

# Training Students for Involvement in Campus Ministry

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## Introduction

I have been asked to discuss effective ways to train students for involvement in campus ministry without getting into the actual involvement programs themselves. That might resemble a discussion of how to load a gun with ammunition without discussing what kind of firearm you are intending to load. Since a previous part of this workshop will have explored what model role we should aim for students to take in campus ministry, I might be suggesting methods of training for activities which the workshop has already dismissed as undesirable and inappropriate for student participation.

Since the scriptural basis for student involvement will have been hammered out in a previous workshop session, I will not attempt to justify involving students in our campus ministry. I will assume that we are agreed that we want college students learning by experience that they have an active role to play in the priesthood of all believers. I will further assume that we are agreed that we are to train our students to lead Bible studies, worship opportunities, outreach efforts and fellowship activities. I assume that we want to train our students to plan, administer, coordinate and execute the program of campus ministry from which they are benefiting. I assume that the goal of ministry elsewhere (to develop an indigenous church, to make the pastor dispensable, not indispensable) is still our goal, although realistically it may never be reached on the campus because of the high turnover in personnel and the constantly changing character of the campus.

Although we may agree that such lofty goals are worthy, our experience in campus ministry may temper such idealism. Not only is the "congregation" involved in campus ministry experiencing high turnover, but many of the key leaders in your campus congregation may be victims of the computerized scheduling of classes at unorthodox, fluctuating times from one quarter to the next. Students who were available for noon-hour Bible classes one quarter may not be available until 10:00 p.m. the next. Students who could make calls on new students one quarter may be harassed by laboratory schedules or internships which allow no time for extra-curricular activities. It is true that people in established congregations also face such fluctuations in their schedules, but on a large campus, a greater percentage of your "congregation" is likely to be vulnerable to such shifts of schedule than you might expect in an average community parish.

This reality of campus life can be frustrating to the campus pastor who has spent long hours training a student leader to lead some aspect of the campus ministry, only to find that his schedule does not allow him/her to be involved. Couple this Scylla with the Charybdis of a part-time campus pastor who must sandwich campus ministry training sessions in between rather rigid congregational schedules (where he is primarily called) and you have the ingredients for a plopp-plopp-fizz-fizz candid camera commercial. Except for two campuses in our Synod, all of our campus pastors conduct their campus ministries "part-time," with varying degrees of congregational approval, which may range anywhere between benign consent to jealous surveillance. It may appear more efficient simply to carry out the campus ministry single-handedly rather than expend the time training students to oversee aspects of the work. Rare are the students who can simply take an aspect of the campus ministry and handle it for the campus pastor without some guidance, consultation, and time-consuming interaction. There are students like that on some of our campuses, and in such cases, the best method of training them to be involved may occur accidentally, as the part-time campus pastor is so swamped by other concerns that he doesn't develop an area of campus work. The impatient, efficient, capable student, out of sheer frustration for the lack of that campus activity, takes the bull by the horns, reads what he has to read, trains himself and organizes that aspect of campus ministry. The intelligent campus pastor, instead of chastising the student for brash precociousness, would then monitor that aspect of the program and establish with the self-trained student the chain of command for overseeing the orthodoxy of the effort. Therefore, one potential answer to the question I have been assigned (namely, "How can we best train our students for meaningful

involvement in campus ministry?") would be: do nothing! The Gospel-motivated, spiritually-mature students who are frustrated with the inactivity and non-existent ministry will jump into the breach, train themselves and develop the ministry best suited to their needs and their campus.

At this point, I make my final assumption: that we are called into campus ministry to train students for involvement not by default but by intent. Therefore, it is my intent to suggest some ways of training students for more active involvement and leadership in our campus ministry. I propose to deal with five basic areas where students could be involved in a meaningful way: 1) Bible study, 2) worship, 3) evangelism, 4) recreation and social activities, 5) administration.

