

# Fostering Commitment to the Ministry through Campus Life

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Fostering commitment to the ministry in young people is a responsibility we all have as our total life's work. It is impossible to isolate this responsibility in a designated area such as the classroom, the campus, or elsewhere. One sets the stage for the other. Motivation carried out in one of these areas reinforces motivation carried out in another.

Our students perceive us wholly as faculty members. The respect and rapport we establish in the classroom is a necessary basis for a similar relationship established out of the classroom throughout campus life, and vice versa. Unless there is consistency in the way we approach fostering commitment to the ministry in our entire life style as instructors, our efforts will be less than successful, perhaps even counterproductive.

Once young people have decided to attend a prep school or worker-training college in order to consider seriously becoming a pastor or a teacher, the responsibility of motivating them to resolve to serve the Lord in this capacity rests for the most part on us, who are charged with their care for four years of high school and four years of college. We, who stand before these students as teachers, choir directors, coaches, student council advisers, or drama club leaders, have more opportunity to influence them than anyone else. In all our relationships with students, we must ever be aware that the Lord is using us as His tools to foster in these young Christians the commitment to serve Him through the ministry. Becoming the best tool possible must be an on-going part of our professional growth.

As a tool in the hand of the Lord, our highest priority is to serve as a positive model for the ministry in all that we do. A student's impression of the ministry is often based on what he sees. Learning by imitation is a powerful and effective means of learning. As teachers we deliberately model certain activities and processes for students to imitate—how to pronounce a Latin vocable, how to construct an isosceles triangle, how to write a bibliography. Learning by imitation can occur at any time, not just at those times when we are deliberately trying to present a model. In fact, learning by imitation occurs most often in the form of incidental modeling, when the teacher does not consciously set out to teach a certain behavior. It may be that the teacher's own attitudes and values are learned by the student in addition to or in place of whatever particular content he wants to teach. The list of things a teacher unconsciously teaches in this way is almost endless—love and respect for others, kindness, consideration for the rights of others, self-control, tolerance, a love and enthusiasm for one's work, and, of course the opposites of all these.

The model we deliberately and incidentally set before the student affects the quality of the education he receives. But more important, such models are likely to affect the student's attitude toward the ministry itself. While each individual's perception of a model may vary, the fact remains that we are constantly making an impression on our students which has a carryover to their perception of the ministry.

Although opportunities to build impressions are more evident in the classroom because a student's attention is focused on the instructor for a greater length of time, out-of-the classroom activities or campus life in general present unique and important ways to influence students. An instructor's role as leader of a class play, an athletic team, the school newspaper or yearbook, or the pep club allows students to see him as a model in a less formal setting where we can be less formal, and interaction can become more personal.

It is in this setting that students will easily notice our friendliness, sincerity, fairness and concern. They will be influenced by our countenance, the smile as evidence of the joy of serving in the ministry. They will react to the enthusiasm we show in our work. They will also be critical of us, judging the ministry by what they see of it in us. They will see if we are arbitrary in our actions, if we refuse to admit we are wrong, if we are unyielding in our opinions, right or wrong. They will also observe our personal conduct which is to be above reproach (I Timothy 3:1-13) and our professional standards which are to be according to God's high calling (Galatians 1:1).

When such a model has been established before our students, one to which they can relate positively, what we say will make an impression on them. Talking to students about the ministry is the most effective

method to foster in them commitment to the ministry, talk that comes from a Christian figure whose words and actions the student has come to know and respect.

It is in this area of speaking to students about the ministry that we, who are directly involved in worker-training, tend to take much for granted. Many times our subconscious attitude is that a student's commitment to the ministry will happen on its own. We assume that since all these students are on a Synod school campus, they know they are training for the ministry. The atmosphere around here will take care of all motivation; the surroundings will permeate an individual and virtually sweep him in a strong current to the end result of work in the church. Thus a student can go through four years—even eight years—of Synod worker training schools without being personally confronted with and encouraged in the real purpose of this education.

We must talk to students about their future vocation. We must talk to them often in a formal, organized manner as well as in informal discussions and conversations. God's Word is the ultimate motivator for the ministry. But to get his Word out, He uses us. And that word must be spoken. Even though the old adage "actions speak louder than words" is appropriate in its proper context, it is a fact that students do not become pastors or teachers because of how they see us act. They make this decision based on what we say, or more appropriately, by what God says through us.

Here a parallel can be drawn to the work of evangelism. We set the stage for evangelism by what other people see in us—our words and actions. However, we are not really evangelists at all until we have spoken the Gospel message, through which the Holy Spirit works.

The same is true with fostering commitment to the ministry. Words must be exchanged with the student on the topic. We must be aware of this and do it. It requires organization and planning. It requires taking the initiative.

