

Developing an Environment for Discipleship on the University Campus

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One of the more noted of Jesus' teaching is recorded by John and is insightful in helping us as his followers better understand biblical discipleship.

"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:4-8, NIV)

Another gospel writer, Matthew wrote that Jesus taught it is the fruit that determines the nature of the tree.

"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit." (Matthew 12:33, NIV)

It seems to follow that we can conclude if we as campus ministers develop the right kind of fruit-bearing environment and culture in our programming then students committed to being Christ followers will be the result.

What does a disciple making environment look like and how can it be developed in a culture that is hostile to the cause of Christ? (John 15:18-21)

Before I begin to attempt to describe such an environment let me remind us of two key realities that will come to bear on our planning and programming. First, our temptation will be great to measure success in terms that is culturally relevant and as a result, become content with a shallow design of discipleship for our students. (Romans 12:2) Secondly, there will be temptation to accelerate the process of developing a desired environment and in so doing compromise its integrity.

Disciple making on the university campus is born out of loving and paying attention to students and putting ourselves in position to help facilitate their relationship with Christ. It can be a long and often a messy venture. Developing the right kind of environment in our BCM's will result in spiritual fruit and it will be commonplace for students to make lifelong decisions to actively follow Christ. Following are ten key distinctives that will mark a disciple making environment. This is certainly not an exhaustive list, but characteristics that will help define spiritually effective ministries.

Planned Intentionality

You, as a campus minister, have been asked to develop and submit a discipleship strategy for your BCM. While our strategies may look different, they are all based on an awareness of students' spiritual needs and the personality and history of each respective campus and BCM. What is important is that you have taken the time and energy to develop the best strategy you can to guide the ministry on your campus. Simply being busy with lots of activities is not characteristic of an effective ministry any more than just hanging out with students all day every day is the best way to do your work. Knowing what your specific goals are for a given period of time and how you can best accomplish them with the relationships you have been entrusted to develop and grow is what defines an effective strategy.

You have been given a guideline for developing such a strategy, but it is not simply an outline to be completed. It is intended to be an awareness document that will help you think through who you are, who your students are, the venue in which you minister, and the resource people that are available to assist you and for you to minister to. Effective discipleship strategies will vary some from year to year because your students are different from year to year. Not only are new students entering your ministry, but returning students are not the same spiritually.

Hopefully you will take the energy and time to prayerfully strategize how you plan to do your ministry each year. Who are resource people who can assist you? What are the past events and experiences that you can draw on and what is distinctive about the coming year that can be a help in helping students discover and grow spiritual lives? What has happened to you in the past year that will affect the way you do ministry?

Without trying to overly spiritualize this process, I do believe it is a spiritual process. It should be undertaken with prayer and appropriate homework. We are reminded that before Jesus chose his disciples (his ministry strategy) he spent time with them and a night in prayer that helped guide his decision. (Luke 6:12-16)

I once heard a speaker say, "Give me the right leaders and everything else will follow. Give me the wrong leaders and nothing else matters. I believe there is great truth in that observation. Who *you* are as a growing follower of Christ is the greatest resource for your ministry. What are the practices you have undertaken that are continuing to shape your ministry effectiveness and even more important your intimacy with Christ? Much Christian testimony is a history lesson. It is the current growth on the vine that produces the fruit. What is God doing in your life today that your students will take note of and be impacted? Life attracts life!

Your ministry will not rise above your own spiritual commitment and the priority you give it in your daily allocation of time and energy. We don't spiritually grow because we chronologically age. We become more spiritually mature because we take measures to enable it. What are you doing consistently for your own spiritual growth and health? We need to be reminded of the Apostle Paul's testimony:

'For in him we live and move and have our being.' (Acts 17:28, NIV)

Following are some prompters that can remind us of some of the *how* of spiritual growth. What does your own devotional life look like? Are you scheduling time each day to spend in study, prayer, and meditation with God? Are you memorizing Scripture? What are you reading for your own personal growth as a Christ follower? There is a difference between reading and studying to teach or speak and doing so for growth. Who have you sought out to intentionally mentor you? No matter how old we may be or how long we have been in the ministry, we still need to identify people who can help us on our spiritual journey? Sometimes these people are only for a season of time in actively assisting us. Others are spiritual guides over a much longer period of time. Who are you praying with for spiritual sensitivity and growth? Finally, have you considered periodically scheduling time for a personal retreat? Such a time can provide an environment for a few hours or for 2-3 days that could mean time to better hear God's word for you.

