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Greetings Friends in Home Missions:

Our Christian Reformed Campus Ministry has been blessed this year. I could report on many things that took place, but in lieu of that, I have updated my ministry calendar to show you the scope of the ministry here. Please be aware that the one thing that that calendar does not include is just the everyday, unscheduled meeting with students. In this, my final report, I am going to take leave of my usual format and tell you a few “stories.” I will also send to you some student reports on my Reformed Leadership Initiative Program.

### **The Searcher**

In the fall semester, a young Christian Reformed woman – a student who has been part of our community for a number of years brought her boy friend – a graduate student who is not a Christian – to our fellowship.

I was presenting and leading the discussion that evening. My topic was ‘*University Education: Purposeful or Purposeless.*’ After the evening was over, that young man came to me and told me that he had hesitated to come as he was not a Christian and that he had encountered some para-church people who had in his words – “turned him right off.” He shared a few things that had struck him about the evening. I wrote them down when I got home. First, he said he felt welcomed and that he enjoyed the discussion and the sense of community. And then he mentioned a few things that I had said. That as Christians we can learn important things – even things about God from non-Christians. That higher research is important and that science, politics, business and most other occupations are legitimate vocations before the eyes of God. That ‘all truth’ is God’s truth, even if the professor teaching a particular truth does not recognize and is perhaps even antagonistic to the idea of a knowable God. Anyone who reads this will recognize that these ideas are not original with me. In fact, at one point I quoted Richard Mouw who said that as Christians (I quote) “we must be diligent in our efforts to discover, honor and appreciate any of God’s gifts that might be at work in the larger human community ....”

Of course the key to all of this is discernment. An understanding of structure and direction granted by the Holy Spirit. Ryan’s reaction to this discussion was not new to me. In fact, I have had similar reactions from students who are not Christian.

What I have found in recent years is that some Christian university students, even CRC students have taken what I would call a fundamentalist approach to the secular university experience. Somewhat troublesome is how one model of discernment, can become the model of discernment for everything. For example, one night we had a talk about music. I just sat and listened as the discussion moved into a debated over what is Christian music.

There were a number of positions on this, but the one that became the most prominent took the position that it is not Christian music unless a Christian writes it. The flip side of this argument was anything written by anyone else is not right – perhaps has no truth. And if you take this line to its logical conclusion as one person expressed it - is from the devil. This explains those magazines which tell you which song is Christian or not and okay to listen to.

For the most part I think this is a relatively harmless understanding, kind of what I would have expected to find in high school, but in the absence of a deeper, more biblical tool of discernment, it has the potential to become the litmus test for what is taking place in the university classroom. It seems easier to say – and many para churches do, - that – that (whatever it is) has nothing to do with God – Christians don't get involved with politics, or you cannot be a Christian and believe that the earth is millions of years old. You need to believe this! These ministries become more about saving students from the university “do what you need to do to get your marks but don't believe it.” This is not our approach which centers around loving the university and trying to be engaged in its life.

Last year I lead a discussion on ‘Natural Revelation – Reading God's First Book’ and one of my student leaders – Julie who ran my women's Bible study along with Michelle, told me that it had been as if her spirit had been waiting to hear this approach to understanding secular thought.

The reason I am telling this little story is that I wanted you to have a little bit of insight into how post modernism provides me with some opportunities to bring the gospel. In addition, I want you to get a little feeling about some of the tools the Reformed perspective provides me with. Creational norms, common grace, the anti-thesis, more particularly the creative tension between the last two concepts.

### **Three Hooks**

One of my Emerging Leader interns this past year, Kathleen, a CRC Student from London, Ontario, had this interesting thing she did – after our worldview sessions. She would go back to her house and relate our discussion to her roomies. In any case, she told them about my understanding of the scope and breadth of the Reformed worldview and one of her Christian roomies responded saying something like – “well, I guess that lets you are off the hook. I guess if you are Reformed there is nothing off limits – nothing you cannot do.” The next time we got together, Kathleen told me of this conversation, so I said “hold on, we have a long way to go here, let's wait and see if you are off the hook or not.

At the end of the course, it is my tradition to take the students who have done this study with me up to Redeemer College for lunch with Al Wolters. (We use Al's book as the course text). When I drove her home, I asked Kathleen if she still felt that she was off the hook. I cannot remember her exact words, but it was something like – “no, if anything, I realize now that I have a responsibility to think seriously and try to come to some sort of Christian perspective about the issues I will be confronted with in my career as a medical doctor and in life in general.” Essentially she said that it will not be easy, but she will try to serve as an agent of re-creation in the area of medicine. Plantinga coined that term agent of re-creation and I find it is a very

helpful term in what I do. To end this story, after I dropped her off she invited me in and gave me a present. It was a piece of wrought iron – which she said symbolized our relationship. At first I didn't understand what she was talking about until I realized it was a large garden hook. Something which you would screw into a wall or tree and hang plants or something else from. Interestingly, it had not one, but three hooks on it. I am not sure what that means.

One final story about Kathleen. Last year, Kathleen headed up our “Baking for Plows” program. In doing that, we had occasion to go to the High School to speak to some students there. After we were done that and were leaving, we ran into a teacher I know who invited us to come into his class and asked if Kathleen would consent to be interviewed. She said “yes,” and the teacher and students asked her a number of questions about being a student at McMaster and her potential career afterward. When the teacher heard that she wanted to be a doctor he asked something along the lines of “will you be combining that with some sort of Christian activity like - medical missions?”

I could see that Kathleen hesitated for a second before she answered “no.” She said, she had tried that, that she had served in a clinic in the Nepal and elsewhere, but that that wasn't for her. She then went on and said that she felt that she would best serve here and that she didn't need to go into some type of mission field to be a Christian Doctor. She could be a Christian in a general practice in Ontario. Afterward, I asked her what she was thinking through this discussion. She told me that she felt the teacher (who was clearly mission orientated) was expecting/or wanting her to say, “yes, I am going into medical missions” and that she felt the pressure to say that because it would be the easy way out. She didn't however because she wanted to explain what she truly felt, and didn't want to succumb to the pressure she was feeling from the teacher. I had stayed silent through the whole conversation, and while I support mission activities, I was struck by how well she explained the Reformed perspective and her maturity in the dealing with the pressure to be the kind of Christian that the teacher want her to be.

In summary let me make a few observations about this ministry. Despite the large size of our ministry some years, I still don't think that this ministry is ever going to be one of those large ministries attracting a wide swath of students. I see this ministry attracting a certain type of student reflective, somewhat serious – perhaps searching- generally brainiacs. From my leadership team this year, all four students Kathleen, John, Cameal and Kristina are going on to grad school. Last year was the same. Every single student who graduated except for Julia went on to med school or some other institution of higher learning. Clearly these are gifted students who with God's grace will be a blessing to the Christian Reformed Church their other denominations and more importantly God's Kingdom, now and in the future.

Michael