In order to be able to converse with a student one-on-one, it is necessary to have regularly scheduled consultations. It would seem that some type of adviser-advisee system would work best, which would allow for at least one such consultation per quarter of the school year. Even though these meetings could be used for a variety of reasons, from academics to personal problems, the major focus should be on motivation for the ministry. Not one of these meetings should go by without a student's realizing his place in the entire picture of the ministry.

While some of these counseling sessions can be quite informal, during which the adviser moves with the flow of conversation, most sessions should be planned. Saying the right things does not just happen in a counseling session, any more than it does in a chapel sermonette. Thought and planning must go into it—practical, step-by-step planning, not only the outlining of general ideas. Going into a counseling session with a student with the general thought, "I am going to give encouragement to go into the ministry today," will probably be much less effective than specific ideas, thought out and written down, linking the presentation to some pertinent and timely subject.

For example, the use of standardized test scores could lead to a discussion of a student's abilities which are conducive to preaching or teaching. Statements such as "you have the type of warm, out-going personality beneficial in the preaching or teaching ministry," or "the Lord certainly has need for a person like you as a pastor or a teacher," could be used as lead-ins to make a student feel the Lord wants him or her personally. An adviser could briefly describe one aspect of the work of the church in each visit—like a job description. (Remember, not all students come from a parsonage or a teacherage.) The question could be raised: "Why become a pastor or a teacher" and briefly explain why it is such important work. On the prep level, one point about the course of study at NWC and DMLC could be made each time, educating the student to the choices and opportunities which lie in his or her immediate future.

On the college level, especially during the first two years when students experience the greatest amount of uncertainty about their future vocations, counseling is still necessary. Like high school students, college students have to be reminded of the great need for pastors and teachers and how their specific abilities could be put to use by the Lord in that service. On both levels, high school and college, carefully planned one-on-one counseling is a vital means of communication. Unless this type of practical thinking and planning are put into each counseling session, we will never reach our personal potential in motivating young people for the ministry.

Recently a questionnaire on the motivation for the ministry was sent out to seventy former prep students presently attending NWC and DMLC. Even though this was not a thorough scientific study and no intention is made to draw far-reaching conclusions from it, one can get the feel for former prep school students' ideas on the topic, ideas which apply to college students as well.

On eighty-five percent of the questionnaires, comments were made which can be summed up by evaluating this statement which probably all prep school instructors have used on a student at one time or another: "You're going to NWC/DMLC, aren't you?" The polled students noted three negative aspects in the statement:

1. We are taking something for granted.
2. We are exerting pressure rather than showing concern.
3. We are emphasizing the wrong thing—the school rather than the ministry.

"Taking it for granted," as these students indicated, that the Lord has chosen the entire student body to serve him as pastors and teachers is easy to do. It is convenient to treat them as a mass, headed in a certain direction simply because that is the direction everyone else is headed. Students resent this, and well they should, since it conflicts with human emotions and spiritual truths. God treats us as individuals both according to our sins and the faith necessary for salvation. This must be our attitude toward each one of our students also.

Recently a former prep school graduate, when asked why he didn't choose the preaching or teaching ministry for a vocation, admitted, "I never really thought they meant it was for me. I knew it was a prep school, but I figured it was to prepare other kids, not really me." This person evidently needed someone to talk to him personally about how unique he is, and how God wants him for the special service of His kingdom. What a feeling of self-worth is instilled in an advisee when an adviser accentuates one of his or her specific positive God-given abilities which could be put to use in the ministry!

Certainly one of the criticisms we will always hear is the second point from the questionnaire: "There is too much pressure put on us to be pastors or teachers." We need to keep this in mind lest we apply pressure where the Lord does not intend it. Telling an individual he must be a minister of the Gospel is a misapplication of the law because the ministry may not be intended for that individual, and the law cannot motivate anyone to love or serve the Lord.

While we do not want to give the impression that being a pastor or a teacher is the only way to serve the Lord, our recruitment efforts, nevertheless, should continue to be relentless. This effort should first reflect our concern for the individual and secondly, for the impending vacancy in the pulpit and classroom. Keeping these priorities in mind at all times will help us avoid the undesirable effects of exerting pressure upon students as though we are somehow trying to fill a quota.

The third point brought out by the questionnaire involves what exactly we are attempting to promote. On the prep level we often find ourselves talking about NWC and DMLC. For some reason it seems easier to talk about the two colleges rather than the ministry itself. It is as though we feel that if we get our students to these colleges, our part of the job is complete. Or maybe we feel that looking any further than one or two years down the road is too much for a typical high school student to handle.

This attitude is also projected many times by recruiters from our colleges. Recruitment is carried out for a school rather than the ministry, again, probably because it is easier talking about the many activities at the school. Instead, it is important, as these young people on the questionnaire pointed out, to highlight the ministry, and then point to the particular aspects of the college curricular and extra-curricular activities which will lead to a well-educated, well-rounded pastor or teacher.

