

Presbytery of Western North Carolina, PC(USA)
CAMPUS MISSION COMMITTEE REPORT
Serving Students, Faculty, Staff and Communities of
Lees McRae College - Montreat College - UNCA - Warren Wilson College - WCU

The Campus Mission Committee invites you to reflect on these three articles about campus ministry recently published in The Presbyterian Outlook.

Join us as we support our ministries to students, faculty, staff and the communities of our colleges and universities.
Ed Brenegar, Chair

College ministries: I am a big, fat liar

John R. Richardson
01/28/2008

Here's a little trivia question for you: What is the one sacramental promise that we make as members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?

Answer: At each baptism the church is asked to promise to help guide, raise, and nurture the child (or adult) in the ways of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Working for years in business, I have been fascinated by the way we do "business" as a Church. No other organization would continue to lose more than 40,000 "customers" a year and not make major changes after two or three years. And yet the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) loses members at that rate and I find that most Presbyterians don't even notice.

After much study, thought, and prayer, I have come to the realization that one of the major contributing factors to this problem has nothing to do with business, and has everything to do with being faithful. In all the many baptisms I have witnessed I have never seen a person sitting in the congregation not raise his or her hand and commit to the spiritual development of the child. And yet, every time we send our children off to college at age 18, we make liars out of the entire Church. As a Church we are asked to make one sacramental promise; we have not been faithful to this promise. At a time when our young people most need the guidance, influence, and nurture of the Church, the PC(USA) is largely absent. We have no national Campus Ministry program, no guidance, no leadership, no plan, and no vision to even address this issue. As an active and supportive member of the PC(USA), that makes me a big fat liar.

Consider this:

- From 1990-2000, one state had more new members join the PC(USA) than all other 49 states combined. (www.thearda.org)

Need a hint? This state ranks first in violent crimes per capita, first in mobile homes per capita, third in deaths by motor vehicle accidents. Still stumped? The answer is: South Carolina!

Consider this:

- From 1990-2000 more than 10,000 new members joined the PC(USA) in the state of South Carolina — more than all other 49 states combined.

Maybe this doesn't surprise you, but it shocks the heck out of most people.

Many factors play into this, but I have a theory about one of the major contributors — campus ministry. I grew up in South Carolina, and it is not a given in that state that a young person will graduate from high school much less go on to college. Yet I believe that if a person grows up in the PC(USA) in S.C., with our proud emphasis on education, this person is more likely to go to college than not.

Hope prevails for Virginia Tech students

Jack Haberer, editor
The Presbyterian Outlook
01/28/2008

For the Presbyterian students at Virginia Tech, hope has found a voice that has quieted the lingering echoes of gunshots. Several of them — survivors of last April's mass murder on their campus — testified to their harrowing search for and discovery of hope with 800 fellow students at the College Conference at the Montreat Conference Center on January 3.

The opening session of this year's conference, the largest conference of its kind in memory, was led by the students along with Alex Evans, pastor of the Blacksburg Church, which is near the Tech campus. Evans set the tone for the evening's presentation with the words, "We are called to be a people of hope, and hope often comes from the deepest, hurting places." The soft-spoken pastor added, "It's the essence of life. It's the stuff that we struggle with. It's where God always calls us to be."

Two brief video presentations about the April 16 tragedy were presented to those gathered. Then the rapt audience listened to the witness of the "Hokies," each clad in shirts bearing the university's name.

While the overall tone was solemn, Erin Kirkpatrick from Virginia Beach broke up the crowd when she said that hope is what causes her to pray each morning "that my day will go as planned and I will not do something stupid like lock myself out of my car." Her tone turned reverent as she added, "To know you're not alone in your grief is a powerful thing. God will be there. He is hope in the purest form."

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The Next Meeting of
the Presbytery's Campus Mission Committee will be
Thursday, February 21
3:00-5:00 pm
Presbyterian Home for Children
Black Mountain, N.C.

People interested in supporting Presbyterian
Campus Ministries are welcome to attend.
Call or Email Ed Brenegar, chair
for additional details.
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Matt Drumheller of Blacksburg replayed the questions that haunted him that day, "Where can I find hope in a constant state of tears all day? ... when I'm feeling lost in my own body?" In those first hours, it "... just felt like God was nowhere to be seen."

Heidi Miller was caught in the middle of carnage, shot three times when Seung-Hui Cho unleashed an assault on his classmates and professors. She saw him turn the gun on himself.

And still hope appeared in one stunning moment.

As Matt stood around in the nearby hospital "waiting and waiting," there came on a gurney his friend Heidi, lying in a dazed, post-surgery state. She smiled at him. It was like " ... God was standing right there beside me saying, 'She's alive.'" Drumheller told the crowd, "God was right there beside me, beside all of us."