Your greatest ministry resource will be your own spiritual health!

Effective Prayer

If there was one single characteristic that marked the earthly ministry of Jesus it was his prayerfulness. He was keenly aware of his dependence on his Father to guide and empower him for what he had come to do. (John 5:16-36) In our pragmatic endeavors we may have relegated

prayer to a ritualistic exercise that carries little expectation of God intervention. We need to be reminded over and over that our ministries are not to be marked by what we can accomplish, but by our faithfulness to subject all that we are and have responsibility for to our dependence on God. That is not the same as asking God to bless our work, nor is it a call to do nothing but ask God to do something.

Intercessory prayer is hard work. To meet the biblical requirement of praying in Jesus' name or asking God to do what we desire is not an easy task. It is a reorientation of our thinking-our conditioning as to how we do work. When we come to understand that all of ministry begins and is sustained with humble dependence on God, it changes the way we do what we do. We need to continually ask ourselves how much time we are investing in seeking direction and enabling from God so we can do what we have been tasked to do.

How are we involving our leadership team and all our BCM students in this reordering of how we are to not only do campus ministry, but also life? What role does prayer play in our BCM activities? Is it token or is it the cornerstone of everything we are doing? In our discipleship groupings and our weekly worship gathering how are we focusing on our dependence on God?

Intercessory prayer for students and for spiritual direction must be seen as key to our ministry if we are to cultivate the kind of environment where God is sensed in all our activities. In such a culture the norm will be to acknowledge God's presence and our dependence on him in all we do. I believe such environments can be developed and our BCMs ought to be marked by such.

I want to note one final observation concerning prayer. We cannot assume our students are mature pray-ers. Effective praying does not just happen. It is born out of learning how as we do it. We should seek to give our students the opportunity to be a part of experiences where they can learn in structured environments, with instruction and practice, to pray confidently and effectively.

Skillful Listening

In the midst of overloaded calendars and full lifestyles we may need to be reminded that we are in the people business. There are none of us who have not had someone who wanted to visit at what we considered an inopportune time. We had something that needed to be accomplished and stopping to talk with someone was not what we had in mind. I am well aware that we must all set aside times for administrative work. If we don't plan for such times our ministries will not be effective. However, we may be guilty of treating interruptions only with frustration. With that attitude, when we are listening, we may not be hearing all that is being said.

The personal time that we as campus ministers can have with students can be some of our most productive in fruit bearing. For your consideration, a component of your discipleship strategy should be constructing intentional time when you can meet personally with students. It is in such times that we have opportunity to not only deepen our relationships and trust with students, but also become a catalyst for their spiritual growth as we hear from them what their current spiritual circumstances are.

If we are to use such times wisely, it is important to be able to skillfully listen, to not only hear what people are verbally saying, but also their emotional language. Without doubt, we listen haphazardly and sometimes send non-verbal messages that are detrimental to developing a trust relationship. Following are some descriptions of effective listening that can serve us well as we relate to not only our students, but all our relationships.

- Be willing to listen- When people need to talk, ministry is listening.
 - Listen with your countenance. Fully looking at people when they are talking to us. This may be a little awkward for us initially, but it also says that they have our undivided attention and we care about what they are saying.
 - If possible limit outside distractions. What we can control we should.
 - Ask for clarification in what you don't understand. The purpose is to hear and understand what they are saying.
 - Ask about their feelings. Communication is not just hearing words, but what the speaker's emotions are saying. React with appropriate body gestures.
 - Allow time for the speaker to say what he may really want to. Be patient. Don't put words in his mouth by thinking ahead of him. Don't be so concerned with your response that you don't really hear what he is saying.
 - Be emotionally poised yourself with your words and with your body language. Don't be critical or judgmental. You may not agree with a viewpoint. You may not approve of an action, but if you wildly react you may not get a second chance to talk with her.
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- Keep confidences. Never promise that you will not tell anyone what is told you. You may ethically and legally have to. You can promise to not betray their trust. Your response should always be in their best interest. If you feel you must legally or ethically respond to what they have told you, tell them your plans and offer to go with them if they will take the initiative.
 - As hard as it may be not to, avoid advice giving. Help those who are entrusting problems to you to think through their circumstances and see their options. If you can help them clarify the pluses and minuses of their options, you may have helped them to better learn to make decisions. Advice giving in the best case scenario may turn into unhealthy co-dependence and in worse case scenario you can receive the blame for advice that causes adverse response.

Skillful listening requires constant attentiveness to the above principles. James gave us timely instruction in his letter to early Christians.

