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THE POWER YOU HAVE

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The opportunities and struggles of campus ministry sometimes are assumed to be the special province of campus ministry staff, boards, and students. Such an assumption misses the fact that campus ministry is potentially the focus of a new generation of

leaders for the church and a possible key to whether there will be “younger people” and new life in the church of the next century.

This presentation, first given at a gathering of campus ministers from the South Central Jurisdiction, also is directed toward all who have a passion for the life and work of the church, and therefore have an investment in the witness and ministry on each campus.

During challenging times for the church and its campus ministries, easy answers always seem tempting. For campus ministry, several easy answers come to mind:

- Replicate the past. “If it meant so much to me, surely it will to students today.”
- Repudiate the past. Look with disdain upon a past form of campus ministry you see as deficient and react against any expression of it, thus missing the positive dimensions it had to offer.

- Mimic another campus ministry model and tradition. “Well, at least it works.”

- React against another campus ministry model. The focus is more on what “we don’t do” than on what we are doing.

The challenge of all church leadership today is not to replicate, repudiate, mimic, or react. It is to respond to today’s needs out of the richness of a long campus ministry history and instructive Wesleyan and United Methodist theological traditions. This kind of response will permit the development of a genuine alternative for students alongside and, where possible, in cooperation with other campus ministries.

Survey of Campus Ministers

In the spring of 1996 a survey was conducted among United Methodist campus ministers and chaplains. The return rate was approximately 25 percent, fairly remarkable given that the survey arrived near the end of a school year.

There were three open-ended questions. No response options were offered. While there was much variety in the responses, there also were clear themes and patterns. The results below reflect those recurring themes.

1. In what dimensions of campus ministry do you see life and energy today?

--Service/outreach [by far the highest response]

--Renewed spiritual interest and faith development

2. What do you see as the greatest challenges facing campus ministry today and in the next few years?

- Funding issues
- Regard issues

3. If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about campus ministry as you experience it, what would it be?

- Funding issues
- Regard issues
- Ways to minister across divisions

Findings from the Survey: Three Great Needs

Three key needs emerge from the survey results. The greatest challenges which emerged are funding, regard, and ministering across divisions. What does this mean for the leadership of those in campus ministry today? We look first at these most troubling issues for those in ministry on campuses.

Funding: The most immediate danger for campus ministry now, according to Don Shockley of the United Methodist Campus Ministry Section, is the withdrawal of support by funding sources. The survey of campus ministers certainly verifies this urgent reality. Changes in denominational funding patterns, shrinking budgets, and more fund-raising responsibilities were mentioned most often.

It would be simple to explain this by the overall decline of mainline churches over a generation. While this is true, and a major source of the dilemma, there are even broader factors that are affecting campus ministry well beyond United Methodism.

For example, a major shift has taken place in Jewish campus ministry revolving around governance and funding. Previously there was a national source for funding Hillel. Now support must come more locally. With this shift have come new expectations and a different kind of accountability. Today there is much more diversity in programs and budgets. However, with new energy coming from such local engagement, there also has come demoralization as more time must be spent by staff on management and interpretation.¹

Roman Catholic campus ministries are facing similar challenges. The Lilly Endowment recently made possible a study of funding issues for the Catholic Campus Ministry Association. Conducted by the Center for Applied Research at Georgetown University, it concluded that there is a serious funding problem for Roman Catholic campus ministries today. With more and more responsibility for fund-raising becoming the responsibility of campus ministers, they found that, not surprisingly, 59 percent lack fund-raising experience, 44 percent are uncomfortable doing this, and 47 percent see themselves as development beginners. Only five percent had professional development help available to them.

The researchers found that the campus ministries with good fund-raising programs are more likely to:

1. serve more students.
2. have a more experienced director. (The length of stay of the director was highly related to fund-raising.)
3. have larger budgets.
4. feel a stronger sense of support from students.
5. develop a strategic plan to manage limited funds.

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Obviously, the first question these findings raise is, “Which comes first?” The answer is probably that most of the better funded programs moved to this over a period of time with a key

factor, though by no means the only one, being the continuity of the director.

Regard: Running throughout the surveys were the pain and frustration caused by the perceived lack of a clear place and standing either in the church or academy. Respondents spoke of struggling with respect, credibility, and priority issues for themselves and campus ministry both within the academy and the church.

“Campus ministers today often feel that they have no solid place to stand either in the university or in the church,” Shockley aptly noted a few years ago. “This sense of marginal existence is a constant theme of our meetings, with some lamenting it and others finding in it great virtue and promise.”²

The effects of either response can be debilitating for morale and effectiveness. The frustrating thing about the desire for regard and credibility is that the more one makes of the issue, the less likely the situation is to change. The more one says, "Take me seriously," or "Appreciate what I am doing," the less likely either is to happen. The temptation is to focus on one's peripheral place which almost ensures that people will not change their image or relate any differently. People may even think less of you. When one is on the margin of regard, it does not seem to work to try to force others to change their thinking just because you want them to do so. There must be another way.