### **Bible Study**

One of the great fears we have which prevents us from turning our lay people loose to teach Bible classes is the dread that they will inadvertently teach false doctrine. Because we know of congregations and ministries which were disrupted by zealous, misguided lay people who gathered for Bible study without the supervision of a pastor, we carry with us a brooding suspicion that anytime a lay person leads a Bible class we are "asking for it." It is easier, safer and less threatening to keep our lay people spiritual babes, receiving their nourishment strained through our theological sieves. We keep talking about Christian education in our circles, but it means producing in our congregations perpetual Bible students, not Bible teachers. Training lay people to be teachers is the job of DMLC and the Seminary, not the task of congregations and campus pastors, generally speaking. At first blush, this statement may sound a bit extreme, but all you have to do is survey our congregations and campus ministries and ask how many adult Bible classes are being taught by lay people. We trust them to teach the Bible to youngsters (who can ask profoundly stumping questions theologically!), and risk their heresies in the classrooms of these impressionable children, but we do not actively recruit our lay people to teach Bible classes for adults. Yet, many of these lay adults are professional teachers in many other fields, spiritually as mature as their pastors, consecrated, devout, and every bit as able to read Kretzmann, Rupprecht, Lenski, and Luther as their pastors. In fact, because they are not trained preachers, they might even have more interesting ways to lead a Bible class than their pastors.

What are we doing to train our college students (the educated, highly literate, potential future teachers in our congregations) to study the Scriptures responsibly even when a pastor is not there to hold their spiritual hand? Even where the pastor leads the Bible study, he can give strong clues to the students how they can be teachers of Bible when he may not be around. First, he can bring along the commentaries he uses to prepare for the Bible class and freely admit which ones he consults. Better still, he can bring them to the study and assign each student a different commentary and challenge the students to compare the comments and evaluate them. This means the Bible class will "cover less ground" but over the long haul the class will learn how to study the Bible responsibly.

Secondly, instead of preparing worksheets on which he has listed all of the cross-references and Bible passages pertinent to the study, he could require the students to develop their own list in the course of the class by using their cross-referenced Bibles, concordances, Bible dictionaries, etc. Again, this means the class will not be *told* what the right passages are to consult, nor will they be given the scriptural argument in a pre-packaged, easily digestible outline. Some of the students who are used to being spoon-fed in Bible classes may resent the campus pastor's requiring them to do the kind of thinking required of them in the rest of their University classes. They may have come to Bible class for an intellectual slumber party where the discoveries were served on a pastoral hors d'oeuvre tray ready to swallow. They may resist a do-it-yourself party where they are expected to help prepare the meal. But, if our goal is to train them to study the Bible and find their answers from the Word, not from men, then we are obligated to shatter their stereotypes, pop their illusions and bring them to the real world of adult Bible study, not re-cycled Sunday School instruction. If our goal is to train students to study their Bibles intelligently even when we cannot be with them, then this is one method of modeling an approach they can copy.

This is the basic flaw in many of the Bible study series I have looked at. The manual tells the student what conclusions he is to reach, what discoveries he is to make and what Bible passages he is to consult. Neat, pre-printed outlines of Bible books only facilitate the student's escape from the analytical, critical skills he is developing in the rest of his university curriculum. Why not ask students to develop their own outlines, argue over them and justify them on the basis of the content? Why not train students to "search the scriptures" for their own content delineation outlines instead of subliminally training them to trust some authority figure's conclusions? Why not teach students to challenge the glib interpretations of commentators especially when there is an obvious difference of opinion among commentators? How many of us campus pastors encourage (not just tolerate) our students to challenge our conclusions, to question our opinions on what a Bible passage means? The way we conduct our Bible classes may be one of the most important ways of training students to conduct their own Bible studies, so that if some hot-shot errorist strolls into their discussion, they will have the spiritual acumen to test what he declares to be the "obvious" meaning of the text.

