

Campus Ministry From The Cradle
A New Campus Minister's Perspective on Campus Ministry

by
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I entered the world of campus ministry December 1, 1993 at Averett College and Danville Community College in Danville, Virginia. While I have learned a great deal during the past three years, I realize that I am still in the infancy of my ministry. In my state in particular, we have seven campus ministers with over 20 years of experience. The rest of our staff have been in the field for a minimum of 5 years. And here I was coming in, straight out of seminary, with only a couple of internships under my belt, and being asked to serve on the same playing field. I must admit, sometimes it can be intimidating! However, these older "brothers and sisters" have been gracious enough to nurture me along the way. It wasn't long before I also discovered my extended family through the ASBCM. I was excited to learn that I had even more brothers and sisters! And some of them are even younger than me! Getting to know our campus ministers around the nation has been more beneficial for me than I can describe. I have been in awe of their ministries, humbled by their talents, challenged by their staying power, and impressed by their integrity. I am proud of our family! I believe I work with some of the greatest people in the world. I consider myself privileged to be numbered among them.

But one cannot stay young forever. This June will mark not only three and a half years of ministry, but also my 30th birthday!

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No longer can I use the excuse of "being new" for my ignorance. It's time to leave the cradle. While this can be frightening, it has given me more room to explore. And a view I have yet to see. My limited experience has left me with two images of campus ministry. I also have two questions about our work and that big, mean, nasty, world out there called the future.

TWO IMAGES

Whenever I take a trip, I pack too much. If I'm going to be gone for 3 days, especially to a place or event I've never been to before, I'll pack for 5, with several outfits for each day. I'm not sure what to expect, so I plan for everything. Lugging heavy suitcases around, however, has taught me the wisdom of packing lightly. Taking only what I need, I try to pack things that are versatile, that can combine with other things. In other words, if you are going to bring something, make sure it's important, because you can't bring everything. I'm trying to learn the same lesson in campus ministry. There are some things we must have with us during our missionary journey at all times. The other things usually are more burdensome than beneficial.

In order to minimize ministerial "clutter," our campus ministry program tries to stick to five specific purposes. I have borrowed these from Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Church*. Likewise, we are trying to be a "Purpose Driven BSU". While we are not a local church, we are doing the work of the church on the college campus. Our five purposes are missions,

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evangelism, discipleship, worship, and fellowship.¹ When opportunities arise to start something new or we prepare to repeat something old, we ask ourselves, "How will this help us accomplish our purposes?" Our parameters for these areas are pretty simple. Missions is simply meeting the needs of others. Our BSU seeks to be servants of our community. To us, evangelism means telling others the good news about Jesus Christ. By the way, that includes Christians and non-Christians. We seek to share the story in any and all arenas. Discipleship is just a fancy word for teaching what we believe. Without it, we fail to develop our future. Worship is when we get together to acknowledge God for who He is and celebrate what Christ has done for us. When we speak of fellowship, we look to create the environment of a loving family.

I realize that these descriptions are vague and just about anything could fall into one of these areas. But these purposes don't just serve as boundaries; they also function as scales in order to keep balance. While we don't try to do everything, we do try to do a fairly even amount among all five purposes. It has reminded us that just because we are uncomfortable or inexperienced with a certain area doesn't mean God excuses us. The need is still there and must be met, regardless of our feelings or fears. Maintaining a balance of our purposes also gives us the courage to say no to things that might overextend us. A student came into my office last semester, excited about an apparent new discovery. He dispensed with the pleasantries and blurted out "Did you know we have a

¹ The Purpose Driven Church, Rick Warren, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995, p. 119.

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Habitat for Humanity group in Danville?” Without waiting for my response, he proceeded to give me a brief abstract of their work, along with an update on their local projects in our area. When I told him I was aware of this, he cocked his head sideways, squinted his eyebrows together and looked at me like a puppy trying to figure out what a person is saying. He said “Well, then why isn’t our BSU involved? Shouldn’t we be doing something?” Telling him about the other ten community mission projects we were currently involved with seemed to have no effect. He was disappointed when I said that we could look into it for next year. Our BSU seeks to work with five areas of ministry and to maintain a healthy balance in each of those areas.

