

## CAMPUS MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

by

Sheila M. Gustafson

"To boldly go where no one has gone before." Prior to marrying my "trekkie" husband, this quote at the beginning of Star Trek meant that it was time to change the channel. The overabundance of techno-babble, strange looking creatures and polyester clothing was more than I could bear. I had much better things to do with my time than to think about the future. Over the past 2 ½ years, my husband has illuminated me to the deeper questions that Star Trek faces: what constitutes life; what defines community; where is loyalty. As I contemplate ministry in the 21st century, I realize that these are some of the same questions we will be facing. As 21st century campus ministers, perhaps our battlecry will also be "to boldly go where no one has gone before." This essay will focus on some practical ways to attempt this venture.

As we embark on a new century, campus ministers must develop creative, student-sensitive and technologically equipped ministries that focus on communicating the gospel in relevant language. It is important that we are aware of the upcoming changes that face us and our students in order to minister effectively. As always campus ministers and campus ministries will tailor make the programs that best fit their group, yet these programs will need to address these issues or they will be sorely left behind.

## **CREATIVITY**

To minister with college students in the 21st, creativity must be employed. For most of us, when we mention creativity we think of creative ministry teams, or innovative worship services, or the use of winsome publications to attract students. These of course are examples of creativity in ministry, and yet the 21st century will require us to broaden that definition. For creativity in ministry, we must think and act creatively to reach the students on their turf. According to the 1996 NSM presentation entitled "The Annuity Factor," 62% of college students are employed during the school year.<sup>1</sup> As the cost of tuition and fees continue to increase, the prospect of students working more hours is very likely. Therefore, standard campus ministry programs (ie TNT, evening programs, etc) will not be as accessible to those working students. Consequently, campus ministers will need to rethink programming and schedules in order to be accessible to students. Perhaps several small groups meetings throughout the week will be more effective than one mega meeting during the week. The use of technology will also factor into reaching students. This will be addressed later in the essay.

Historically, campus ministry met the extracurricular needs of students. The SCAs (Student Christian Associations) were forerunners not only of campus ministry but also of the student affairs programs of contemporary universities. The buildings

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<sup>1</sup> "The Annuity Factor - A Leadership Development Presentation of National Student Ministry," 1996, p.19

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which were constructed, many of them impressive in scale, likewise anticipated not just the denominational houses but also student union structures which the universities themselves would later erect and operate."<sup>2</sup>

As universities evolved, these responsibilities shifted from campus ministry to the student affairs division. Hence, campus ministry has become more removed from the daily operation of the university and focused more on the spiritual issues of students. In the 21st century, however, campus ministries that rekindle their relationship with student affairs may find a vital link to the university. Seeing ourselves as an arm of the student affairs division can help us relate to students and administration that would normally be inaccessible. Providing relevant programs that directly link to campus emphases can enhance the overall campus and provide a Christian voice. Again, knowing your campus and the "hot topics" that surface in student circles will provide you with the ideas for programming.

Tied to this element of campus programming is the necessity to provide ministry opportunities and meetings in the mainstream of campus. For those campus ministries who do not have houses or buildings on or near campus, having meetings on campus is commonplace. However, for those with campus ministry facilities this may feel foreign or uncomfortable. Yet, for visibility

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Schockley, *Campus Ministry: The Church Beyond Itself*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989, p. 18

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to students and to the administration / faculty, the utilization of campus facilities can be beneficial.

Funding of campus ministry will also be an area where creativity and ingenuity will be needed. As denominationally sponsored programs diminish, campus ministers will need to tap other resources. Many campus ministers are already contacting alumni for support and funding. However, we need not stop there. Writing grant proposals, contacting foundations, and researching local opportunities can prove invaluable. As the wave of volunteerism moves across the upcoming generations of college students, forging links between non-profit groups in order to provide mission opportunities and services can enable us to provide low-cost experiences for the students. Utilizing creativity without compromising integrity or doctrine will help us best minister to and reach the 21st century student.

### **STUDENT SENSITIVE**

Who are the 21st century college students? What will they be like? What demographic information can we acquire?

According to the *National Center for Educational Statistics* 1995 report, by the year 2000 the nontraditional student population will increase 16% while the traditional student population will increase 4%. The 1996 *Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac* predicts that by 2006 the college population will increase by 12% to 16,389,000. It is predicted that 45% of the population will be male and 55% female. Thirty-nine percent will be part-time. Two year institutions are expected to increase by 10% while four year

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institutions will see a 13% increase.<sup>3</sup> According to *U.S. News & World Report* over the past 30 years, undergraduate enrollment has increased over 260% at public institutions yet only by 84% at private institutions. The primary reason cited for this difference is the rising cost of education at private institutions. This trend is not expected to turn around.<sup>4</sup>

What does this mean for campus ministry? That the average 21st century student will be a nontraditional, female student on a public university campus, more than likely taking classes part-time. Is this who we, as campus ministers, are ready to minister to? Are we sensitive to the needs of these students?

Child care, convenient schedules, relevant programming, self-directed projects. These are only a few of the things non traditional students are looking for in order to attend meetings and / or programs. Topics such as divorce recovery, parenting, budgeting, self-esteem, and study skills are a few of the issues non traditional students are facing. If we are serious about reaching the university, these students must be included in our vision for ministry. Although their attendance may be inconsistent, the non traditional students often are more focused and directed and hence able to know their commitment levels. If we let them, they can be some of our greatest resources in ministering to the campus.

