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Campus Ministries: The Search for New Models

THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT MODELS of ministry for sharing the Good News of Christ's saving love among the students, faculty and staff of our nation's colleges and universities. As a matter of fact, in *The Ivy Jungle Network Report, The State of College and University Ministry*—November 2003, the multiplicity of approaches and settings for campus ministry was cited as one of the challenges in putting together a current assessment of campus ministry in the United States (*The Ivy Jungle Network Report*, 2).

Within the LCMS, the following terms have been commonly used to denote some of the different approaches in conducting campus ministry: student assembly ministry, town and gown congregation, all university congregation, and contact ministry. We might consider these to be some of the primary established models of LCMS campus ministry. However, these are very broad classifications, and individual local ministries

often use their own terminology to describe their "model" of campus ministry.

The Search for New Models: One Size Doesn't Fit All

CONDUCTING A GOOGLE SEARCH of "campus ministry models" will produce hours of fascinating reading. Across denominations and parachurch organizations, there are seemingly countless models of campus ministry, with many claiming to be the next big thing—or at least worth a second look. Names of some popular campus ministry models include: befrienders model, house church model, church-based model, partners model, small group model, cell church model ... presence model, networking model, church-on-campus model (Brittain, 673) ... and the list goes on. Reading the descriptions of specific campus ministries indicates that elements of more than one model are often blended or adapted to meet unique local needs and outreach opportunities. In other words: One size doesn't fit all!

A presentation by Tim Kruse of St. Paul's University Catholic Center in Madison, Wisconsin, helps illustrate this point. Speaking

at a symposium at the University of Notre Dame in 2004, Kruse presented five different examples of Catholic campus ministries that are considered to be exemplary in terms of evangelizing the unchurched. One ministry is modeled around small group discipleship. Another ministry is staff-driven and utilizes peer ministers to teach the faith to other students. In one of the "exemplary" Catholic ministries, a monastic brotherhood at a large campus parish runs an outreach ministry focused on hospitality and fellowship events. Two of the ministries Kruse identified work in partnerships with different national parachurch organizations, drawing upon the strengths of both groups: Catholic denominational identity and the parachurch evangelism expertise. Each of the "exemplary" Catholic campus ministries developed a custom-tailored model that best mated the ministry resources and mission opportunities of their specific location. That is to say, the "top five" evangelistic ministries weren't all doing the exact same things in order to successfully reach the unchurched.

As we consider a search for new models of campus mission work within the LCMS, the necessity for local ministries to be custom-tailored also holds true. There isn't any one "successful" blueprint that can be utilized in a cookie-cutter fashion throughout the church with the same results. Each campus is different. Each district is different. Each campus ministry will have a different set of resources available upon which to draw. As we consider new "models" of campus ministry, it will be helpful to look at some historical aspects of LCMS campus work, as well as some common factors influencing the development of new models today.

Factors Shaping Models of Campus Ministry in the LCMS: Some History

SEPTEMBER OF 2006 will mark the 86th year of campus ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Initially, campus ministry was as a measure of "conservation," intended to preserve the spiritual life of an estimated 6,000 Lutheran students attending non-synodical schools in the 1920s and 30s. Over time, both the number of students and the number of

campus ministries began to grow significantly. Following WWII almost 50,000 Lutheran students were attending public colleges and universities. In order to minister to an ever-growing student population, individual LCMS districts established and administered Word and Sacrament ministries in public university communities. At schools with a significant Lutheran population, university chapels and student centers were strategically erected near campus (many of these were student assembly ministries and all-university congregations). In some locations town and gown congregations were established to serve both students and the broader community. When those options weren't available, nearby pastors and congregations were called upon to serve as contact ministries. A student organization, Gamma Delta, operated under the Walther League from 1932-1969 (LCMS World Mission *Harvest Newsletter*, 1).

In the early days, it might be said that LCMS campus ministries were primarily chaplaincy ministries designed to provide spiritual care to the thousands of Lutheran students already on campus. Over time, however, college and university campuses began to be recognized for their mission potential. In 1965, in convention, the LCMS placed campus ministry under its Board for Mission Services. While campus ministry continued to provide spiritual care and a worshipping community for Lutheran students, it also began to develop strategies for reaching out to non-Christians (*Harvest Newsletter*, 1). In the 1960s and 70s, some districts entered into cooperative ministries with the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America (predecessor bodies to the current Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). During this same period a pan-Lutheran student organization, Lutheran Student Movement, replaced Gamma Delta. By the late 1980s, however, theological differences were challenging the continuation of most cooperative Lutheran work. In 1988 the LCMS formed its own student organization, Lutheran Student Fellowship (*Harvest Newsletter*, 1).

