary of our graduation. The reunion prompted the return of memories, many of which had escaped to the far reaches of my unconsciousness. Revisiting the familiar scenes of college years brought home to me anew how potent college is in helping to form the ideas, values, and habits that help shape our futures.

One of the fond memories rekindled concerned my first exposure to campus ministry. When I joined BSU as a freshman, I had no idea that I would still have a close connection to campus ministry nearly forty years later! Even though I am not a minister or a recognized religious worker, I nevertheless have a close affiliation with those who are at the University of South Carolina where I hold an administrative position as a member of the Division of Student Affairs. One of my current responsibilities is to serve as liaison to those ministers and related persons who provide campus ministry on my campus.

During my thirty years on campus, I have served in a number of different administrative and faculty roles culminating in my current position where I hold a dual appointment in student affairs and the College of Education. Beginning as a faculty advisor to BSU in the early 1960's, I have maintained a close relationship with campus religious programs and activities. Over the years I have also had the opportunity to observe several different programs by serving on their boards of directors. In short, I have seen campus ministry from several different vantage points including that of active church layman. This somewhat unique and continuous perspective has prompted this view of campus ministry and its increasing value as part of a comprehensive offering of student services today.

A Different Approach

My view of campus ministry has been shaped by the dynamics of where I serve and the leadership I have observed. The University of South Carolina has long had close ties to organized religion. The University's first president was a minister who saw no conflict in such dual roles on a state university campus. So closely was the campus influenced by its religious heritage, that it was not until World War II that the requirement for chapel attendance was abolished. The University to this day has a strong Department of Religious Studies and it continues to appoint a chaplain to offer prayers at formal occasions including football games and to help coordinate the University's campus ministry program by meeting weekly with chaplains and other religious workers.

Perhaps my views were shaped most strongly, however, by my student affairs supervisor in the early 1960's. The Dean of Students, as he was called then, had a

big job but a small staff. The campus was faced with making racial integration work, and later with trying to deal effectively with protests prompted by the Vietnam War as well as other national and local events. Against this backdrop of 1960's challenges, the Dean was searching for ways to provide adequate staffing for the growth he saw coming in campus enrollments.

As the Dean assessed the level of his resources, he took special note of the chaplains who had been assigned to the campus by their denominations. Although there were only a few chaplains available then, he noted their strong spiritual values, the fact that many had received pastoral training in crisis management, and their strong commitment to USC students. He resolved to look for ways to incorporate their talents more effectively in meeting overall campus needs. At the time, the chaplains related to the campus in a very loose and unorganized way. There was no formal statement spelling out their relation to the campus and there were no explicit expectations for their service to the campus.

His plan, which has influenced institutional policy ever since, resulted in a policy which required every recognized chaplain and religious worker to agree to work together for the betterment of the campus. This so called 'chaplains' agreement' became a springboard for encouraging greater campus involvement on the part of all campus ministers. Included in the benefits for recognition were a regular staff I.D. card which provided full campus access, a campus parking decal, inclusion on the mailing list for faculty and staff communications, tickets to athletic events, and mailing labels for students of their denomination. This show of interest on the part of the University for upgraded status was welcomed by the religious workers and a close and trusting relationship ensued.

Since the advent of the new relationship, campus involvement on the part of campus ministers has developed even further. For example, chaplains now serve on a number of University committees, teach the University's widely acclaimed freshman seminar course (University 101), serve on weekend duty while classes are in session, respond readily in the event of campus emergencies, and serve as faculty advisors to campus organizations including some which are not directly related to their denominational missions. Additionally, they have created a service award given annually during the University's Awards Day ceremony, provided the impetus for an annual award given to the most outstanding academic advisor on campus, and helped influence the development of a number of campus services including orientation, the counseling center, and others. The counseling role provided by chaplains augments the overall campus counseling efforts and students are better served through these combined efforts. A colorful poster which adorns many faculty and staff office walls describes the numerous counseling services available on campus including those provided by University chaplains. In short, the contributions of campus ministers have been many and substantive and their impact has been felt campus wide.

Value of Campus Ministry Today

As I reflect over the past forty years of my prolonged and nearly continuous involvement with campus ministry, my understanding and appreciation of its role on campus has grown. During my student days, my perspective of campus ministry was affected by the personal benefits provided me by BSU. The impact of the ministry was powerful—I gained a new perspective on religion, found new and broader issues to question, found dedicated churchmen who were interested in my welfare and who taught me what church service means, and perhaps most importantly, it was at BSU that I met and later married the woman who has been my wife for nearly thirty-five years!

But this perspective, as meaningful as it is, is a subjective and personal one. My current view has been shaped by other roles I've played including church layman, parent of two recent college students, and most importantly as university administrator. I'd like to share this perspective which has been gained largely through the lens of looking at my present campus and the manner in which campus ministry has been fostered. I appreciate campus ministry today because I see it meeting five distinct campus needs—serving students, providing a church presence on campus, sensitizing the campus to questions of values, providing order to the presence of religion on campus, and enhancing faculty and staff development.

Meeting Student Needs

In fulfilling their pastoral roles, campus ministers meet students in times of crisis and provide effective personal, social, and spiritual counseling. Take away the hundreds of hours of such counseling provided to students each year and you have the potential for a more volatile and troubled campus. As more and more students come to campus from broken homes and single parent families, the need for such counseling assistance is even more apparent. Counseling centers nationally have been hard strapped to meet these new demands brought to campus by a changing student clientele.

