
CAMPUS LIFE

DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE CAMPUS MINISTRY

Bernie Molnar

In many countries around the world, Seventh-day Adventists are becoming aware that thousands of our members attend public colleges and universities in pursuit of advanced training and specialized degrees. We are also realizing that non-Adventist students and teachers on those campuses represent an important social group that remains virtually untouched by our message.

What kind of ministry should we develop, as Adventists, for this unique setting? What practical steps can we take to make Christ's presence felt on the secular campus? Are there activities that will enhance our program of Christian nurture and outreach?

The following remarks are based on my own experience as a student who became a Seventh-day Adventist at a large public university, and on my years as director of Adventist campus ministries. I know that many of these approaches will also prove effective, perhaps with some adjustments, in the social context where God has placed you as a student, teacher, or concerned church leader.

Should We Get Involved?

Any effective ministry in a public college or university needs to reach out evangelistically to the non-Adventist community on campus, and to minister and train for witness the Seventh-day Adventists attending the institution. These two objectives must be pur-

sued together. It is not really possible to approach effectively one and disregard the other.

Campuses are fertile mission fields. Our friends in other Christian denominations recognized this reality long ago. Students come to these educational centers from all over the nation and frequently from countries abroad. They are usually more open and tolerant of new viewpoints than the general public. Many of them are earnestly seeking direction and purpose in their lives, and are spiritually responsive to an honest presentation of God's message. The best time to reach these future leaders of society is today, while they are still at the formative stage in their life experience.

We encourage all our Adventist young adults to attend one of our colleges or universities and enjoy the benefits of a total Christian program. However, a large number of them are on public campuses for a variety of reasons. Some are pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees not offered in our schools. Others believe they cannot afford the cost of a private education. Still others prefer to remain at home rather than live in a dormitory away from home. A few have purposely chosen to stay away from the Adventism in which they grew up. In addition, there are those who have a family of their own and are working full-time, while advancing slowly in their studies. All of them need to know that their fellow Adventists

are interested in their academic success and in their eternal salvation. If we encourage them to commit themselves fully to Jesus during their college years, they will often become the leaders in their home churches after they graduate. Many, in fact, can be effective leaders in the local congregation while attending the university, if we give them the opportunity.

Starting a Campus Ministry

The first step in beginning a public campus ministry, naturally, is to locate the Adventist students attending the college or university. Some names will be easily obtained through referral from other students, parents, and church members. Some universities ask the students to state their religious preference on the registration form for each academic term. This information is usually made available to a properly recognized representative of the church.

Additional students who are Adventists or who are interested in the Seventh-day Adventist Church can be found by advertising on the campus the location of the local congregation and the times of its weekly meetings. For lack of this information, it is not unusual for an out-of-town student to be on campus for several months before he or she knows there is an Adventist church nearby!

The importance of also publicizing on campus key activities sponsored by the church—whether they are carried out on the campus or not—cannot be overemphasized. I, myself, became a Seventh-day Adventist as a result of an evangelistic series I attended while pursuing graduate studies in engineering at the University of Florida. I learned about this series, which was held several miles away from the campus at a social club, only because someone had posted a handbill advertising it on the bulletin board outside the university student center. I later discovered that the person that had posted the announcement was a university student attending the Gainesville Adventist Church who was not yet a member himself.

Once the Adventist students on campus are located, they should be brought together and encouraged to organize themselves as an official Adventist student association. Membership should be open to any Adventist faculty or staff member, and also to students who are not presently Adventists but who have an interest in Adventism. Having an organization will tie this ministry closer with the university community. It will also grant the group several privileges such as the use of meeting facilities on campus at little or no cost, free use of university audio-visual equipment, the right to post advertisements on campus and to set up a literature or information table.

Colleges and universities have various procedures for recognizing a student organization on campus. They usually involve an official name, a written constitution, conditions for membership, a faculty or staff sponsor, and a list of the officers. (We will share some of our sample constitutions

if you write to us at the address listed below.) In Texas we are using one of three names: Adventist Christian Fellowship (ACF), Adventist Bible Christian Fellowship (ABCF), and Adventist Fellowship International (AFI).

Forming an official organization and beginning some activities is one of the best ways to develop a spirit of unity and purpose among the Adventist students attending the university, and to establish an Adventist presence on the campus. Usually only members of the university community can be official members of the student association. However, other interested members of the church can attend and participate in the activities sponsored by the organization, and should be encouraged to do so.

Even if the number of Adventist students is too small to organize a formal association—perhaps there are none—it is still possible to begin a ministry on campus. Through proper advertising methods (to be discussed later in this article), students can be invited to attend meetings and participate in activities sponsored by the local church. It may be also possible to hold some meetings on the campus. As a result of an intelligent and sustained evangelistic outreach to the campus community, under the blessing of God, a nucleus of Adventist students can eventually develop into an official association.

