



# The case for campus ministry



By Nathan J. Hill

At the end of my first year in college, I faced a crisis. I had been gifted with a full-ride scholarship, and the criteria to maintain it seemed trivial — a 3.0 or higher GPA. I was a stellar high school student,

graduating in the top 10 percent of my class. College would be just another notch in my belt, I figured.

On the last day of spring semester, the reality of my poor academic performance sunk in — a dismal C average. I knew I had to call my father and explain that I had failed to make the grade. I would lose my scholarship; my college career was in jeopardy.

I made my way over to Cameron Campus Ministry (CCM) to say goodbye to staff and friends. The campus minister, a United Methodist pastor who had taken an encouraging role in my life, stopped me on my way out and told me something I have never forgotten.

“Nathan, you are far more important than your grades.”

Rev. Phil Jones’ words affected me more than I realized at the time. A few weeks later, my parents helped me move back into the dorm for the summer semester, encouraging me to stick out my college career. And I found myself back at CCM, engaged in Bible study and warm community. In my remaining years of college, as I worked and struggled to pay bills, I did my best to share Rev. Phil’s message with others.

What brought me back to school was the campus ministry, a rare ecumenical space of fellowship, spiritual seeking, and opportunity in the dusty plains of southwest Oklahoma. At the time, I was close to giving up on Christianity. I had grown tired

of my small Oklahoma world. I wanted to see what else was out there. But I was drawn to the leadership possibilities at CCM, and Rev. Phil exposed me to books and angles of theology that ignited and sustained my spiritual seeking. My cynicism and faith struggle found a home with other students who shared the same questions. Most of all, I was drawn to the authentic

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faith Rev. Phil nurtured. CCM was a place where I could deal with the big questions and grow.

My campus ministry experience opened doors for other expressions of faith. During a mission trip to Mexico, I saw the way others view the Christian journey. I saw the plight of the poor. I was challenged to use my gifts of preaching, singing, and encouragement to build up others. CCM put me in touch with leaders in my community who testified to their faith by tirelessly giving support to our ministry. Finally, campus ministry helped me to hear God calling me into ministry.

Campus ministry offers one of our most important ways of developing new leaders. But it’s also the first to take a cut when financial challenges hit. Campus ministry might seem “expendable” compared to other programs, often because it

takes place far from the spotlight of local congregations. Some churches would rather support ministries closer to home. But without strong campus ministry, Disciples lose contact with thousands of young adults who get exposed to faith at a crucial time of their lives.

My friend Richard was one such student, a self-professed atheist, a perfect example of the kind of young person the church leaves behind. I invited him to our theology group, which met weekly to discuss the powerful arguments of Nietzsche, King, Borg, Romero, and Augustine. Soon, Richard began to transform our meetings. At the end of my college days, Richard told me, “I’m not sure yet if I really believe,

but because of you, I can see why faith and believing in God is important.” I was speechless. How far had Richard come right before my eyes?

My dream is that campus ministry becomes a priority in the church, to develop leaders who will carry our churches into a changing world. I hope we will build new ecumenical partnerships on every college campus in North America. I hope we will support pastors called to this ministry and give them the resources to reach out to young adults like Richard and me. ✉

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