Another way to train students to lead Bible study requires taking the time to sit down with key potential leaders and work through a section with them the way we prepare it for our Bible classes. This makes us very transparent, of course, if we have been shaking Bible classes out of our, pastoral sleeves without any re-studying of the text or by simply copying an outline from Lenski or some other favorite resource. We may have to admit that our own preparation for Bible classes has been shallow, one-dimensional, and not as steeped in the study of the Greek and Hebrew as our cribbed quotations from Lenski, Leupold, Edersheim or Pieper might suggest. Even more reprehensible is stealing copyrighted material from study guides and passing it off as our own sweat and blood. All too many of us might have to admit that we have "borrowed" such material without properly footnoting it for our students. What the law calls plagiarism some teachers prefer to call "research."

In summary, then, training our students to be more meaningfully involved in Bible study, in a leadership capacity, means risking mistakes. Without the willingness to risk the occasional mistakes a student leader might make, we also fail to discover the exhilarating potential of our students. We don't have to toss them into a sea of theological confusion without any guidance; that would be irresponsible. But the more transparent we make ourselves, so they can see how we approach scripture, reason our way through to our conclusions from scripture, wrestle with the questions we have to ask to come up with the answers we share, the better are the chances they will learn an approach to scripture which they can use even when we are not around. Then, of course, we have to nudge them out of the spiritual nest and let them fly solo. If we are going to monitor their discussions, we will have to resist the temptation to be the oracle of theological wisdom perched in the corner of the room.

If we have responsible students who have the time to use the helps we use to prepare the Bible study ahead of time, we will choose that avenue of training. If student schedules do not allow for that much advance preparation, we may adopt the "research it together" approach suggested above. If, on the other hand, we have a flare for exciting, informative lecturing, we might decide to unload all that we can learn on our students in stimulating lectures and then structure discussion questions for them to explore in small or large groups. This latter approach may be very beneficial for the majority of the students, informative and exciting, but only a few will have the sagacity to emulate such an example when they have a chance to lead Bible study for themselves or for others. If our goal is to train, we must do more.

### **Worship**

We hope that the students involved in campus ministry will someday lead devotions in the families they have. We hope they will serve on worship committees in the congregations they will eventually join wherever they establish their residence. We hope they will help lead devotions for young people's groups, as camp directors at Christian camps of our fellowship, as pioneer leaders, and as congregational society officers. The campus ministry is an excellent arena in which they can learn what it takes to structure a worship opportunity for the family of God.

One way to train them to structure such worship opportunities is to involve them in sub-committees to plan the campus worship service. Some can serve on a hymn committee, selecting either hymns from our hymnal or acceptable, scripturally accurate contemporary hymns. Others can help formulate a confession of sins which really speaks from student hearts. Others can formulate prayers of thanksgiving, intercession, special need. If given the theme of the service, they can even use their concordances to locate appropriate auxiliary psalms for the group to use, coordinated scripture readings, hymn verses which give an exposition on the text at the center of the devotional pause.

As students help shape their own worship services on campus, they will learn a multitude of lessons about corporate worship. They will learn to consider the worship needs of people who prefer King James English as well as those who prefer modern English. They will learn to balance the needs of those who find traditional hymns communicative with the needs of those who need more contemporary expressions of their faith. They will perceive that corporate worship, properly structured, attempts to incorporate the needs of the whole family of God. It does not impose the pastor's preferences on the people to whom he has been called. It does not assume that everyone who worships finds the same forms equally as meaningful.

Such a training approach requires a campus pastor who is willing to allow young Christians the full range of Christian freedom in their worship life allowed by Holy Scripture. It means allowing them to choose forms of worship which may not always be the pastor's favorite but which do serve the worship needs of his students. It means encouraging students to create new hymns just as our forefathers created new expressions of their faith. It will, no doubt, require time explaining to students who do not understand *adiaphora* that some other students' needs for new forms is to be respected. They may need to be trained to understand that simply because a form of worship is different from what they experienced at home, it is not automatically "bad" or "wrong." On the other hand, students who prefer new forms are also to be reminded that the needs of those preferring traditional forms should be deeply respected. Frank, calm group discussions of what needs each person in the group has for meaningful worship can open rich opportunities for students to grow in their Christian understanding and concern for all members of the worshiping congregation.

