

THEN & NOW

by

Geneva Metzger

The 1997 Annual Session of the ASBCM will mark the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Association in Kansas City on June 12-13, 1977. Charles Walker, current editor of *The Campus Minister*, has asked some of us who were in the original membership/leadership to think back to the beginnings of the ASBCM to try to define the “dream” which gave impetus to the need/desire for a national organization.

I have a lot of difficulty remembering details from 20 years ago, and my notes and correspondence from those years were given to the ASBCM for the archives. Therefore, I have had conversations with several people who were significant in the organization of the ASBCM and who are still involved, and I have also gone back through issues of *The Campus Minister* to try to balance my memories with what was printed from the annual meetings.

The significant individuals whom I remember as the catalysts for the ASBCM were Dick Bumpass, MD (now deceased), Don Gurney, CO (now retired), and Ron Brown, VA (now State Director in Maryland). These three involved me in the discussions leading to the development of a national organization for Baptist campus ministers. By that time I had had experience as a student and a campus minister in six states and knew campus

The Campus Minister

ministers from most of those. Though these early leaders in the ASBCM may have been perceived by some as “rabble rousers”, I can assure you that the intent was not a political power play. (That incorrect perception did lend itself to some interesting conversations and a great deal of laughter.)

Rather, the purpose of the Association, as adopted in the Constitution in June, 1977. (and not significantly revised since) , revolves around our *identity, collegiality, professional competence*, and the *sharing of resources and knowledge* to enhance our effectiveness as campus ministers. The only area in the original proposals for a constitution but which was deleted from the adopted Constitution was a certification process.

THE BEGINNINGS

There were at least two years of both formal and informal conversations, in state Campus Minister gatherings, with campus ministers at Student Week at Ridgecrest and Glorieta, in phone conversations and letters, in small informal committee meetings, in conversations with the State Directors at their yearly meeting and with the NSM staff, which preceded the formal organization of the ASBCM in 1977. Very significant conversations took place in the summer of 1976 at the National Directors’ Workshop in Clinton, MS where we had the largest number of campus ministers together in one place to consider the possibility of a national organization. At that time we had a tentative constitution and by-laws for consideration. Later in the summer smaller groups of interested campus ministers had further discussions at both Glorieta and

The Campus Minister

Ridgecrest during the August student weeks. A lot of conversation at Clinton, Glorieta and Ridgecrest revolved around the purpose for the organization and membership, but the most controversy was the proposal for a certification process.

Those of us who were in other professional organizations which had certification processes did not think it extraordinary to suggest certification as a part of a professional campus ministers group. A part of the purpose was (and is) to promote professional competence, and that is usually accomplished with some kind of measurement by a body of our "peers." Many perceived the suggestion of certification as a way of "interfering" with the rights of the state directors or, at best, as excluding some. We came back to this several times over the years, but a certification process never gained enough support to be included.

As would be expected there were some campus ministers and state directors who were very supportive of a national organization, Others were openly opposed because they perceived the need as unimportant or they perceived the possibility of a political action group which would only cause problems in the state convention. The remainder of the state directors did not care one way or the other. Still, we left the Clinton meeting with the understanding that we would gather pre-session to the SBC on June 12-13, 1977, to formally organize as a national Baptist campus ministers group.

WHY 1977?

By the 1970s, Baptists had been in the business of campus ministry (student work) for over 50 years, but it was only in this period of history that campus ministry was being viewed as a lifetime "call." In the early years of Baptist ministry to college students, people moved into campus ministry for a few years and then on to some other ministry position. This was partly due to the low pay, the few positions available and the fact that many did not view campus ministry as "real" ministry. By the 1970s many men and women had been serving as campus ministers for 20 or more years. This longevity of service and the possibility of living out a call serving on a college or university campus gave impetus to the desire to interact with others doing the same ministry.

The Mississippi River formed a dividing line in the United States forming two sub-groups of Baptist campus ministers. With few exceptions you were a part of the group east of the Mississippi which attended Student Week at Ridgecrest or the group west of the Mississippi which attended Student Week at Glorieta, and at both those meetings the campus minister had the responsibility of a student group which occupied most of his/her time. The only gathering which brought a lot of us together from all across the country was the National Directors' Workshop which only occurred every four years. There was a keen desire on the part of a lot of us to try to have a more frequent interaction with other campus ministers from all across the country, not just one section of the country. Also by this time, the dates for the opening of our

The Campus Minister

fall semester prevented many of us on the east coast from even attending the gathering at Ridgecrest.

Other ministry groups (Religious Education, Youth, Music, Pastor) already were organized on both the state convention and national levels. This organized presence gave those ministry groups a recognition in the denomination plus a forum for the interchange of ideas and the support and encouragement of others who shared their love of ministry. These groups usually met pre-session to the SBC. We believed that as campus ministers we understood our particular needs better than anyone else and that we were equipped to develop national programming which would answer these needs. The decision to meet pre-session to the SBC was, in part, to give us denominational exposure. It was also practical because many campus ministers were already attending the SBC annual sessions on a regular basis or would be able to get financial assistance if the ASBCM met pre-session to the SBC.