Informing our students about the work of the church should be going on continually in some way or another on our campuses. One method, which was initiated at MLPS this past school year, was an entire week entitled, "Work of the Church." This idea, from the "Career Day" concept of other high schools, was used to present the various areas of ministry in the WELS. Two hours a day were set aside to hear speakers, view displays, and ask questions regarding five major areas of ministry: the work of the parish pastor and teacher, home missions, world missions, special ministries, and worker training. Student committees took charge of the entire week, securing speakers, doing research, and setting up displays.

Another informative endeavor for MLPS students is the annual trip to NWC and DMLC by the senior class. Benefits of a well-planned visit to these schools are obvious. Here students can see first-hand what type of specific training is necessary for them as they prepare for the ministry. Furthermore, a visit with friends on these campuses has a tendency to take the edge off the strangeness of the campus they may be attending.

One of the criticisms listed by MLPS students about the trip is that they wished they could have taken it as freshmen or sophomores. While this probably will not become a reality at MLPS at the present time for practical and financial reasons, it nevertheless does serve as a reminder to us that we do not overlook first and second year high school or college students in our recruitment efforts. It is so easy to begin the “big push” in the last year or two of school, almost totally ignoring the development of positive attitudes to the ministry on the part of freshmen and sophomores.

Ideally, it is the goal of every worker-training school to develop a really positive attitude toward the ministry as a vocation on the part of the student body as a whole. This is something that does not happen overnight.

It is not the result of one particular recruitment effort. It is a spirit, initiated by the faculty especially in the upper classes, which then permeates the rest of the student body.

In this type of atmosphere, dormitory “rap” sessions result in favorable discussions regarding the work of the church. Peers support one another in their desire to serve the Lord full-time. A student who wants to become a pastor or a teacher is not looked down upon, but quite the opposite, he is part of the “in-crowd.” It is the thing to do. Now here it is not the intention to have those who do not choose the ministry as a vocation labeled the “out-crowd” nor make a pitch for becoming a pastor or a teacher because everyone else is. The point of emphasis is rather that full-time church work be viewed very positively on our campuses by the student body as a whole.

Certainly a most important means to foster commitment to the ministry is through morning chapel. Since, unlike any other career choice, the choice for the ministry is a spiritual choice, we need spiritual tools to recruit for it. The law and the Gospel are those tools. When our students keep hearing us say how much Jesus’ forgiveness means to us and how touched we are that God has called us to share His forgiveness with others, the ministry will receive top priority in their vocational plans.

Promoting interest and education in the ministry has its place in the extra-curricular aspect of campus life also. In organizations dealing with specific areas such as music, drama, photography, speech, debate, writing, and mathematics and science, students can be led to realize how their particular talents can be useful in the ministry. In athletics a coach would be remiss in his coaching if he did not point out how the discipline, the attitude of paying the price to reach a goal, learned on the athletic field or floor, carry over to real life, yes, even life in the ministry. Although many times situations dictate making the applications, it rarely happens to any degree of success without forethought. Again, the emphasis is on planning.

Even totally informal visiting with students requires being conscious of the need to talk to the student about the ministry and thus to be alert for the opportunities as they present themselves. These informal visits with students in the hallway or lobby, at a break during an athletic contest, after chapel or church, at faculty-student gatherings, between classes, in the dormitory have the potential for the easiest, most effective motivation for the ministry.

Of greatest importance here, however, is the previously established rapport with students. Students must perceive you as a trustworthy, friendly, concerned, genuine individual. Spend time getting to know them. Find out about their families. Find out what they like or dislike. Show that you are interested in them as persons and that they are not just numbers. This takes time and effort, but it is effective in projecting you as a person who cares and is concerned about them when you bring up the subject of the ministry.

Allow the student to get to know you. Develop a mutual understanding and respect. Be yourself and be sincere. Give a positive picture of the ministry without giving the idea it is all a “bed of roses.” Share experiences with them. Poor-mouthing or other complaints about workload and hardships in the ministry have no place in our conversations. Turn students on to the ministry, not off.

It is in such a setting that discussions can include questions that range from: “What do I want to do with my life to earn the most money, get prestige, and be successful?” to “How can I best serve the Lord with my life?” or “Lord, what do you think is best for me and Your Kingdom?” A listening ear will hear many students asking the right questions, struggling to find the answer.

Providing answers to these questions is our role as motivators for the ministry. By developing an on-going and person-to person communication between faculty and students, we can provide education and encouragement toward this end.

In doing this, however, we are constantly aware that the ultimate choice of the ministry is not made because of us, though we may be used by God to influence such a decision. The real reason a young person finally decides on the ministry is found in the familiar words: “It was He who *gave* some to be ... pastors and teachers...” (Ephesians 4:11).

Let the Lord open our eyes to see the unequalled privilege we have in the career to which He led us. Then let Him use our words and our actions to foster this same commitment to the ministry in each precious student He has sent to us.