A scene in *Death of a Salesman* may give a clue. Willie Loman is always bragging about his two sons, well beyond their actual accomplishments. One day at work his best friend's son comes by to say good-bye to his father before leaving for a trip. After the son leaves, Willie asks the father, "Where is your son going?" "He's going to Washington, D. C.," his friend replies, "to argue a case before the Supreme Court." "Before the Supreme Court? And he didn't even say anything about it," was Willie's shocked reply. His friend responded, "He doesn't have to. He's going to do it."

That may be the philosophy needed to address the regard issues. It is not so much a matter of declaring oneself and campus ministry worthy. Neither is it requesting that people who may view you and your ministry as peripheral change those views. Rather the challenge is to do one's work in such a way that much less needs to be said about it because the impact is so obvious. This involves taking back from others the power of determining worth and places it in the ministry itself.

The credibility all of us seek for our ministries is no longer automatic. It emerges over time in the same ways that we have come ourselves to value people and activities—through sheer respect for the faithfulness and integrity of their efforts.

Ministering Across Divisions: Clearly diversity is the character of our experience today. Just think of all the diversity of ages, races, gender, states, countries, plus countless other personal and cultural differences that characterize our arenas of

ministry. Then, there are theological, social, and political differences with which to contend.

Campus ministers today face student bodies significantly different from years past in many cases. On campuses there is an increasing awareness of a diversity that has been present for years but not reflected in their campus ministries. In

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virtually all situations, the presence of differences is a dominant reality on the minds of campus ministers.

The divisions referred to by campus ministers most frequently on the survey include racial, theological, class, and nationality differences among students. In addition, often campus ministers contend with divisions and suspicions beyond the student body involving church and academy, as well as academic and spiritual.

For many students arriving on campus from church backgrounds, their previous church (and sometimes school) experiences have not prepared them for the new diverse world of higher education. Thus, campus ministers find an increasingly diverse, and often divisive, context in which to minister. They are asking how to function in such a way that campus ministry can be a part of the solution and not another part of the problem.

A Challenge

The usual procedure with problems is to make a list of them and then develop separate plans to address each. Then, in addition to the problem solving, everything else, including the exciting and alive ministries, must be done. So a campus minister may need to work on fund-raising and still find time to develop new small discipleship groups that are so needed and wanted.

The challenge is to find a way to build on places of energy and power in a way that will *at the same time* address areas of concern.

Findings from the Survey: Two Great Sources of Energy

The greatest arena of life and energy today involves serving and outreach. Included here were direct mission efforts in the local community, as well as the campus. Habitat for Humanity and

Volunteers in Mission are examples. The other source of life and energy identified by many was renewed spiritual interest and faith development. Included here was much emphasis on small groups for Bible study, Covenant Discipleship, and prayer. For some, worship was an important living edge in their campus ministries.

Searching for Clues Among Living Edges to Address Challenges

What might this mean for campus ministry? How might we use these survey results to plan ministry for the future? The task of all listening (and that is what a survey is) is to discover clues. The key question here is, "Can we discover, in the living edges of campus ministry today, a 'lens' through which the challenges of funding, regard, and ministry across divisions might be addressed?"

"Serving" as a Lens:

Nothing is more central to the Wesleyan tradition of leadership than serving. The connection between religious experience and social needs was apparent from the earliest days of the traditions that make up United Methodism. "The world hears the gospel when it sees it," was Albert Outler's description of early Methodist evangelism. Campus ministry might well take these as watch words for renewed vitality today.

Don Haynes, when serving as a district superintendent in North Carolina, asked this question of local churches, "If your church closed today, who would miss it other than your members?" That is a great question for any ministry setting. It is a question that could be used for an annual ministry audit to see how well the ministry is doing in serving broadly.

It is the kind of question that may help one understand some of the campus ministry funding and regard issues. In asking, "If our campus ministry closed today, who would miss it other than those closest?" do you come to realize that there are indeed many people throughout the academy and church who would say, "What will we do without their voice? Who will now meet the needs of so many addressed by their service?" Unfortunately, that may not always be the conclusion.

Mark Randall, a campus minister at Washington State University, wrote these insightful words on his survey: "Somehow, it doesn't truly 'click' with our laity and clergy about the importance of what we do. Sometimes people convey that it is 'nice' or 'good' for us to be there, particularly when students are in need, but other than that, I don't think a lot of folks would scream and holler if our campus ministry went out of existence."

That is why *servicing* is so important as a lens. Not only is it the place of greatest energy for many campus ministries today and in many churches as well, but it offers a great opportunity to address funding and regard issues *on the way* to fulfilling the vision of serving—instead of as an afterthought taking time and energy away from the vision.