Activities

A vital campus ministry will have very close ties with the local church. The members of the student organization will also be active members of the local congregation. Non-Adventists who are reached evangelistically on the campus will be invited to attend

Sabbath school and worship services, as well as other activities, and will become members of the local church when they are baptized. Ministers and other church leaders can make an important difference in this area.

As part of the campus ministry, a collegiate Sabbath school class for students and other young adults may be organized to meet each Sabbath at the church. Some congregations designate "Campus Ministry Sabbaths" with an appropriate program and a special meal planned after the worship service, to which all students and others involved in this ministry are invited. For students who are away from home, a warm attitude of the local church toward them says more than many sermons.

In addition to a program of spiritual nurture and fellowship centered at the local church, other activities can be sponsored by the student organization on campus and in the student residences. Here is a list of several that have proved successful:

- * Special speakers, sponsored by the Adventist student organization, on topics such as biblical archaeology, creation/evolution, ethics, stress and time management, personal relationships, preparation for marriage, etc.
- * Bible studies, both one-to-one and in small groups.
- * Prayer groups.
- * Revelation and Daniel seminars.
- * Christian films and videos, followed by a discussion.
- * Vegetarian cooking classes.
- * Stop-smoking programs.
- * Christian musical concerts.
- * Literature racks and manned literature tables at strategic locations.
- * Free cassette tapes on Bible topics.

* Religious interest surveys conducted personally among the students.

* Social programs such as picnics, sport activities, excursions to places of interest, sailing, special meals followed by Christian games, etc.

When scheduling these events, special attention should be given to avoid dates that fall on days too close to examinations and other conflicting programs on campus.

The success of any of these activities involves the formation of friendships. As you make yourself available to God, he will lead you to students who are seeking spiritual truth and with whom you can establish friendships. Then, as you study the Bible with them, they will share its powerful message with their own friends.

Clifford Goldstein, who now edits an Adventist journal especially directed to Jewish readers, became a Seventh-day Adventist in 1980 as a result of studying the Bible with me and several other students in our campus ministry at the University of Florida. Cliff was particularly interested in Bible prophecy. One day he became so excited as the message of the Scriptures became alive for him, that he went to the campus grounds and began sharing publicly from the Bible. This occurred before he had become a member of the church. Many students circled around him to hear what he had to say, because they remembered how Cliff used to heckle preachers before his conversion. Today Cliff reaches thousands through the journal *Shabbat Shalom* and his speaking ministry.

Advertising

At a practical level, an essential ingredient in the success of a campus ministry is to find the best way

of advertising its activities and services. These methods vary from school to school. One can learn much by observing the means other student organizations use to promote their activities.

It is also important to find out and follow the university policies for posting announcements on campus. Often such announcements need to be cleared by the university before they can be posted. If there is an officially recognized Adventist student association, approval is easy to obtain.

A personal invitation to friends and acquaintances on campus is the surest approach. But in addition, the following methods should be considered:

* Handbills distributed personally.

* Posters and announcements displayed on bulletin boards.

* Display and classified ads in the campus newspaper.

* Direct mail to students (some universities make available for

purchase at a reasonable cost peel-and-stick mailing labels with the names and address of students enrolled).

* Spot radio announcements through the campus station.

A successful Adventist ministry in a public college or university requires planning, dedication, teamwork, and sensitivity to God's guidance. The Holy Spirit wants to reach out in Christian love through us—students, ministers, lay leaders, chaplains—toward those who seek purpose, reconciliation and hope on the campus. Anyone who decides to begin such a nurture and outreach program is entering into one of the most exciting and challenging pioneering ministries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today.

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NEEDED: Local Representatives

Are you

* An Adventist teacher or staff member at a non-Adventist college or university?

* An Adventist pastor or a campus chaplain at a university center?

* A mature Adventist student interested in providing spiritual support to other students on secular campuses?

The General Conference Committee on Ministry to College and University Students (MICUS) is looking for individuals who are committed to the Seventh-day Adventist message and mission, and who are willing to serve as local campus representatives.

You will be expected (1) to be a counselor and spiritual mentor to Adventist students attending the local college or university, (2) to recommend ways in which the church's ministry to these students can be enhanced, and (3) to provide a constructive critique of each issue of *DIALOGUE*.

In turn, you will (1) be kept informed on activities sponsored by the MICUS Committee in your world division, (2) be involved in developing nurture and outreach plans for the future, and (3) receive a free subscription to *DIALOGUE*.

If you are willing to serve as the campus representative for MICUS, send your name, address, current position, local church membership, and a brief curriculum vitae to the regional representative listed on page 2. Thank you!