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”(James 1:19, NIV)

The task of creating a disciple making environment is predicated on remembering and practicing that which is important. Being with and really listening to students will go a long way in the cultivation of the culture we desire.

Healthy Small Groups

BCM is rooted in small group experiences. All of our campus ministries include Bible study groupings that fit the numerical definition of a small group. Yet, an effective small group is characterized by much more than its size. The reason a small group can be so effective in disciple making is because it can provide the kind of environment where a student feels accepted and affirmed and free to share with others his or her story. That need is universal.

Most often small groups are formed to read and discuss curriculum together. That is certainly a rallying point for group formation. It will not guarantee spiritual growth and disciple making. That is a goal that transcends cognitive exercises. George Gallup (Gallup Poll) has written, “I think people want to grow in an experience of community and grow in their faith, but often they don't know how. They don't know the practical steps, or how to live out these religious experiences in their lives. Through Bible studies, fellowship or prayer groups, classes or small groups, people need to have a place where they can discuss their experiences and doubts.”

It may be advantageous to remind us here that disciple making is not about gaining more biblical knowledge. Disciple making is marked by life transformation. The *how* and the *so what* factors are the key determinants in small group disciple making.

We sometimes act as if transformation occurs simply as a natural part of the process of being together. That is not true. Creating a small group environment where disciple making can occur is work on the part of the small group leader, and lest we forget, a work of grace by the Holy Spirit. Let me interject that small group leaders in our BCMS, regardless of the group purpose, need to be trained and have regular meetings with BCM leadership if they are to be able to create the culture desired.

Students (or adults) who will serve as small group leaders should be individuals who see each group member as a person having worth and dignity. Each has something to say worth hearing and can contribute to the group. They should remember to be patient with other group members who may not be as spiritually mature as they. Leadership involves encouraging others in any number of ways. A temptation that they will face will be to try and manipulate group members to arrive at an opinion that is the same as theirs. That should not be their purpose. The *how* of group leadership is to be Christ like and manipulation is not. Finally group leaders need to be good listeners. Effective listening can help create the environment they desire where students feel accepted and encouraged to journey spiritually at their own speed.

As stated earlier most small groups are formed around a curriculum study as purpose. In addition to a time of dialogue about the reading small group gatherings can also be a time for sharing life experience, both past and current. Everyone wants to tell their story. Many are just particular about who will hear it. Small groups are good places to experience life sharing if the sharer feels safe in doing so.

Another element of a healthy small group is care-giving. In the course of a group establishing its identity and trust being created group members begin to feel a kindred bonding to each other. The Greek word for this is *koinonia*. It should be a natural part of a good group process. When it happens, group members do not want to miss a meeting because they enjoy being with people whom they feel genuinely care for them. There may be group meetings from time to time that the need to provide encouragement for a group member hurting or facing a difficult decision overrides the intended discussion.

Small groups are ideal groupings for ministry action endeavors. Depending on the formation purpose, planning an activity to meet a need outside the group is a way of strengthening care and love within the group as well as modeling what it means for a group to act christianly. To be a Christ follower is to seek to serve others and come to love them as we have been taught.

Small group closure can be difficult when a group has experienced *koinonia*. Good leadership uses good small group involvement to help prepare members for life after a particular group when they will have opportunity to be in another grouping or may perhaps lead one. We all need such experiences in our life throughout our life.

Responsible Accountability

Early in the earthly ministry of Jesus he sent out his followers to do ministry but he sent them out in pairs. (Mark 6:7) Why did he do that? At least one major reason was that he knew as his followers seek to act like him they need tangible help in the process. We are too prone to lose focus (keeping Christ at the center of our lives) and we need someone who will lovingly remind us of what we are to be like. I say lovingly because accountability is not born out of control or manipulation, but out of love and commitment to another's best interest.

In the Apostle Paul's writing you almost always see him referring to those who are with him. While there were other benefits of them being with him, one reason was Paul knew Christ followers need one another. We need others to assist us in living a life devoted to Jesus. One deterrent to this arrangement is pride. We are conditioned from early in life to learn to do things on our own. To ask for help is interpreted as a weakness. Living christianly demands relationship with others who are committed to helping us stay active on the journey.