By the middle 1990s, a strategy statement had been adopted for LCMS campus ministry which said: "Districts are being encouraged to see their campus ministries as missionary



outposts, and those serving in campus ministry are asked to see themselves as missionaries” (Siering, 4). This is a significant shift from the days when campus ministries were primarily understood to be chaplaincies.

“Old” Models Are Challenged

THE SHIFT FROM A FOCUS of “conserving” Lutheran students to one which views campus ministry as a missionary endeavor is not the sole motivator for searching for new ways to continue and expand campus ministry. Some other realities have forced districts, congregations and local campus ministry boards to re-design their campus ministries.

As the 20th century came to a close, funding and staffing full-time ministries became a greater challenge for the districts and congregations involved in campus ministry. Maintaining district-owned buildings (that were now often 30-40 years old) was not always desirable for districts nor something local campus ministry boards had prepared to consider on their own. The districts that had pursued pan-Lutheran ministries began the painful process of exiting those ministries as the era of cooperative Lutheran campus ministries began to end. In almost every district the issues of funding and staffing have been factors influencing the re-shaping of how Christ’s mission on campus is carried out within the LCMS.

Yet, campus mission opportunities continue to grow.

The Growing Campus Mission Field Calls for New Models

RECOGNIZING THE CAMPUS as a mission field and campus ministry as a missionary endeavor necessitates some knowledge of what that mission field looks like. Who are the people on our campuses? What are they like? How many are unreached? How can the church best communicate the Gospel with them?

Today, according to statistics presented on the LCMS World Mission Web site, there are over 16 million college students on 3,700 campuses in the United States. Of those, approximately nine million are between the ages of 19 and 25. It is precisely at this age that young people are shaping their life-views and

desperately need the guidance of God’s Word and to be connected with Christian peers and adult role models. Many in campus ministry estimate that between 70 and 80 percent of the students on U. S. campuses are unchurched. When the international student population is added to that figure, the non-Christian population on campus becomes greater than the number of non-Christians in the average U. S. community (*Inter-Connections*, 3).

Research reported by George Barna in September of 2003 suggests that only three out of 10 young people (in their 20s) attend church in a typical week. This includes not only those young people who have never been connected with the church, but those who have grown up in active Christian homes as well. The Barna study points out that “millions of twentysomething Americans—many of whom were active in churches during their teens—pass through their most formative adult decade while putting Christianity on the backburner” (*The Barna Update*, 1). In the same report David Kinnamon, a twentysomething Barna researcher, reacts to the study’s findings:

Christianity is not going to whither away among twentysomethings—more than 10 million are active church-goers and very committed to the Christian faith. But the real issue is how churches will respond to the faithquakes that are reverberating through our nation’s young adults. The notion that these people will return to the church when they get older or once they become parents is only true in a minority of cases. More importantly, that reasoning ignores the real issue: millions of twentysomethings are crystallizing their views of life without the input of church leaders, the Bible, or other mature Christians. If we simply wait for them to come back to church later in adulthood, not only will most of those people never return, but also we would miss the chance to alter their life trajectory during a critical phase. And, besides, what church couldn’t use the infusion of energy, ideas, and leadership that young adults can bring to the table? (*The Barna Update*, 3).

While Barna’s report might seem startling, it serves as a reminder of our church’s call to be in mission on campus. Within reports like Barna’s there are also some telling clues as to what factors should be influencing how we approach reaching college students with the Gospel. For example, many of the young people surveyed in the Barna study reported a desire to be trusted with leadership roles within their churches. Mentoring was pointed out to be the most appealing form of leadership development for young adults. Some campus ministries are picking up on this finding and encouraging mentoring relationships to be a part of their peer ministry programs or in the training of their small group Bible study leaders.

Another open door for new campus mission work is that of ministry to international students and scholars and their families. On our campuses in the United States there are currently 720,000 international students and scholars, along with many of their dependents (*Selle*, 25). Many of these international guests have never had the opportunity to learn of God’s love for them. They’ve never experienced true forgiveness. They’ve never been introduced to Jesus, the Savior. While they are here in our midst we have the opportunity to show them God’s love and teach them about Christ.