If serving (or mission or outreach) is the lens, then worship, spiritual formation, community building, interpretation, and funding can be viewed

through and shaped by this lens. Every component of the ministry will have an integrity of its own, but not seen as distinct and separate activities. The key question

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to ask about everything is, "How might this be done if seen through the lens of the vision of serving?"

Spiritual Growth as a Lens: Since the surveys identified spiritual growth as a second source of life and energy in campus ministry, are there additional clues here for a "lens" for ministry? One significant link may be the question of how to minister across divisions.

The Wesleyan movement began as one in which diversity of people and ideas was genuine. Wesley was always reaching out to those who were different. Diversity was a challenge for him and early Methodists, but the results make clear the seriousness with which the task was taken.

With all the struggles caused by differences, diversity is the way ministry should and must be in our time. Diversity is not something to endure but, rather, to celebrate. Diversity is always a challenge but one offering many rewards. If our campuses are not representative of diverse constituencies and our campus ministries are not representative of the diversity of our campuses, then an appropriate question is, "What is it about our school/campus

ministry that results in some people taking us seriously and others not?"

However, in a community of faith, more has to be said. Just as we know that people can be homogeneous and unfaithful, so also can people be diverse and unfaithful. Diverse people of faith must hold something in common that is stronger than all their differences. That may be why Emilie Townes, a member of the Saint Paul faculty, says that the starting point for work on diversity in the church must always be prayer and fasting.

Frederick Buechner speaks of his seminary days in the 1950s at Union Theological Seminary. While not diverse by today's standards, Buechner says his experience was one of utter diversity of theology, politics, countries, cultures, and visions of the church. "But beneath all those ways in which we differed from one another," he recalls, "there seemed to me to be something deep and life-giving that all of us shared." He found this reflected in Latin words over the door of the dining hall: "They knew him in the breaking of the bread."³

Leadership in the Wesleyan tradition finds unity in Christ, despite countless differences. Such unity in Christ maintains distinctiveness and self-identity but now the differences are put in a new perspective of the common center of Jesus Christ. Such leadership maintains unity through respect for others as valued children of God. As in so many other cases, the example of the Wesleyan tradition is to hold together concepts and people not normally associated with each other.

The Power You Have

What, then, can we conclude? Do we do "programs" to address the challenges of funding, regard, and ministering across divisions? Regard and credibility, as well as funding, always seem to come as by-products of serving. They cannot be claimed. A good lesson that seems to run through all vital organizations is, "If you want to thrive, serve."

A few years ago Odette Lockwood-Stewart spoke at a conference on campus ministry at Saint Paul School of Theology. She reminded campus

ministers that the question is not *if* we have power such as funds, support, access, resources, visibility, etc. Rather, the question is *how* we are using the power we *do* have in campus ministry.

This can be a time for all in campus ministry to remember the rich pioneering history of campus ministry. Campus ministry often has led the way

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for the church and the academy in ecumenical relations, the role of women, and racial justice. In all these times of leadership, progress was made without having great power in conventional terms. Instead, campus

ministers created their own power by identifying with a true and appropriate vision for the time. Thus, the vision became for them something beyond the details of the specific topic. The vision became what author Margaret Wheatley calls a "field of energy" from which many things flourish.

And the vision for campus ministry—given the reports from the surveys—will likely include a vital connection with serving and spiritual growth. Among those in the Wesleyan tradition it has always been so. It also is significant to remember that John Wesley's linking of personal holiness and social holiness goes back to a university setting.

Today is a time calling for pioneers. Students, colleges and universities, society, *and* the church cry out for your creative leadership. In fact, you as campus ministers are closest to the very people who are not in the church today and whom the church does not seem to have a clue about how to reach. You are seeking to minister every day to a constituency younger, more racially and ethnically diverse, more theologically diverse, and more religious and culturally alienated than most churches will experience in a decade.

You will have some clues for the whole church. You have no protection from the reality of our culture. The college may become disconnected from its constituency but it still has an endowment and/or appropriations. A local church may be unengaged, but at least there is still a core group of loyal members who keep things going. Not so for campus ministry. You are on the front lines every day with nothing between you and the current realities of religion and society. If you do not find ways

to relate, no matter how difficult the circumstances, there is no campus ministry. As frightening as that is, it can be exhilarating if you and church leaders can come to see campus ministers as the consultants we so need to engage the world the way it is today, instead of trying to recreate the past or relate to the world and people the way we wish they were.

Don Shockley is right. "Now is not the time for those who care about campus ministry to go into a survival mode. Now is the time for the church to determine what its mission in higher education is and to fulfill it with renewed vigor."⁴ God bless you as you fulfill your great calling.

Notes

1. Robert Rankin, editor, Max D. Ticktin in *The Recovery of Spirit in Higher Education*, (Seabury Press, 1980), p. 53.
2. Donald G. Shockley, *Campus Ministry: The Church Beyond Itself*, (Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), p. 37.
3. Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), p. 58-59.
4. Shockley, p. 5.