

ASBCM PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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I am thankful for the opportunity to address our association. I have never been an out front BSU Director so it would make sense I would not be an out front ASBCM President. God does not want us to be something we are not, we are already that. He wants us to be everything He created us to be. God has given me a partner in ministry, my wife Suzanne, who is a much better communicator than I. God has always lead tremendous student leaders to campuses where I have been called to minister. It would make sense that He would lead me to be the ASBCM President the same year He would lead tremendous campus ministers to the ASBCM Executive Committee. They have allowed me to be me. However, I did not shrink from this opportunity to speak before you because I have observations that are very important for me to share.

In 1971, I accepted the call from a local BSU committee to become the first full time director at Northwestern State College in Alva, Oklahoma. Northwestern was a small campus of fifteen hundred students -- fifteen hundred students who packed their

suitcases every Friday and returned to their home towns which were not very far away. Alva had one Baptist church. Monthly business meetings were very exciting. The church was going through a difficult time as far as church/pastor relationship was concerned. Many business meetings started out with a deacon standing up and saying, "Pastor, don't you think it is about time you resigned?" Suzanne and I decided then we would stay in campus ministry as long as the Lord would allow us. That was twenty-four years ago!

During that first year I was mistaken several times as a new student on campus. That doesn't happen any more. My first student president was a young man from Shattuck, Oklahoma, named Mike Williams. Last summer a student contacted me about the possibility of going to Glorieta Student Week. She was a sophomore at another campus in the state. Her name was Jennifer Williams from Shattuck, Oklahoma. I asked her if she knew one of my former students. His name was Mike Williams and he was from Shattuck. He had married a beautiful young lady named Peggy Riddle. The student became silent for a while and then said, "They are my parents." I aged just a little bit that day.

I want to talk about change in student ministry. I will not debate the fact that students have changed these last twenty-five years, they have. But I believe that students are more alike than different. The thing that has changed the most in my ministry is

me. Even though I can still beat most students in tennis, ping pong, and basketball, I do not prove that boast nearly as often. I have changed and it is not just gray hair and a sagging chest. Some of the change has been for the good and some for the detriment of the ministry to students to which God has called me. As I look at myself, I see an aging student minister. I walked by our bedroom the other day and thought sure my dad had dropped by for a visit, but alas it was my reflection in the bedroom mirror. That is what I would like to speak to this evening. For those of you who still have your youth, my wish for you is that you might grow old in student ministry. I want to talk about the good and the bad that we old timers are causing our profession, and give you some things to watch for as you walk down the same path.

Let me first talk about the detriment.

1. *Loss of youthful enthusiasm.* I kid myself every once in a while and say that I am as excited as ever about student ministry. The truth is my enthusiasm is tempered by reality. While there are some positive aspects of this loss naivete, there are times it hampers creativity and spontaneity. I may be able to bite my tongue and not say it but sometimes my thoughts are, "We have already tried that," or "We have never done it that way before." Those thoughts are picked up on and loss of enthusiasm is communicated.

2. *Satisfaction in ministry.* We have longevity and security. We

realize that there will be another year. We become comfortable. Satisfaction can mean stagnation.

3. *We keep new blood from entering student ministry.* If the average minister moves every 3 years, I have kept eight campus ministers from entering the ministry, just by not moving on. Young people looking for a place in student ministry find that established ministries are filled by staff who have been in place 20 to 30 years and they become discouraged because of the lack of opportunity.

4. *Too many times we become cynical and critical.* Some of us have fought too many battles. It can leave us bitter. We have competed for ministry dollars and we have lost more than we have won because some do not understand the importance of our mission. Another reason for being cynical is past expectations. We have planned large events attend by small crowds, and we have suffered disappointments that are stuck in our memory. We have crossed too many people and strained relationships with significant people. The longer you are in campus ministry the more apt you are to be cynical and critical.

5. *Last but not least, we suffer from a loss of energy.* I find it difficult to put in the 12-14 hour days I used to put in. I used to go to the residence halls at 10 pm to start visiting. Now I am ready to find a bed at 10 pm. I used to sleep quite often on hard gym floors, I enjoyed all night lock-ins, playing cards until 2 am, and talking and listening to students at all hours of the night. If I miss a nights

sleep now, it does me in for several days.

Those are just a few negative comments about the aging Campus Minister. Age is a relative issue. My father still calls me "son."

I have a top ten list so you will know if you are an aging campus minister.

10. You think you recognize a new freshman and it turns out to be your son.

9. You think you hear two students talking about the nursing home ministry but they are really talking about you.

8. AARP, Ensure, and Depends are part of your everyday vocabulary.

7. You and your wife finally get out of town to go to a conference. You check into a motel and all you get excited about is a good nights sleep.

6. You go on the Fall retreat and forget to take the students.

5. The students will let you play softball only if you will play for both teams, and a freshman volunteers to run bases for you.

4. You want to teach your students a new game call horse shoes.

3. You believe shuffle board should be an Olympic sport.

2. You can't remember if it is DSM or NSM.

1. You show up at the Howdy Party only to find it was yesterday

Along with all those detriments I have one observation to share with you. The most exciting and growing ministries, that I know about, are being directed by aging Campus Ministers. Why? Here are some possibilities.

1. *We have learned to enjoy students.* I don't have to count them, make them guilty, or exploit them in any way. I have seen

generation after generation of students come, go, and return to say thank you. My perspective has changed. I'm planting oak trees not dandelions. I know that regardless of how frustrating a student can be, the potential of significant contribution to the kingdom exists. I see potential and not problems. I can relax and enjoy students.

2. *We have positions of privilege on campus.* Longevity does that. It takes time to establish relationships and trust with significant people on campus. Aging Campus Ministers have invested time that open doors of opportunity on a campus.

3. *We can enjoy the tough years.* When leadership fails or students do not respond, we know that God is doing significant things in students lives anyway. Sometimes our fondest memories are from what some would call lean years. We know that this too shall pass. There will be another year.

4. *We have a wisdom that only comes from experience.* We know when to let students fail and when to rescue them. We can look past our own ego and love students not because they are lovable, but because we know their potential. We have learned to deal with immaturity in a mature way. And on a good day, our hearts can be broken for someone who rejects everything we stand for.

5. *We can give the ministry back to the students.* It is a student movement. If our convention or association kills it, it will be resurrected again by the ones who began it in the first place. Only an aging BSU Director could know that.

6. *We realize it is a privilege to be on campus.* We realize this is our purpose in God's kingdom work. I would like to be paid more, but if I could, I would do it for nothing. I would like to be appreciated more, but the truth is I would do it if no one else knew about my effort. It is where my heart is. It is where I live and where I want to die. It is a place where I have planted my life. Only longevity can say that.

I have heard a definition of success which says, "A successful person is a dreamer who has found a dream too exciting and too important to remain in the realm of fantasy and who day by day, hour by hour, labors in the service of their dream until they can see it with their eyes and touch it with their hands." Only an aging campus minister can realize that success.