I’m sure that one constant in ministry is trying to deal with the legacy you have followed. Most of the time, we pick up where someone else has left off, and must endure comparisons. When I arrived to serve in Danville, I was blessed to have followed some great campus ministers. Averett’s BSU officially began when Kirk Lashley, now Director of Missions for the Roanoke Valley Association in Virginia, was hired in 1972. David Blevins followed him and served until 1989. I still hear from churches and former students about how great he was. I also still get some of his mail! He now serves as Pastor of Woodland Baptist Church in Arlington, Virginia and still volunteers in campus ministry at Sweetbriar College. Ken Owens, now Campus Minister at Furman University in South Carolina, was hired in 1990. He followed up on the good work of his predecessors and strengthened the foundation of our program, as well as how far it extended. By the

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time I arrived in 1993, Ken had left behind a strong, healthy BSU, and a tough act to follow! BSU was by any measure the largest organization on campus. He had built good relationships with faculty and staff. He was well-known and liked among the local churches. Plenty of people told me the strengths, not to mention the weaknesses, of each person before me and their programs. I guess these people shared these things with me because they thought I was going to look to these guys for what worked and what didn't, and sort of form an eclectic, patchwork quilt of the past and drape it over the campus for the future.

While I do try to learn from the experiences of others, I figured out that the whole of this ministry would be more than simply the sum of their parts. We had to form our own identity. And that meant for me to be who I am. Without getting too philosophical, let me state in much simpler terms a second image that I use in campus ministry. The first image, our five purposes, reminds me of what campus ministry is supposed to do. The second reminds of what the campus minister is supposed to do. I owe this image to Angela Perkins, Campus Minister at the University of Louisville. During my seminary days, Angela allowed me to intern with her for two years. She pointed me toward the shepherd and the sheep. In the scriptures, Christ calls himself the Good Shepherd. He is the one who cares for the sheep, calls them by name, and protects them from harm. They trust the shepherd, know His voice, and follow His guidance. In many ways, campus ministers and students have a similar relationship. campus ministers often share helpful advice with students.

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Students sometimes actually listen! But campus ministers are not shepherds. For we also need a shepherd and Christ is the only shepherd (see John 10:16). Instead, I think we are like sheepdogs. Sheepdogs can do a lot for sheep. They can bark at sheep who are lagging behind to catch up with the rest. They can slow down the sheep who are going too fast. They can warn sheep who are straying away from the herd. And when the sheep are in trouble, they can go get the shepherd. And like sheep, the sheepdogs need praise, correction, and guidance. As a minister, it doesn't take long to realize you have limitations. We can't force our students to get involved. We can't stop them from behavior we know is dangerous. And we can't make them see that Jesus is the answer to what's missing in their lives. But if we bark enough, maybe they will figure it out for themselves.

Two Statements

1. "We are so overworked, but why are we so undervalued?" I know I talked about images earlier, but let me share one more. Imagine yourself standing in the ocean about knee deep. And you are holding a bucket in your hand. You have been given the job of emptying the ocean. Despite being overwhelmed, you begin. And you make progress. You can measure huge amounts of water you have removed. But then you look out at the ocean and it still stretches further than the eye can see. Sometimes this is the way I feel in campus ministry. We've been given an enormous task. We have so many "people groups" to satisfy. There are the students. They are our first priority. But we also have the

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faculty, staff and administration. We also serve the local churches. Many of us have more than a hundred connected to our programs. Most of us are also state employees, which means we have duties there as well. We also try to plug into our local communities, alumni, donors, etc . . . Trying to meet the needs of students is enough of a challenge. Keeping up with all these other "concentric circles of concern" makes you wonder if human cloning isn't such a bad idea after all.