International students are a specific segment of the campus population that has received growing attention in the LCMS over the past ten years. Existing campus ministries, districts, and various ministry coalitions have been developing intentional outreach ministries among internationals. Today, intentional international student ministries utilize English conversation groups, cooking classes, small group Bible studies, hospitality events and various other friendship ministries to share the message of Jesus Christ as Savior for all people. Most often, international student ministries employ part-time directors and rely heavily on volunteers from local congregations.

A third mission opportunity calling for the development of new models of campus work is among those attending our nation’s junior colleges and community colleges. The American Council on Education, in a June 2004 press release, reported that community college enrollment grew by 14 percent during

the 1990s, five percentage points more than all the rest of higher education. This is a new segment of campus mission opportunity that we have little experience with as a church. How do we minister to students who are only with us for such a short time (two years)? How do we connect with students who are more likely to be living at home and/or are required to hold a part-time job while in school? What about community colleges that are becoming more residential? Because community and junior college students are likely to transfer to a four-year college to finish their degrees, there is also a shorter period of connection with our traditional campus ministries. How will the church respond to these new and expanded opportunities for mission on campus?

Whether in a traditional four-year setting, with international students, or on a community college campus, having the ability to develop authentic relationships with students is vital in sharing the Gospel. A creative thinking and dedicated people who are willing to be a part of those relationships will be equally important.

New Models of Campus Mission: One District's Shift

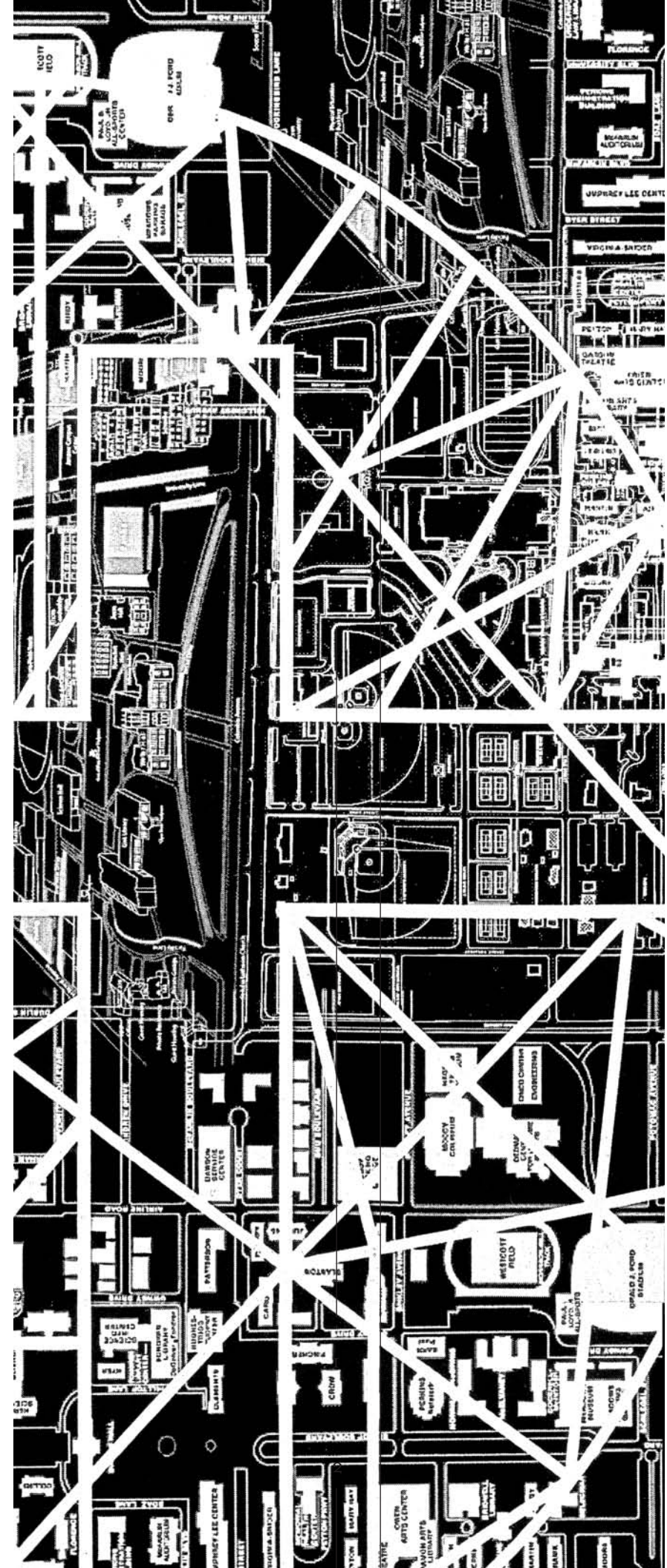
AT THE BEGINNING OF OUR CURRENT DECADE the Missouri District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod endeavored to develop a new model for its campus mission work. Facing challenges of funding and staffing, the Missouri District Mission Board was forced to take a serious look at how it encouraged and conducted campus missions. With district-owned properties at five campuses and staffed ministries at nine sites, combined with stretched district finances, it was evident that changes would be required. Calling a campus pastor to serve each individual site was not possible. Splitting a pastor's role, part-time campus and part-time congregational ministry, also had drawbacks—both for the pastor and those being served. Yet, amidst these challenges was also the realization that mission opportunities on Missouri's campus were actually growing. A rethinking and retooling of campus mission work for the 21st century was about to begin.