Not all student needs that campus ministers address can be labeled serious or of crisis proportions. Most of these everyday needs represent the typical developmental process which traditional age college students undergo. In his book entitled *Education and Identity*, Arthur W. Chickering describes the typical developmental tasks which college students encounter. These tasks, or vectors as he labels them, include developing competence, managing emotions, developing autonomy, establishing identity, freeing interpersonal relationships, developing purpose, and establishing integrity. Students provide both formal and informal testimony to the significant influence campus ministers exert in helping them grow and develop. Had I kept a diary of my college years, I'm certain I would have written of the many ways my campus minister helped me mature both personally and spiritually. I'm reminded almost daily that this potential to meet developmental needs is still being

fulfilled by the campus ministers on my campus.

Church Presence

One of the chief values of campus ministry is bringing the church closer to its members and potential members at a time when many college students are separated for the first time from their communities of support—family, childhood friends and neighbors, and home church. Although some dedicated students will seek an off-campus church to continue their religious relationship, many appear to use the 'new found freedom' which college offers to take a break from formal religion—especially that inherited from family. This is the challenge often faced by campus ministers today who find many students eager to consider the time honored questions of 'Who am I?', 'Where am I going?', and 'What role should religion play in my life?', yet are reticent to return to the structure of their previous religious experience.

Against the backdrop of this scenario, campus ministers are gaining a new appreciation of how students develop faith and its relationship to students' overall development described above by Chickering. Amid emerging theories of faith development, campus ministers can work in tandem with college student affairs staff to foster student developmental needs including spiritual growth. Colleges and universities become even more hospitable to campus ministry when viewed against this perceived common mission.

Sensitizing Campus

One of the classic roles described for campus ministry by the now famous Danforth Foundation study published in 1969 is that of 'prophetic voice.' Over the years, my campus has witnessed the impact of this prophetic mode through formal programs such as religious emphasis week and visiting scholars series in which speakers sponsored by chaplains addressed religious and values issues of interest to the entire campus. There is increased discussion today about the desirability of returning to a campus wide focus on religion popularized by the religious emphasis week of former years.

Not all prophetic efforts are as formal and broad based as those described above. Currently the chaplains raise questions of value through their personal or collective efforts of communicating their points of view directly to the vice president for student affairs or other officials. The close working relationships outlined earlier have worked to open numerous channels of communication to the campus and these campus ministers do not hesitate to speak to the issues which impact society and campus such as multiculturalism, individual rights, or issues of church and state.

During a recent monthly luncheon sponsored by the chaplains for interested faculty and staff, participants learned of a new city wide effort to use young volun-

teers to help beautify and renovate a number of city areas. The audience of church laymen and community leaders learned about new avenues of community service through which college students can learn what citizenship means today.

Religious Order

With the multiplicity of religious orders, denominations, and organizations existing today, campus ministry offers the campus community a means of order and stability. Current policy specifies that the University will recognize religious workers on request from their national or regional authority. When such requests are received, a faculty/staff/student committee meets with each candidate to discuss university criteria for recognition including the campus policy that recognized workers are expected to work in harmony with each other. This policy generally limits recognition to no more than one or two representatives from the same denomination or organization.

Unrecognized representatives of the same religious background desiring campus access must coordinate campus visits with the recognized representatives. With over 100 Baptist churches surrounding USC, there would be chaos if all of these churches were allowed uncoordinated access to the campus. This policy has served the campus well and in particular has honored student wishes for consistent enforcement of the University's Solicitation Policy which covers religious canvassing as well as other types of solicitation. Campus access may also be gained by invitation of registered student organizations which are supported by nearly every campus ministry program. Thus the policy offers a useful balance by allowing access for coordinated religious activity yet limiting solicitation efforts.

Staff Development

I have observed in my years on campus a very positive and beneficial impact that campus ministers have had on student affairs staff. These benefits have resulted from the close working relationships that have been fostered by the University's deliberate policy described above. As a result, student affairs staff have gained a new perspective on the broad developmental goals they are helping students to achieve. Many will now acknowledge that the student goals of developing purpose and integrity may clearly call for a spiritual dimension that campus ministers can help students achieve.

To illustrate, it may be helpful to describe the relationships that have developed between campus ministers and student affairs staff. As previously mentioned, the student affairs staff is represented at weekly meetings of the Carolina Chaplains Association (CCA) and the University Chaplain. In addition, campus ministers often serve on advisory committees for such key services as orientation, health services, and leadership development where they have regular input into campus programs. Also, various campus ministers who have received crisis or pastoral

training participate in weekend duty with student affairs staff and offer their services when warranted. Their services are requested most frequently upon a student's death or severe injury. They've proved especially helpful in dealing with grieving parents and close friends.

Campus ministers have also volunteered to participate in training programs for student staff who serve as residence hall directors or resident assistants in campus housing. They have proven helpful in providing information about how to handle personal relationships during a crisis and how to deal with religious cults. To facilitate their relationships with student affairs staff, the CCA sponsors an annual coffee for student affairs staff, a dessert reception with residence hall directors and staff, and a luncheon for international students and their campus advisors. In all these ways, campus ministers have close contact with student affairs staff and serve to provide meaningful staff development for many campus workers.

Conclusion

My nearly forty years of exposure to campus ministry has left me with an indelible lesson. Campus ministry is as vibrant and full of potential today as when I first experienced it as a student. But I have a broader view today—one that has developed as a result of many years of service within academe. I see the value of campus ministry repeated daily as some students discover its benefit for the first time, while others rediscover its force after returning to campus. Campus staff, too, are learning more about the students they serve from these dedicated church men and women who augment campus staff. I only hope we don't take their services for granted.