Go back to the ocean. You continue to bail water. The sweat drips from your face, your arms are sore, and your back hurts. You stop to stand up for a moment when you notice some people not too far away, standing on the beach. And each of them have hoses in their hands, pouring water back into the ocean. They smile and wave. One of them bothers to ask if you mind. Another says "I thought you might like it." Another says "We didn't have anywhere else to put it." The others just stare in disbelief as to why you are so surprised. While you wish they would stop, you realize it's just something you're going to have to deal with. So you have some ideas. You ask if you can get someone to help you. "No," is the response, "we don't have the resources." So you ask "Well, can I get a larger bucket or a second one so that I can do more?" "No," is the response, "we have always used this one-size-fits-all bucket." And then they take your bucket, poke a hole in it, and hand it back. "I'm sorry," is the response, "but we are all having to make sacrifices."

Too often, campus ministers are asked to do too much with too little. In my mind, there are several reasons. The first is the

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money. If money is plentiful, then we have secretaries. We have interns. We have student centers. And we have full time campus ministers where they need to be. People don't ask if all these things are necessary. But when the money gets tight, campus ministry bears a lot of the burden. The secretaries aren't needed. The interns will have to go. Do you really NEED a student center to do your ministry? Why does this happen? Well, the second reason is public relations. Simply put, we are too quiet! I had a lady from a local church leave me a message last year. She wanted to know how she could make a donation to student work. Naturally, I returned her call! When we spoke, she asked if I had an address for Campus Crusade, because her WMU circle had heard they needed money to reach college students and they wanted to help. I gave her the address, but I also gave myself a kick in the pants! People in our churches just don't know what we are doing. We have ten times as many students involved in BSU than any other campus ministry organization in the world. Yet ask people in Baptist churches about college ministry, and you are as likely to hear about Crusade and Intersarsity as you are BSU. Who's fault is that? It's our fault! I have no problem with Crusade or any other group. I've just learned it's time to stop grumbling and to start asking. No longer will I whisper in the shadows. I firmly believe campus ministry is THE most important ministry we do as a state and I will shout it from the rooftops.

2. "I'm excited about our work, but how will we do it in the future? I had lunch with one of our local pastors a few weeks ago. Whenever we get together, we always spend some time venting

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some of our frustrations about ministry. One day, after a rather mild tirade, he stopped and said "You know, there aren't many people in the world who will put up with what we put up with." It made me ask myself a question. Why do I put up with it? Why do I do this? Why don't I become a banker and work 9 to 5 and go home at regular hours like "regular" people? Well, call me a sadist, but I love it! I love what I do. I love being there for students to help them through difficult times. I love building relationships with faculty and helping them "stay connected" to the college student. I love leading student Bible studies with some of the sharpest and spiritual minds in our nation. I love the energy students exude in doing missions, and find that it rubs off on me. I love training our future pastors and ministerial leaders. And I absolutely love working with our local churches. Despite all the hassles, it's worth it!

But I'm very concerned about how we will do this in the future. I think one thing is for sure. It won't be the way we are doing it now. I don't claim the gift of prophecy, but I do foresee some things in our future. There will be fewer campus ministers and fewer campus ministry resources. Instead of local campus ministers on each campus, there will be "regional" campus ministers who try to get volunteers to do the work. Local churches will be asked to form more "church based" student ministry programs. Student centers will be sold and become the exception rather than the rule. Again, this will be due to a combination of a lack of funds and a lack of priorities. "Church based" student work is only mentioned when money is the question. Personally, I think

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it will be put into place, and then it will fail. Perhaps we will see more campus ministers employed by the local association or the local church. Unfortunately, I believe we will be fortunate to maintain what we have for the next 10 years.

But this should not be our goal. I know that I still have a lot to learn in campus ministry. But I hope campus ministry will be around long enough for this kid to learn it. We must not become complacent. We must keep telling the story and asking for what we need. Others will advocate the legitimacy of separate ministries. We must do the same. I will not be satisfied for our local BSU to just keep doing what we are doing. We will seek to grow and expand. We will ask for help. We will do our best to let others know the tremendous work God is doing through campus ministry and that campus ministry is worth investing in and desperately needed for our future.

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