Roberta Hestenes, noted Christian educator, who has helped us immensely in her writing to better understand the *how* of living as a Christ follower remarked: "You can sit in a sanctuary and listen to a sermon, and have the best intentions in the world about doing something about it, but if you don't have somebody who can say next week, 'Did you act on

that?’ you can bet you will fail to do it.” I believe Dr. Hestenes is absolutely correct in her assessment. For a period of time we may make strides in going it alone on our journeys of faith. However, if we are deeply committed to staying on track, it will not be long before we realize we need help. Knowing there is someone who will “get in our face,” but do so in love, when we begin to lose focus is vital to our spiritual health. (See Galatians 2:11-14) For over fifteen years now I have been in such an accountability relationship. I know what it means to have someone, out of his love for me, question me about the quality of my life as a disciple during the past week. I know what it means to have someone I can share my deep spiritual concerns and doubts with and am confident of his daily praying for me. I cannot imagine, nor do I want to try, what it might be like to try and live out my faith outside of such an arrangement.

The question at hand is, “How can responsible accountability relationships become a marked characteristic of the discipleship environment in our BCMs? The answer at least begins with our need as leadership to model it and then VOICE LOUDLY the expectation that all the students in our campus ministry should also be a partner in such an endeavor. There will be some of your students who have already entered into such a relationship without your prompting. However, for many of them they need to be taught that this is a big part of the *how* of taking faith seriously. The voiced expectation of this partnership early on in the school year with follow-up in personal conversations with students might be a catalyst for many to seek out accountability partners. Student leadership who are modeling this and are leading small group ministries can provide positive peer influence and even the names of possible partners. Our weekly worship time, as well as small group gatherings, are opportunities for brief testimonies of how this may be working.

It is suggested that accountability relationships be of the same gender for several good reasons. Two people will set their parameters for questions and the depth of their sharing. The deeper the trust and depth of relationship the more insightful and helpful the accountability process can be. I want to remind us again responsible accountability is born out of a commitment to another’s best interest and love, never power or control. The following questions may be useful in providing examples of how accountability partners can encourage each other.

Have you been faithful to spend intentional time with God each day during this past week?
(Mark 1:35)

Are you actively memorizing Scripture? (Psalm 119: 9-11)

Have you received any new insight from Scripture or other reading in the past week? What is it?
(Proverbs 1:5)

Is there a problem area in your life that you are struggling with? (Isaiah 59:1-2; I John 1:9)

How have you expressed love to your family this past week? (I Timothy 5:8)

Have you been a faithful steward of your life since we have last talked?

(I Corinthians 4:2)

How have you been involved in intentional disciple making during this past week?

(II Timothy 2:2)

What has been the most significant event in your life since we have last talked? (I Corinthians 12:26)

How can I specifically pray for you during this coming week? (James 5:16)

Timely Curriculum

One unintended obstacle in biblical disciple making has been the increase of curriculum available to guide us in the process. Please don't misunderstand me. I am grateful for good curriculum, but often we have based the disciple making process on it instead of investing life into life. Curriculum many times is assigned to be worked through on an individual basis, maybe accompanied by some discussion with a group, to compare the answers we put in our workbooks.

An effective discipleship environment will employ any number of good curricula, but not as the foundation for disciple making. Curricula are guides to direct a small group learning experience where dialogue, testimony, accountability, and modeling play pivotal roles in faith shaping. One filling in the blanks in the curriculum piece without the involvement of others rarely experiences any significant life transformation, only more information about a subject.

When a curriculum is used to guide a Bible study or some other discussion group, care and planning are essential to make sure the curriculum functions as a catalyst to growth, not merely a conveyer of information. The choice of curriculum should be made contingent on the need seeking to be addressed in the group. Just because an author has written helpful material before is not a guarantee that another piece he or she has written is the best resource for the current subject. With the vast possibilities of study material, it is more important than ever that leadership be familiar with and recommend curriculum that is conducive to use in the manner discussed above.

I would like to offer two curricula suggestions that I believe will meet the needs in your BCM students. The first one I want to recommend is the Bible. Let me explain further what I mean. All of us do Bible studies, but Scripture may be the secondary curriculum used. We let a Bible study guide interpret Scripture for us and if we are not careful we may find ourselves really studying what someone else believes. Even if the writer is biblically correct, the process of grappling with truth straight from Scripture is lost or relegated to a minor component of the group process.

What if your small groups only used Scripture as their curriculum for a semester or a year? What if the group learning process was built around the reading of a passage and then group members dialogued both the meaning and the application for their lives today? What

if the expectation was to report at the next study how that truth may have been realized during the week? What if each weekly session provided time for expected testimonies from students as they shared their experiences? There is something inviting about the truth and authority of Scripture not being a second generation discovery, but sharing together what the Word is saying to them. Listed below are some foundational Bible study guides for a group to use as they discuss a particular passage.

