

Campus Ministry is Youth Ministry

By Ryan, Sr. Pastor, Southern California

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.” - Matthew 9:37-38

I recently had a conversation with a youth pastor who was explaining to me the challenges of leading his particular group of students. For over an hour, I listened as he griped about their complacency, their disruptive behavior, and their general lack of interest in anything spiritual. At the end of his rant he paused, and I had a moment to observe a man who was totally defeated. It was clear as he sat there that he was convinced he was pastoring the only group of young people on the planet who were beyond help. “I don’t know what else to do,” he concluded, “I’ve tried everything.” Well...not everything.

Instead of offering my struggling buddy some sound words of advice he’d probably heard many times before, I invited him to join me for an on-campus Bible Study at one of the local public high schools. As we walked through the front gates and into “the world” of our local students, I prayed the prayer that Elisha prayed for his servant when the two were surrounded by the enemy Aramean armies, “O Lord, open his eyes so he may see (2 Kings 6:17).” My hope was that this 120-second walk through the chaos of a campus lunch period would remind him of something his frustration had caused him to forget: the students aren’t the enemy; they are captives to the World and desperate for love, truth, and hope.

Campus ministry is not only helpful to those who minister to students on a regular basis; it is essential. The school campus is where students live. No matter how incredible a mid-week gathering at the church, it’s difficult for those two hours to compete with the thirty-five they spend on campus. I know youth pastors who scour their students’ Instagram, Facebook and other social media profiles for anything that will help them know where they’re coming from and what they’re dealing with. Sadly, they miss the opportunity right in front of them.

Campus ministry is more than just a good source of information; it is a good source for transformation. Being on campus with students for a single day can accomplish what decades of youth ministry within the walls of a church cannot. It moves the youth pastor out of the hospital and onto the front lines of battle. It shifts the focus from triage to tactics. The youth pastor is forced to shed his doctor coat and put on the full armor of God. This is what leaders do.

Our church has a thriving youth ministry of more than 250 students, and our youth pastor has a lot to do with that. He is a gifted teacher and a great leader. As expected, he is also one busy guy! Still, toward the beginning of last school year, we made it a priority to get him on campus at the high school across the street. Partnering with the local parachurch ministry, he built a small team of adult volunteers from the youth ministry and they showed up every week - loving kids and sharing the gospel at lunchtime. The results have been encouraging, to say the least.

Every week, new faces are seen at the lunchtime Bible Study. Most of these students are also becoming involved in our church’s youth group, hungry for more of the love and truth they get during the week at school. Kids are coming to Christ. Recently, the youth group launched a “Blue Button Revival.” Students walk around campus wearing a big blue button. When others ask about it, they respond with: “It reminds me that God loves me...and He loves you, too.” One sophomore from the group led three people to Christ - at school - the first day she wore it!

I firmly believe that any person who is called to youth ministry is also called to campus youth ministry. The call is irresistible. Do you feel it? If not, it may be due to a lack of exposure. Now is the time to find out what Christian groups are already connecting with the public school campus closest to your church. Call them up and partner with them. Believe me, they will love the help.

It may also be that you have spent some time on campus, but you felt more of a desire to run away than to dive in. In that case, confront the reasons honestly with the help of the Holy Spirit and maybe a spiritual mentor. It may be that some fears are paralyzing you, or that old insecurities are placing obstacles in your way. You might feel ill-equipped. Or, it may be that you're not called to youth ministry...at least not yet. Whatever the reasons, find out! Don't retreat back to the safety of the church and convince yourself that campus ministry isn't for every youth pastor. It simply isn't true.

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