He then added emphatically, "Even for the child going to bed hungry, God is there. It's God's presence and God's help that will lead us through."

Abby Schuhart from McLean Va., turned her attention to Heidi, this time from the vantage point of a roommate. When she saw Heidi rolled by, "there she was with that same groggy face I get to see every morning," she shared to the giggles of the crowd. After a pause, she added, "That moment defines hope for me. For me she is a symbol of hope. She's back at Tech, attending classes, going to physical therapy ... giving hope that continues to build."

Then Heidi herself spoke.

This past fall semester was an "emotional mountain" for her to climb, she told her peers. "There were times when things got hard, really hard, but I had to keep pushing along. ... Hope was hard to find at the times when I found myself facing rock bottom."

She did find that hope doesn't always come in spectacular ways. "I learned that lesson for the first time in those first few moments I switched from being student at my desk to a student lying on the floor playing dead wondering whether I would ever make it out of that room in Norris Hall alive. Because that morning, as the smell of gun residue and blood penetrated my nostrils and blood seeped through my jeans and three bullets entered into my body, hope seemed far away — because he left the room, but came back in, he would run out of bullets, but then he would reload."

The horror was almost too much to behold. "Evil was standing there embodied in this person standing four feet away from me, then it came — hope found its way into that room." It first appeared when she began to move her left foot. "I realized that I wasn't paralyzed and that my nerves still reached my foot despite the three bullets that had just entered my left side."

During and following a hospital stay, the support of family and friends continued to renew her hope, along with the hard work of physical therapy. " ... and my faith was there to remind me that somehow this was all going to find a way to work out, and inside myself I found a way to hang onto the person I was before but also make room for this new facet of my life."

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To campus or not to campus?
Jack Haberer, editor
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To hear 800 Presbyterian college students singing out songs of praise is encouraging/discouraging.

To see those 800 wear t-shirts that boldly proclaim their faith — many unabashedly announcing their affiliation with our denomination — is really encouraging/discouraging.

To listen as those 800 talk about following Jesus intently, serving God sacrificially, and listening to the Spirit attentively gets downright, overwhelmingly encouraging/discouraging.

The College Conference at the Montreat Conference Center in early January showcased the vitality that is evident among some of the younger adults in our branch of the Church (see pp. 7-9). It was easy to see how the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s brand of Christianity could really energize these students.

When the me generation was given the option to "accept Jesus" so they could have "life abundant," that message really resonated. Organizations promoting that message, with a sincere desire to lead folks into a vital relationship with Christ, found a ready response. They brought many folks, especially college students, into the fold.

I am a product of that movement and I give thanks for it.

But, the millennial generation wants more than abundant life. As so many sociologists are telling us, they are less self-absorbed than their parents' generation. They're not into rebellion against, but re-invention of, the world around them. They don't want to keep waging the internecine battles of their parents. They want to bring real healing and reconciliation and justice and mercy to the world.

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So why is South Carolina special? I am not naive enough, nor blind enough, to think that campus ministry is solely responsible. But I do believe that one of the indicators of a healthy Church is a healthy campus ministry program. One of the indicators of the health of churches in that state can be traced back to the campus ministry program of one specific church: Fort Hill Church in Clemson,

From the late 80s to this day, Fort Hill Church and the Presbyterian Student Association at Clemson University are committed to creating arguably one of the best examples of a successful campus ministry program in the country. Few single colleges or universities can claim credit for sending as many young students off to seminary. But Fort Hill didn't stop there. This local church committed to creating a successful statewide campus ministry program. Each year there are statewide retreats on various campuses in the spring or fall, as well as special events throughout the year. It is a fine example of what a statewide campus ministry program can look like.

Consider this:

- 85% of PC(USA) high school students stop going to church when they go off to college and less than 15% ever return (Rodger Nishioka, associate professor of Christian Education, Columbia Theological Seminary)
- From 1990-2000 the PC(USA) closed 327 churches and lost 411,769 members. (www.arda.org)
- During this same time period the Presbyterian Church in America opened 280 new churches, gained 93,901 members, a growth rate just over 42%. (www.thearda.org)

My point is this: The PCA focuses on three main areas of mission: international mission, campus ministry, and new church development (www.pcanet.org). Most of their new church developments are in or near college towns. As different as I feel we as the PC(USA) are from our PCA sisters and brothers, the truth is we believe in 95% of the same things. Yes, ordination of women and segregated worship are big issues, but they are a part of that 5%. We can learn from the PCA in this regard: They have been faithful to the sacramental promise they make to their young people at baptism.

This is not about numbers. This is not about being successful. This is about being faithful, and as a church we have not been faithful to the one sacramental promise we make to each and every young person in our denomination.