A Campus Ministry Action Team was formed, and a "Campus Missionary" model of ministry began to develop. The concept for the Missouri model borrowed from a model already being explored in Kansas. The initial plan called for the district to be divided into two regions, eastern and western. A campus missionary would be called to oversee and facilitate campus mission work in each region. The missionaries would serve as guides to local campus ministry coordinators, non-ordained, part-time workers responsible for leading each of the campus ministries. Other key participants in this model include the students themselves (who receive leadership training for ministry), as well as the local congregations in the campus communities.

Not only does this model provide a more realistic way to navigate some of the financial stresses of the old system, but it also offers some potential benefits. First of all, it is an equipping ministry. Church professionals facilitate and equip God's people for ministry. The campus missionary and campus ministry coordinators listen to, train and guide students in reaching out to their friends and peers in a Christ-centered way. District-coordinated Peer Ministry Training Modules provide student leaders with an ongoing opportunity, throughout all four years of college, to grow in their study of God's Word and in sharing their faith.

Ronnie Merritt, who was one of the first campus missionaries to pioneer this model in Missouri, now serves as the chair of the Campus Ministry Action Team. According to Merritt, the new model "allows the campus centers to truly better meet the students' needs The key word in this ministry in my opinion and based upon Scriptural support is 'equipping.' Young persons empowered by the Holy Spirit 'doing' ministry that God has called them to do in a campus setting is what campus centers are all about. The church professionals facilitate and equip God's people for ministry much like the Apostle Paul did in the early church (Merritt, 1)."

Another positive aspect of Missouri's new approach to campus mission work is that it encourages local congregations to join hands with the students living in their



community. Local congregations provide a Word and Sacrament worshipping community, volunteers—and to varying degrees, depending on the circumstances—facilities and pastoral care. The message is: Ownership of campus mission belongs to everyone—students, campus missionary, campus ministry director, congregations and the district. The full-time campus missionary position affirms campus ministry as a calling, and the partnership in mission affirms the campus mission field as vital and important in terms of fulfilling our Lord's command to make disciples.

The reality is, both in Missouri and across the nation, the campus mission field is growing. Not only are there more students on our traditional four-year campuses, but community colleges are emerging as one of the most rapidly growing segments of the campus mission field. According to Missouri's campus missionary, Rev. Gene Wyssmann, there is currently some new campus mission work beginning at two or more junior or community colleges. Under Missouri's new model for campus mission work, reaching out to students at these two-year institutions has become a high priority. With the help of the campus missionary and the Campus Ministry Action Team, measures are underway to increase the number of intentional international student ministries as well.

While Missouri's new model might be considered a work in progress, it seems poised to bring about a unifying of campus mission work within the district.

The Missouri District serves as only one example of a new model for campus mission which is being developed. Other districts, circuits, congregations and existing campus ministries are also engaged in seeking new ways to effectively communicate the saving message of the Gospel in the university setting. In some instances existing ministries are being revitalized, while in other instances new ministries are beginning in places where there was previously no intentional campus outreach.

Resources and Encouragement for Strengthened and Expanded Campus Mission

MINISTRY AMONG STUDENTS, faculty, and staff at our nation's state and private colleges and

universities has been important within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod ever since campus ministry work officially began at the University of Wisconsin almost 86 years ago. The original models of ministry on campus were born out of the desire to minister to students, combined with a committed effort to utilize available resources effectively within the campus setting. The most important detail was that the church followed through in pursuing its campus ministry goals.

