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A Philosophy of Campus Ministry

We live in turbulent times. Space and time have collapsed. The pace and complexity of life continues to increase. There is a pervasive feeling of discontent within our culture. Societal shifts are deeply affecting us all. College students, perhaps more than anyone else, are pulled in a dizzying array of directions. It is within this context that Christ calls us to be about the ministry of reconciliation. As we are reminded in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19,

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

Campus ministry, centered in Christ's reconciliation, lives into this call through four primary disciplines: hospitality, community, mission, and leadership.

Hospitality

As Christ-followers, we are called to welcome the stranger (Matthew 25). Campus ministry needs to have a common space which can be a sanctuary and respite for students. This ministry space can be a place where they can come and receive spiritual direction, both formally and informally. In this world of fast food restaurants and instant access everything, hospitality creates environments of unforced rhythms, natural grace, and warm welcome. It is an environment that fosters rich conversation, meaningful friendships, and spiritual contemplation.

Hospitality extends in all directions. While we welcome our fellow sisters and brothers in Christ, we also embrace those of different faiths and walks. All are welcome. The welcome that we extend carries over into our daily lives as we traverse the campus and the city.

Community

Through our common call of reconciliation we bind together as the body of Christ. As God exists in Trinitarian community, we endeavor to live in the unity of that spirit as Christ's body. It is by this example that we move against the grain of consumer culture. We serve one another, placing others' needs above our own. We resist the temptation to live at arms length from one another. Instead, we risk vulnerability and honesty. It is, perhaps, our greatest witness of Christ's redeeming love when we forgo hyper-individualism in place of genuine unity.

In campus ministry, community takes on many forms. Small communities of faith, such as discipleship groups, bible studies, and various support groups can be formed throughout campus. In these small gatherings students can practice the ancient disciplines of our faith and experience God's grace in their daily lives. By gathering around the table for meals on a regular basis, community can be shared, pain expressed, prayers offered, and hope restored. Community also is enhanced by the regular occurrence of less structured meetings and spontaneous outings. We

intentionally bind together with those of different backgrounds so as to support, encourage, and learn from one another.

Mission

As God sent Jesus and together they sent the Holy Spirit, our triune God sends the church into the world. As a campus ministry, and part of the Church, we are sent as God's reconciling ambassadors to a hurt and broken world. There is much injustice and oppression in our world, not the least of which on college campuses. Christ calls us to be on mission in today's context. We step out of our comfort-zone and into the muck and mire of the world. We offer no less than Christ, his love, redemption, and hope. We are truly about kingdom work.

Campus ministry functions in three ways as part of God's kingdom reality; we are a sign, a foretaste, and an instrument. We are a sign pointing to a life of justice, freedom, and embrace in Christ. We are a foretaste, living out as best as we are able God's call of reconciliation. We are also an instrument, bringing, in concert with the Holy Spirit, freedom for the captive, hope for those in despair, and food for the hungry.

Leadership

We all have influence on each other and so we are all leaders. Whether it is in ministry, service, the classroom, our social networks, sports, or in another area, there is a pressing need for development of strong leaders. As followers of the servant Christ we are called to servant leadership. Servant leaders care for the poor, marginalized, and disregarded, are aware of their gifts and call, and join with others on mission.

Effective campus ministry will intentionally work toward the formation and empowerment of strong servant leaders. Leadership formation occurs by formal means of education, such as the Servant Leadership School*, partnering with campus organizations, and one-on-one mentoring of students. Leaders are also formed by informal contact within the local church and neighborhoods. When students are integrated and participate in the local church and their neighborhood/city there are many opportunities for spiritual and leadership formation.

Conclusion

These four key components of campus ministry, hospitality, community, mission, and leadership, form the nucleus of a strong and vibrant presence on a college campus. The campus ministers, leaders, pastors, and co-laborers partner with and pour into the lives of today's college students. It is a privilege to see God at work in the hearts, minds, and souls of students. And God's reconciling work is carried forth into all corners of the world by these faithful disciples.

* I have recently been in dialogue with Pat Jenkins and Dick Coldwell regarding the re-starting of the Servant Leadership School in Cincinnati. I participated in the SLS 10 month training with Debbie Campbell in 1999 and we are moving towards re-birthing the school in the Fall of 2004.