This is also about stewardship. If stewardship is defined as what we do with what God has given us, then we are being terrible stewards of the children of this church. We have some of the best Christian Education programs in the world K-12, and yet when we send our young people off to college we abandon them and abandon the promises we make to them.

The single greatest mission field facing the PC(USA) in this next century is the college campus. If we, as a Church, are faithful to the one sacramental promise that we make, if we really are good stewards of that which God has given us, then one day we might begin to see the PC(USA) transformed into all that God has ever hoped and called for her to be.

John R. Richardson is vice president for development at Montreat Conference Center, Montreat, N.C.

<http://www.pres-outlook.com/tabid/2119/Article/6773/Default.aspx>

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Over the ensuing months, she has discovered that there is "no tragedy trump card you can turn in to God that says you've paid your dues on the hard times."

Looking back on the whole experience she reflected, "That morning of April 16th in my French classroom in Norris Hall I saw evil in its purest form. I faced someone who had no hope at all." She has not tried to psychoanalyze the killer. But, "the only way I can conceptualize it in my head [how] this happened is that he had no hope, no hope at all, and that is where his hopeless path led him." This is as close as she has come to an answer, she says, "and I've come to terms with that."

Prior to the evening's event these students and their pastor gathered in the quiet Anderson Auditorium to go over the plan for the service. Even though these students are the closest of friends, this was the first time they had shared their stories with one another. According to Evans, they all wept when they heard them express in their own words just how they experienced the horror of the day, and the discovery of the hope that was sustaining them in the aftermath.

When they later shared their stories with the 800 fellow college students at the conference, many in the audience shed tears, too. All of them gave a standing ovation, adding their own witness to the fact that, as the conference theme says ...

"Hope* ...

... *has found a voice."

[http://www.pres-outlook.com/
tabid/2117/Article/6771/
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To campus or not to campus?

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Put simply, they don't just want to accept Jesus; they want to follow Jesus.

The PC(USA) has a long pattern of pressing its folks to be engaged in mission, to be transformers of culture not escapists from it. In this respect, our message hasn't changed too much over the years. We have merged gospel proclamation with justice promotion. We have promoted both individual participation and collective connectionalism. We have been left and right, north and south, east and west. And, frankly, some me-generation dropouts have scolded us for lacking the popular appeal to hold them.

Now our message finds natural resonance with a rising generation. That's encouraging.

It's discouraging, too. At this crucial moment, our ministry among college students is in a shambles.

Oh, some of our campus ministries are thriving. Some dedicated leaders are pouring themselves into making disciples of students on their respective campuses. Some of those folks showed up at the Montreat conference with students in tow.

But, some college ministries do little more than provide a hangout for a small circle of friends. Few of our campus ministries see their campus as a ready and accessible people group needing to be confronted with the claims of Christ. Evangelism, in the best sense of that word, is not being engaged in such places. And, worst of all, a lack of funding and leadership has closed lots of such ministries. Many colleges and universities lack any viable Presbyterian presence.

Or, should I say, no PC(USA) presence at all. Another Presbyterian presence, the Presbyterian Church in America, is spreading all over the country's college campuses. Having determined to make campus outreach one of their top priorities, they have placed Reformed University Fellowships on hundreds of campuses, and that small denomination — just an eighth the number of members as ours — is drawing students to their message like athletes to the Olympics Games. They have shown that a focused vision, the mobilization of effective leaders, and the investment of funds can reach this generation.

Which does lead back to some encouraging realities. The presence of new leadership in Louisville means we have every reason to expect new ideas to rise to the surface. We do have the funds to expand campus ministries, if we so choose. And some of our campus ministries are thriving, as John Richardson reports (p. 10). Can the rest of us learn from them? Can we make ministry with and among college students a top priority for the PC(USA) and, in the process, unleash the vision of a generation to be followers of Christ Jesus?

It is discouraging to see 800 energetic, mission-minded, college students expressing their faith, knowing they are a tiny fraction of the number we could be reaching. But it is encouraging to know that the possibility of connecting with a generation for the cause of Christ has not been this opportune in decades. Will we rise to the possibility?

— JHH

<http://www.pres-outlook.com/tabid/2115/Article/6768/Default.aspx>

Presbytery of Western North Carolina Campus Ministries

Rev. Kathy Campbell, Chaplain - Lees McRae College

Rev. Steve Woodworth, Chaplain - Montreat College

Rev. Bill Buchanan, campus minister/ associate minister - UNCA/ Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church

Rev. Steve Runholt, pastor;/campus minister - Warren Wilson College and Church

Rev. Dick Lonee, interim pastor, WCU/Cullowhee Presbyterian Church