If a campus pastor insists that those who prefer contemporary worship forms must show love to those who prefer traditional forms by shelving any contemporary forms, he is failing to train a whole generation of Christians who are going to face this challenge in their congregations. Love is a two way street, requiring understanding and empathy not just from the innovative but also from those who don't want to change what they have always used.

There are many Lutheran Christians who would die of apoplexy if asked to open a congregational meeting or society meeting with prayer. We have not successfully trained our people to pray aloud, except to recite common table prayers and the liturgical responses. It is regrettable that many Lutheran Christians have the notion that only a pastor can open an elders' meeting, ladies guild meeting or boy pioneer devotion with prayer. He becomes the equivalent of a Gentile cantor, hired to pray for us.

There are a number of ways in the campus ministry in which a pastor can train his students to be more comfortable with praying aloud. It would be rather unloving and inconsiderate to drop it on them some night like a bomb, with an obtuse introduction like: "Let's all hold hands and take turns adding a thought or two to our prayer tonight!" Since this practice is so uncommon in our circles, the campus pastor needs to prepare the students properly for it and freely grant those who never feel comfortable doing it the right to refrain.

One simple introduction to the concept of students participating in a prayer would be to ask for volunteers before the devotion, and arranging them in a prescribed order so there would be no confusion or awkwardness. At informal devotional get-togethers, such an approach is comfortable and natural, and yet it allows those who prefer simply to listen their freedom to listen. In formal worship services of the campus ministry, such a participatory prayer might be deemed incongruous and disorderly. But in the informal setting of a retreat, midweek classroom devotion, or other such surrounding, students might learn with great relief that they can talk to their God aloud as comfortably as they talk to their campus pastor.

If the group is sitting in a circle, the pastor might suggest that he start the prayer and that each person who wishes to add one thought to the prayer may do so in turn. If anyone prefers not to add a thought, he can

simply tap the person next to him to signal that it is his turn. Participants can be reminded that their prayers are not being graded, and that if someone ahead of them offers the same thought they were planning to add, God doesn't mind the duplication. If they have to stop in the middle of a sentence and start over, God doesn't mind that either. The campus pastor will find his own prayer life enriched as he trains his students to actively contribute to the prayer life of the group.

There is an occupational risk in training students to take such an active role in their own worship life. They may feel justifiably disappointed when a campus pastor organizes his Sunday morning services with a minimum of thought and sensitivity to the needs of his people, reading lifeless prayers conveniently snatched from a dusty prayer book, selecting hymns without any obvious relevance to the thread of the service, or failing to even have a thread that holds the service together. In training his students, the campus pastor will be involved in constantly re-training himself to the exhilarating privilege of shaping a worship service that is truly to the glory of God, inspiring and edifying for God's people and expressive of the full measure of our faith.

### **Evangelism**

It has become popular for our Lutheran Collegians to pile into vehicles at vacation breaks and charge off to exotic locations far from their campus residences to canvass-witness. They may speak glowingly of the experiences they had. The missions they help may record stunning results from their efforts. But how is their life on campus any more expressive of the Christian faith after that exhilarating experience than before? It appears to me that our campus ministries generally appear to be primarily soul conservation reservoirs, havens of refuge, where outsiders can stroll in if they see an ad that intrigues them or if they mistake it for the "other Lutheran" ministry on campus. It is almost as if we view soul conservation and soul winning as alternatives between which we must choose. How can we train our students who are conserved on campus to serve on campus as ambassadors for Christ? How can we train our groups of students to reach outside their group to the confused student, the cynical student and the doubter?

One way is to develop such a whizz bang program of Bible study that our students will enthusiastically invite fellow students to share it, the way they would invite them to an exciting movie they had seen once and want to go back and see again. In that approach, we train our students to invite friends to the campus ministry opportunities. Students who have been warned about unionism may not understand how to invite students of other denominational backgrounds to their fellowship of Wisconsin Synod students without compromising our fellowship principles. The group itself may freeze up when "an outsider" comes in who doesn't understand their groupy jokes, their churchy jargon, or their convictions. Some might even view such a guest as an intruder who is rocking the boat of their assembly in the safe, pure harbor of like-mindedness. They may feel reluctant to sing out boldly on their hymns when a guest sits next to them refusing to sing and curiously wrinkling his brow from time to time when the pastor affirms beliefs he has not yet appropriated. Yet, in such a setting, our collegians have an opportunity to witness to the validity of their convictions and the depth of their faith as well as the sincerity of their worship.