- ✓ What is the physical scene of the passage? What is happening?
- ✓ What are the difficult words?
- ✓ What is the relationship of this passage to the whole context in which it occurs?
- ✓ What does the passage teach about the nature of God?
- ✓ What is the central meaning?
- ✓ What do you need to do to apply its truth

For the small group (Bible study) leader here are some ideas that may help him or her in their preparation.

- ✓ Prepare sufficiently
- ✓ Be a learner yourself
- ✓ Let others talk; create opportunities for them to do so
- ✓ Use modern translations
- ✓ Go first, then be quiet
- ✓ Be transparent in your sharing
- ✓ Withhold judgment, keep confidences
- ✓ No preaching allowed
- ✓ Make room for silence
- ✓ Allow for differences in opinion
- ✓ Trust the process

The second curriculum possibility I want to mention is the study of a systemic theology. There are several good ones available. A systematic theology is not the same as a resource that deals with key biblical doctrines; rather, it is a study of what Scripture teaches arranged by key topics. We are seeing in the church today a growing ignorance of people who do not know what Scripture teaches. There is obviously a need among our students to provide an opportunity for them in tandem with others to discover and discuss what really is in Scripture and what the application is for their lives. Remember this is not a short study so it may be wise to think in terms of not only a semester, but a school year for those willing to undertake the process.

Curricula are helpful resources to guide us in a discipleship process. Outside of Scripture they were never intended to be the primary means for spiritual transformation to take place. That is a work of grace by the Holy Spirit. However, he delights in using other people who are also involved in a faith journey to encourage each traveler. Curricula are best experienced with others. The purpose is to not get the right answers in the blanks, but to discover what it means to follow Christ Jesus in our given circumstances. When students are involved in that process it makes for an environment that will bear much spiritual fruit.

The Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

Students who have been or are currently in our BCMs often go through seasons of spiritual sensitivity. For a time they will be actively involved seeking to live out their faith in a meaningful way only later to grow less enthusiastic about their faith and in many cases become inactive in our ministry and a local church. This is especially a reality for some students when they leave the university setting. Certainly the camaraderie available through BCM is an asset in keeping students involved and growing in faith, but that is not the most compelling reason why students stay active on a spiritual pilgrimage or drop out of the journey.

I believe the most telling characteristic of one who is and who will stay active and maturing in their faith experience is his practice of spiritual disciplines or habits. Richard Foster in his book, *Celebration of Discipline* wrote: "Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people. The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths."

If our students are to become deep people and continue living life with God throughout university life and afterwards it will be because they become disciplined to continue to practice his presence. (See I Timothy 4:7-8) Perhaps the greatest contribution we as campus ministers can make to those who pass through our ministries is to facilitate and encourage the practice of such disciplines.

There is no biblical list of such habits, only many illustrations from the life of biblical characters whose lives were marked by such practices. A spiritual discipline is any activity undertaken on a regular basis that results in a deeper devotion to Christ Jesus and helps the participant to more fully pay attention to His presence in her life and to be more consistent in obedience to him. The more common and classic examples of such disciplines are prayer, fasting, Bible study, personal devotion time, meditation, solitude and silence, and Scripture memory. I want to say again there is no one comprehensive list of disciplines. They are not ends in themselves, but means to intimacy and obedience.

The one book, more than any other, that has spawned renewed interest in this subject is Richard Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline*. There are numerous other books and workbooks that can be used as guides to help foster a process of discipline development. Let me mention here that a spiritual discipline is not an activity to be marked off a neither "to do list," nor are they to be done periodically, but methodically and regularly for the purpose intended-intimacy with Jesus.

How can we as campus ministers best facilitate such practices in our students? Let me offer some suggestions that may prove helpful. First, messages about the practice of the disciplines are not nearly as effective teaching the "how" of the disciplines. Let's not assume our students know how to have a quiet time or how to do a personal Bible study. As foundational as it may seem, teaching sessions on *how* may prove very helpful. Second, accountability goes a long way in developing such habits. If we or students are asking students how these practices are

progressing, there are constant prompters and opportunities for feed back as well as “success” sharing. Finally our own practice of spiritual habits will do more to keep the vitality of our faith practice fresh and inviting to students. We teach by modeling!

Therapeutic Presence on Campus

I had a wise seminary professor who use to say that of all people Christians ought to be the most therapeutic group. Because *therapeutic* is almost always used in a medical sense, he was saying that Christ followers ought to make people feel better when they are around. Whatever the circumstance Christians should make things better! His observation has always made a lot of sense to me and has great implication for how BCM’s should function on the university campus.