The belief in the value of this association was strongest at the personal level for many of us, but the reality of the organization was aided by the increasing longevity of service by many of our campus ministers and the desire to be related to our peers across regional boundaries.

WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED?

I believe the two most valuable contributions of the ASBCM to Baptist campus ministry have been our annual sessions and our journal, *The Campus Minister*. The annual sessions have given me the opportunity to meet and become friends with many

The Campus Minister

campus ministers I would not have known otherwise. The programs have usually addressed at least one and sometimes several of the parts of the purpose of the ASBCM. We have been able to enlist speakers who shared a love for campus ministry who were also capable of addressing church and non-church related issues pertinent to our ministry in an educational setting. I have attended 16 of the 20 annual sessions, and even when I did not find the content of the presentations particularly helpful, I did find the collegiality very beneficial.

Even for campus ministers who chose not to or were not able to attend the annual sessions, the journal has been a valuable resource. In the first issue (Vol. 1, Number 1, Winter, 1978) Ron Brown made this statement in his editorial *Perspective*: "One purpose is to promote professional competency among Southern Baptist campus ministers. This does not suggest that Southern Baptist campus ministers are either unprofessional or incompetent. It does suggest there is a need for a sense of identity and collegiality among our campus ministers national-wide. Philosophies and theologies of campus ministry, program personnel resources, how we relate to our churches and state conventions, how we are continuing and upgrading our education and our professional skills are some of the areas we can share and from which we can benefit. To such ends *The Campus Minister* was called into being."

In preparation for this article I have looked back through all the issues of the journal. I am amazed at the depth and breadth of the articles, the writers and the books reviewed. The journal has

The Campus Minister

provided a forum for several hundred writers, including many of our campus ministers, to address issues important to our ministry within the university setting. I have learned a lot from and about other campus ministers who have generously invested their time to contribute articles, responses, and book reviews which have provided information, guidance, prodding and encouragement.

None of this would have been possible without the diligent (and non-paid) service of our elected officers and committee members who worked in every area for the fulfillment of our purpose as an Association. For some it was a sacrifice to invest the time and money to serve as an officer, but for all it seemed to be a service of love, a sense that they were only giving a portion of what they had already received or would receive from others.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

People and organizations have a life span which are affected by both internal and external forces. There are two forces which have had a profound effect on the life of the ASBCM. The most prominent was the "takeover" controversy in the SBC which became an open issue in 1979 and a growing sense of regionalism within all areas of the church. The second may be a reaction to the first.

The ASBCM was officially organized just two years before the controversy in the SBC was politicized and became public. During its first decade the interest in the ASBCM was strong and membership in the ASBCM grew, but each year as the controversy intensified it took its toll on attendance at our annual session of the

The Campus Minister

ASBCM. We are at a point in time now when many of us will not attend the annual session because it still meets in conjunction with the SBC and others who feel as strongly that they will not attend if it meets in conjunction with the CBF and others who have just opted out of the national organization because it doesn't seem to be worth the effort.

Whenever we feel threatened or are wounded, either personally or professionally, it is natural to seek safety and security within a more narrow focus. Some campus ministers just don't want to "fight" anymore, and they choose to spend time in smaller gatherings of colleagues, by regions, by types of schools, etc. Some of these gatherings are structured and relate campus ministers and students in adjoining states to each other for major programming events; some are informal and relate individual campus ministers to each other by types of schools or other interests.

Should we continue the ASBCM as an organization? I do not have the gift of prophecy, so I don't know for sure. In these days of limited personnel and money it may be needed more now than 20 years ago when we depended on the NSM staff and resources for literature and programming. But the limited personnel and money may dictate our attention be directed closer to our area of ministry.

Can the ASBCM still achieve the purpose for which it was originally organized? Yes, I think it can, but I believe there will have to be some changes. If there is to be an annual session, I believe it must be moved from pre-session to the SBC. We may

The Campus Minister

need to consider meeting in conjunction with other national campus ministry groups. We may need to meet every other year and use the alternate year to encourage regional meetings.

Whatever direction the ASBCM takes, I hope that each of us who reads the journal will consider becoming involved to help the officers of the ASBCM to determine what needs to be done next.

POSTLOGUE

I have been involved in the ASBCM since the beginning. I have given to the members of the ASBCM and to the organization only a small portion of what I have gained as a Christian, a minister and a campus minister. I don't like to let go of important people, things or organizations, but if this is the time, I trust that God will give us the wisdom of discernment. If this is the time to dig in and invest, I also trust we can sense God's leadership in the direction we must move.

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