A campus pastor may need to regularly review with the group what their two-pronged *raison d'être* is: soul conservation of the saved and outreach on the campus to the unsaved. Publicizing the worship services and midweek devotions of the group in campus newspapers may attract visitors, especially if the gatherings are held in public buildings on campus. Is the group unashamedly willing to share Christ with their campus world? Or are they simply content to spread the word through the grape-vine when they will assemble in their twentieth century catacombs safe from the intrusion of drop-in guests who are not carbon copies of themselves?

The campus pastor trains his collegians to think of outreach by reaching out himself, aggressively advertising his presence and his program all over campus. He also models the outreach mentality by making himself accessible on campus. But more than this role-model of accessibility his willingness to show his students how to talk about the Savior with their friends can train them to share their faith, too.

He might offer a series of training workshops on how to share their faith with friends and strangers, coupled with actual practice. A whole weekend retreat followed up by specific targets which the students set for themselves on campus could also facilitate more openness among our students with the Gospel.

The campus pastor may train his students to man an information booth by supplying them with a multitude of useful Gospel tracts at high density areas on campus. Some pastors and students avoid such visible appearance handing out tracts on campus for fear of being associated with religious groups whose stereotypes they do not want to endure. If we pursue such thinking to its ultimate conclusion, we would avoid any activity which some religious group sponsors and abandon most of the Gospel imperatives laid on us by Christ.

In some ways, sidewalk evangelism is easier on a large campus than a small one. The chances of running into dormitory friends is smaller than on a small campus. For the beginning witness, the dread of having to talk to someone whom he knows is much more paralyzing than to talk to total strangers. The pastor can take his recruits through a training session, role play different passers-by in the safety of the workshop, and then go out with them on the sidewalk with Gospel tracts and specific invitations to campus ministry events.

The greatest mission field for evangelism on a large campus are the WELS students whose names the campus pastor receives but who never respond to any mailings. It would be a convenient training program to take active students in the campus ministry along on calls to these inactive referrals. Using the TAS outline, the pastor could demonstrate to the active student how to review the law and Gospel with the student and urge him to follow-up by taking advantage of the campus ministry program. Progressively, the student takes a larger and larger part in the presentation until he can conduct the entire conversation with such a student. It is a time-consuming training process, but it offers great potential for reaching many more students of our fellowship than if the pastor tried to call on them by himself. The long-range benefit is the training of a future evangelist for some congregation where the trained student eventually settles down.

### **Recreation and Social Activities**

Students know better than the campus pastor what they like to do. The campus pastor does not have to be a social director or entertainment genius. The pastor may have to discuss with the group what the goals of their recreation and social activities are. Sometimes, groups claim they are planning “fellowship” when their choice of activity only threatens the feeling of fellowship by excluding some people who cannot participate because of handicaps or limitations. Roller-skating, horseback riding and volleyball are great for people who like to roller-skate, ride horses and play volleyball, or watch others roller-skate, ride horses and play volleyball. But what about the person who cannot do such active activities? Do the leaders take this person’s interests into consideration when planning other activities? The campus pastor may have to sit down with the planners and ask them to consider if some of their planned recreation which they enjoy so much may appear childish to other college students. They might not have felt that way because they have been doing it for so long they just assumed everyone would enjoy doing it. The campus pastor should not abandon the students entirely in their planning meetings of social events, at least not in the early stages of their planning year. The pastor has a longer view of the campus ministry than most students. He may be aware of factions which the planning group may not recognize. He may have to take the time in the early meetings to be there to keep reminding them of their goal, requiring them to define it clearly in the context of a Christian campus ministry and then to justify their choices in the context of their agreed upon goals. As he perceives the students’ growth in perception, he can phase himself out more and more, as he becomes confident that they are considering their own goals as a group when choosing their social activities.