It really does not matter how we may view ourselves in self evaluation of our ministries. What is important is how is the general student population viewing us and what difference are we making on campus. Conceptually BCM exists to make mature disciples. There is certainly a pervasive dimension of evangelism in that purpose and faith sharing will be facilitated more by attraction to the lives of Christ followers (our BCM students) than unnatural confrontational events. What makes for such an attraction?

Our servant involvement in student life functions is a good beginning. Asking administration how we can serve is a good question and a worthy endeavor for us. If we can believe and help our students understand that as Christ followers we exist for the well being of others we are positioning ourselves for opportunities where students will take note of a different spirit. We serve, not because it means another 100 people will attend BCM. We serve because it is the thing that Christians do and in so doing we discover how we can make a viable contribution to the spiritual well-being of the university campus where we serve. In that process I believe there will be students (including some of our own) who may not fully understand why we do what we do, but want to be part of such a group. We learn to do what we can do without promise of human payoff or reward. Our reward is faithfulness to our calling and seeds planted that will reap good crops.

To be a Christ follower is a high and noble calling. I think we have a responsibility to help our students more fully understand that and act accordingly. High expectation of our BCM students is essential if they are going to positively affect their campus. Therapeutic presence results from living out a ministry purpose for sake of the Kingdom. We may need to discuss among our leadership teams how we can better do this and how we can take our gatherings (of all types) from the inside of buildings to the visible world of the general student population.

One other thought to consider is that some of our students can choose involvement in some campus functions and possibly organizations for the purpose of disciple making. That may sound a little counter-productive and even risky. Granted it is not a venture for an immature believer, but for some of our students with accountability it is a worthy challenge. To exist to help others (therapeutic) is to redefine success. (See Matthew 9:12-13) It is another way in cultivating the kind of environment where students are much more likely to hear God and choose to live life with Him.

Promotes Churchmanship

BCM was never intended to take the place of a local church in students' lives, yet without intentional intervention on our part observation and statistics tell us there are some students who will choose to delay local church involvement until later, if at all. That is true also for some of our BCM students. An important and relevant question is how can our ministries do the best possible job in facilitating our students' involvement in a local church that will help sustain continued spiritual growth after a relatively short university experience in which he enjoys BCM fellowship and support?

In responding to this dilemma we are speaking to the need for strengthening the discipleship culture of our ministry. We may need to be reminded that BCM is not an end in itself. We exist to assist the local church in encouraging and equipping students for spiritual formation. Following are a few ideas for you to grapple with as you consider how to proceed.

First and foremost we as campus ministers model local church involvement. How can your students see and hear about the importance of the church in you and your family's life? Second, we should voice expectations of our students church involvement and at intervals ask accountability questions. Third, continue to be an advocate in your church, and others as opportunities present themselves, for her involvement in BCM. If the church is active in campus ministry it is an attraction to students. Some pastors and staff members may make excellent worship or program speakers. It is important to use a variety of people. Last, we should never criticize the local church in their presence. What students hear us say certainly is a factor in their developing their church (and Christian) ideology.

Discipleship is a lifelong journey. Encouraging a student's involvement in a local church might very well be the endeavor that has the largest spiritual pay-off for the future. It will be the local church where mission experience will continue, where spiritual formation will continue, and where fellowship with other believers seeking to live out their faith will occur.

What about Evangelism?

Glaringly absent from the above list of environmental characteristics is evangelism. Why, when that is so central to our purpose? The reason is because disciple making, the biblical wording for evangelism (See Matthew 28:19-20) is at the heart of all the characteristics that have been discussed. Evangelism, while intentional, was never intended to be a stand alone activity apart from the holistic purpose of helping students experience and respond to what it means to be loved by God. Disciple making means not only being a catalyst for others to know Him, but a facilitator in their nurture as they discover and practice His presence. In our BCM functions there should always be the expectation and cultivation of non-Christian students being involved. That is why the development of an environment is so desirable. It is in such a culture students can observe lives being lived with God and be comfortable in voicing questions among accepting friends.

The Apostle Paul stated in his letter to the Christians in Galatia a biblical principle that is both a challenge and a hope. He wrote: Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. (Galatians 6:7-8) A discipleship environment will in due season produce the kind of results (spiritually mature disciples) that is our purpose. One final word also from Paul (in the same passage) is timely for us. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:9)