Today is a moment in time when the campus mission field is calling for new and revitalized models of ministry. The search for those new models is in its infancy, and is being encouraged at a national level through the Lutheran Campus Mission Association (LCMA), a mission society in partnership with LCMS World Mission.

According to its mission statement, LCMA is committed to providing "creative leadership to enable and empower campus ministers and the broader church to be effective witnesses of Christ in the academic community and the world" (LCMA, 3). As a partner in the *Ablaze!* movement, LCMA has adopted the following strategic objectives¹:

- Ignite an energized, Spirit-led, mission-focused, self-generating movement among students, as well as faculty and staff, to share Christ with 4.5 million people by 2017.
- Build a broader base of partners with a vision for campus missions.
- Increase opportunities and capabilities of partners.
- Enable, equip and link resources to campus missions partners.
- Facilitate a culture, attitude and spirit of courageous entrepreneurial leadership for the development of campus mission.
- Support the Board for World Mission's vision for campus mission work and campus mission partners (LCMA, 5).

A catalyst for campus missions (missionary), the Rev. Greg Fairrow, has been called by LCMS World Mission to help districts, congregations and other appropriate entities within the church establish new campus ministries and revitalize existing ones. LCMA provides resources like the annual Campus Mission

Confabulation, which is designed to encourage and equip campus workers, lay volunteers, and college students alike as they gather for learning, fellowship and celebration. Another LCMA-sponsored resource is the Campus Missionary Institute, which exists for current campus workers who wish to be renewed in their vision for campus mission ministry, to develop a strategic plan for an existing campus mission ministry, or to develop a vision and strategic plan to start a new or to revive a dormant campus mission ministry.

There isn't a "one size fits all answer" as to how a *missionary* campus ministry is to be formulated. There is, however, our Lord's command to "Go and make disciples of all nations" by baptizing and teaching. We also have His promise to be with us as we respond to His directive: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). As our Lord is faithful to His Word and we are faithful to Him, new models of campus mission will emerge from congregations, districts and coalitions recognizing the need and opportunity to reach out to those on campus with the love of Christ.

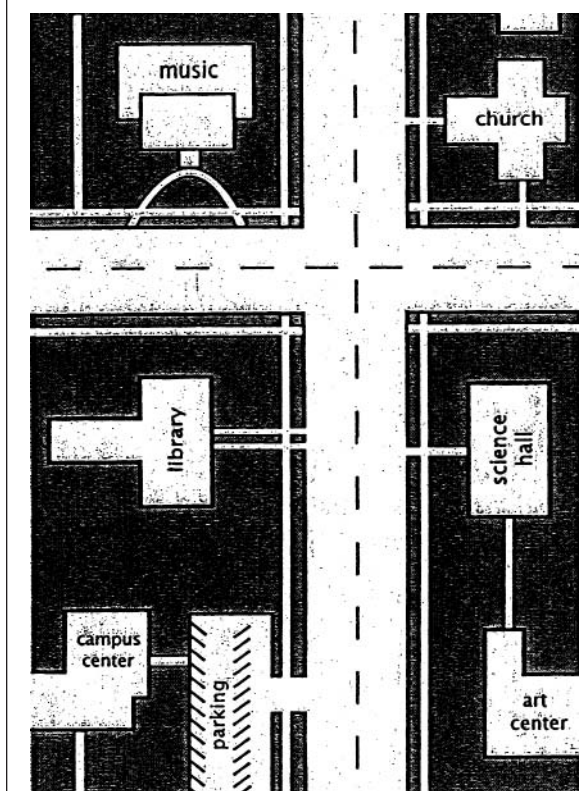
Notes

¹Definitions of terms used in the Lutheran Campus Mission Association Balanced Focus Plan: *Partners*: congregations, ministries, districts, executives and other entities who collaborate with LCMA to share the Christ with 4.5 million people by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. *Partners* shall share LCMA vision and goals. *Mission responders*: people who respond to the Gospel by involvement in God's mission by learning, praying, giving, telling, going, sending and celebrating. *LCMA people*: LCMA Board and staff, International Student Ministry representative, Lutheran Student Fellowship representative. *Leadership*: LCMA Board. *Board*: Board for World Mission, LCMS.

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