The pastor must be willing to let go. The campus pastor who never trusts his students to make sound judgments and good choices fails to train them to think for themselves and answer for their own mistakes. The training process includes letting students make mistakes, poor judgments and bad decisions. But more. The campus pastor is there when they do make mistakes to help them see that it is not the end of the world, that out of the ashes of a disaster arise new lessons for the future. If the campus pastor is so insecure that he can’t brook failure, and so uncertain of his role in the training process that he takes the students’ failures as his own, he will

never be able to let go enough to allow them to grow enough to complete the training process. The only real test of successful training is the solo flight. The flight instructor who insists on continuing to ride with the student pilot never allows the student to graduate to the next level of training.

Part of his training of students to plan their own social activities involves raising the questions they should consider when planning their events. They may need to be reminded that what they choose to do socially is not to contradict their Christian witness. They may have to be reminded that they, as a group, functioning as a group under the Wisconsin Synod represent the Synod in many people's eyes. They should be trained to ask what impact their social activities will have on the image of their campus ministry on the campus and beyond the campus? Would it be advisable to forego a planned activity which might cause undue confusion and controversy? On the other hand, they ought to be trained to recognize the freedom they have as Christians under grace. They should not be easily intimidated with reckless threats that their activity is going to "cause offense" when in truth it is merely going to upset some people, surprise some people, or require some other Christians to be tolerant of an activity they would not enjoy but which in and of itself is not sinful or in bad taste. Sometimes, our campus pastors may have failed to train our students to practice their Christian freedom and instead trained them to cower before uninformed or imagined opposition. It has been said before, but it bears repeating: training students for meaningful involvement in the campus ministry requires taking risks that they might make some mistakes, mistakes which the training campus pastor may let them make as part of the full training process.

### **Administration**

Much of what has been said under the other sections pertains to the administration of the campus ministry. Effective leadership is built of three essential components: a clear perception of valid goals for the group, adequate and constant feedback between leaders and followers, and understanding of the program chosen to meet the goals of the group. The campus pastor who wants to train his students to administer more and more of their campus ministry must be willing to expend hours sitting with them, evaluating their goals, defining them, deciding how to communicate these goals to the people to be affected by campus ministry, determining how to get adequate feedback from the intended targets of campus ministry, re-evaluating the goals, choosing a program that will meet those goals, asking the questions that need to be asked to implement the program, evaluating the program to determine if indeed it is meeting the goals, revising the program, etc.

Some students have had a great deal of leadership training from other experiences. They are sensitive, bright, and persuasive. Others may require more personal attention from the campus pastor developing their leadership perceptions, their communication skills, and their organizational procedures. It may seem, sometimes, that the campus pastor just gets some leaders trained, and they graduate and leave. If he doesn't see his role as part of the larger context of the church, the campus pastor may grow discouraged and depressed. If he thinks of his campus ministry in parish ministry terms, he may be perennially frustrated. But if he regards his campus ministry as a dispatch center, training recruits for positions in the field, he won't view the time spent training them to be thorough planners and sensitive leaders as wasted when they push on to other locations. His task is to influence them with the Word and whatever wisdom he has acquired while they are under his ministry so that when they leave his ministry they are somehow fuller, better equipped, and stronger Christians.

There is no short-cut for training students to be thorough planners except to thoroughly plan with them, evaluate their plans, examine their activities after they have occurred and revise blueprints for future events on the basis of past and present observations. Of all the areas, this is the one where it is most tempting to just "do it yourself and do it right." In the process, the campus pastor may shape a very efficient, neat program which will reflect on him very favorably. The students might respect his genius and creativity, his detailed preparations and his insights, but they might never be able to duplicate it or anything close to it themselves. He may be viewed as a very successful campus pastor, but if he has failed to multiply those who can offer ministry to their world by keeping them recipients of ministry and not co-laborers in ministry, the great success might in one very critical aspect be a profound failure.