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<sup>3</sup> The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, September 2, 1996, p. 18

<sup>4</sup> *U.S. News & World Report*, September 16, 1996, p. 110

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But what about the traditional students who will still be a vital part of the 21st century campus? What sensitivity must we have towards them? In the September 12, 1994 issue of *Christianity Today* Generation X students were described as students looking for authenticity. Regardless of denominational affiliation, students were quoted as wanting "real" Christians. I believe this need for authenticity will continue into the 21st century college students. "What works" regardless of who teaches it or pays for it, will characterize the future students. Teaching the basic doctrine of Christianity will be a key in order to distinguish it from New Age beliefs. A focus on the gospels, rather than on the epistles, is necessary in grounding students in who Jesus is.

Diversity will characterize the students. If our membership is not reflective of our university population, then many students will be turned off by our group. Counseling needs will continue to increase as students from dysfunctional families arrive on our campus. Knowing how and who to refer students to will be primary in meeting the deep emotional needs of students. Serving as mentors for young men and women will continue to be a large part of ministry in the next century. In his book *Mentoring: Confidence in Finding a Mentor and Becoming One*, Bobb Biehl shares why mentoring is important and will continue to be significant.

In the past, mentoring happened everywhere. On the farm, a boy or a girl was mentored along side of mothers, fathers and extended family members . . . . Mentoring was the chief learning method in the society of artisans where an

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apprentice spent years at the side of the craftsman learning not only the mechanics of a function, but the 'way of life' which surrounded it. . . . In contrast to the past, the mentoring function today is in short supply. It is certainly not found in those homes where children part company with their parents for the better part of each day and accumulate an average of only eight to eleven minutes of parent-child conversation before the sun sets. And it is not found on most campuses where faculty and students rarely meet outside the class room.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to the 1970's literature on mentoring was almost nonexistent. Between the mid 1970's and 1986, 400 articles and research studies were published. Between 1988 and 1992, 372 dissertations used the word "mentor" as a key word and between January 1993 and June 1994 an additional 153 dissertations were added to the Dissertation Abstracts computer database.<sup>6</sup> Since the need and art of mentoring are growing, campus ministers must be equipped to be mentors.

Realizing what kind of students will be attending our universities sensitizes us to the needs and programs our ministry must provide in the 21st century.

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<sup>5</sup> *Bobb Biehl, Mentoring: Confidence in Finding a Mentor and Becoming One*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

## **TECHNOLOGICALLY EQUIPPED**

The rampant growth of technology has hit our campuses. E-mail, internet, surfing, chat lines, online. All of these are every day vocabulary words for the average college student. For most, computers are a necessity not a luxury. Some students spend much more time "talking" with their friends over a computer than actually meeting "face to face" for conversations.

Campus ministry can utilize this information super highway if we are not afraid to embark into a new area. In addressing creative programming for the 21st century, some of it could come directly over E-mail. Interactive Bible studies, discussions on "hot topics" from a Christian perspective, encouragement / devotionals, publicity and much more can be disbursed through the E-mail system. Future students will come to our campus expecting us to utilize this technology. A friend of mine has a 3 year old son, who cannot read, but already knows how to play computer games. By the time he reaches the college campus, his computer skills will be ingrained in his learning process. "Churches that don't establish a presence in cyberspace will start to seem badly out of touch with their parishioners," according to Barna Research in Glendale, California.<sup>7</sup> Campus ministries will also fall into that category.

Perhaps the greatest ministry we can have is by interacting with students who are searching for truth on your campus chat line or the Internet.

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<sup>7</sup> "Jesus Online," *Time*, December 16, 1996, p. 63



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Almost overnight, the electronic community of the Internet has come to resemble a high-speed spiritual bazaar, where thousands of the faithful - and equal numbers of the faithless - meet and debate and swap ideas about things many of us had long since stopped discussing in public, like our faith and religious beliefs. It's an astonishing act of technological and intellectual mainstreaming that is changing the character of the Internet and could even change our ideas about God.<sup>8</sup>

Students who would never come to a campus ministry meeting are open to discussing faith issues via a computer. Even general home pages are browsed by the curious who may never openly inquire about the ministry group on campus. "It is the nature of computer networks that they tend to throw together people who would otherwise never meet - - never mind discuss something as intimate as one's own beliefs."<sup>9</sup> Thus campus ministers can have a vital ministry with those whom he/she may never meet, through the use of technology. Of course, to truly minister and mentor a student one would need to create face to face meetings with him or her and develop a long term relationship.

### CONCLUSION

Although "to go boldly where no one has gone before" seems overwhelming and challenging at first, is that not what

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<sup>8</sup> "Jesus Online," p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

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campus ministry has been about since its inception? As we seek to be creative, student sensitive and technologically equipped may we continue to place our love for God and our love for students in the center of what we do. In 1938, Frank Leavell wrote "BSU was to offer students *nothing but the best* because they *deserve* and *demand* the best." <sup>10</sup> May we be faithful to the vision which has led us to campus ministry and effectively minister to students in the 21st century.

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Sheila M. Gustafson serves as Campus Minister at IUS, Ivy Tech State College and Mid America College of Funeral Services and is also Adjunct Instructor of Christian Education at Southern Baptist Seminary

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<sup>10</sup> *BSU Guidebook*, p. 9