

Campus Ministry Report to Classis
Winter, 2011
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God is good. It's a real privilege to wrap up a semester with a strong sense of the reality of God's presence on campus and in the campus ministry. The semester ended on a very good note with an Advent celebration with the Graduate Christian Fellowship group. Together we read some texts, sang some songs and spent time in prayer together. There were about twelve of us in attendance, a great improvement over my last two attempts to form a strong graduate Christian fellowship group. The Advent celebration followed a semester of reflection on the Letter of James. Together we had some great discussions, great meals and have begun the formation of blessed relationships. It's my hope that we've built some invaluable momentum that will propel us through to the end of the year.

The weekly Tuesday lunch and Bible study has also proved fruitful, both in terms of numbers and in the depth of the discussion and reflection. Every Tuesday the HUB space was virtually overflowing, so much so that I was forced to use a much bigger pan to make enough soup for everyone. This year we've been studying the gospel of John. We got as far as chapter 8. The discussion was rich and fun and we have learned a lot about and from each other, as well as about the person and purpose of Jesus.

On Tuesday afternoons I met with two students who were unable to attend the lunch Bible study. We would begin our discussion on the gospel of John, but the conversation would quickly turn to wrestling with general questions about faith, God, the Bible and Christianity. Later in the semester, we were joined by a fourth year Finance student from China who is interested in Christianity. The story of how we met is rather interesting (to me, at least).

Grace (the Finance student) showed up in my office one day last semester. I invited her in and she launched into a number of issues she was struggling with. She missed her parents who were back in China, she was worried that she won't be able to find a job after she graduates, and she had just developed Bell's Palsy. She told me that when she was in grade ten (in China!), her teacher had told her that if she ever had problems that she couldn't handle, she should go to the church. Now, many years later, she was facing problems that were too big for her to handle and she came looking for the church on campus. So after she had explained all of her issues she sat back and waited for me to solve them for her. After we had talked some more and she had expressed her interest in Christianity (she called it "christiany") I suggested she join us on Tuesday afternoons. She came twice before the end of the semester and just emailed me yesterday to tell me that she would continue to attend.

Wine Before Breakfast has been stable. It has been great to have such a wonderful variety of guest preachers. I'm also happy that more members of the

WBB community have taken the opportunity to reflect on the texts. My goal for WBB has all along been to have the community take more ownership by taking on more of the leadership roles. It's nice to hear "non-theological" students, i.e. engineers and biologists, reflect on the texts.

In my fall report I wrote about shaping the campus ministry around the idea of being the presence of Christ on campus, particularly in areas of service. One of the ways I do this is to preach two or three times a semester at a small Korean worship service that meets weekly on campus. Normally this group has local Korean pastors come on campus to preach. On the occasions when no Korean pastor is available, they ask me. It's been good to make myself available for this group and may open doors for other kinds of ministry in the future. A second attempt at increasing the presence of the campus ministry was to hold a holiday open house in cooperation with the other chaplains who share the HUB office space. While the turnout was great, we had hoped to attract more university staff from areas such as Student Services and the International Centre, which is directly across from our offices. Unfortunately none of them attended.

In October I had the opportunity to attend a conference on Emerging Adulthood at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. I attended the conference with Rick Mast (West End CRC) and Geoff VandeKuyte and Harry VanBelle (Inglewood CRC). The keynote speaker was Christian Smith, author of two important youth ministry books, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford Press, 2005) and *Souls in Transitions: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford Press, 2009). Smith mainly spoke about what he'd written in his book on Emerging Adults. He did speak briefly about how EAs view the church. Many do not see the church as a place of belonging. They find that belonging elsewhere. They see religious beliefs as cognitive assents rather than life drivers. Churches are elementary schools of morals. Kara Powell, another speaker at the conference described this idea as a behaviour focused gospel. The church is all about telling us what we should and shouldn't be doing, a "gospel of sin management" as Dallas Willard described it. EAs also assume that evidence and proof always trump blind faith. And if faith is blind, than not having any faith at all must be "seeing." They also view church as primarily a personal endeavour, not a social or institutional one. These are general comments, of course, and there are always exceptions. It should also be pointed out that Smith was speaking of the American situation, although I suspect that our own Canadian context isn't radically different.

Kara Powell, Executive Director of the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) and a faculty member at Fuller Theological Seminary, spoke about the problem with a gospel that's too small. A big or deep gospel is one that is grounded in grace and trust, is open to crisis and doubt (it makes room for difficult questions like does God exist? is Christianity true/the only way to God? am I living the life God wants? does God love me? etc.), and it's connected to community.

Dr. Tim Clydesdale, professor of Sociology at the College of New Jersey, and author of the book, *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens After High school*, spoke at one of the sessionals. He spoke of the Identity Lock Box, a metaphor for the way EA's put off or bracket out major identity questions for a later time, such as after they've graduated or gotten a job or become financially stable. The challenge for me, and others who work with EAs, is to get them to open up their identity lock boxes.

Finally, I attended a session led by the Presbyterian Campus Ministers at the University of Madison in Wisconsin. They discussed ten things they've learned in their ministry thus far. I'll share just a few of them:

1. Campus Ministry is changing all the time and we have to be an intentional part of that.
2. Students, like rabbits, are quick to jump away and hard to catch. They spoke of the idea of multiple doors into the campus ministry, that is, providing a variety of access points into the ministry. Programming is one access point. Preaching at this Korea worship service is another. Preaching in the Classis is yet another, although this may be more of a window than a door. Hosting an open house is another door. All of these provide ways to build relationships with people in different ways and contexts.
3. Effective administration is critical to campus ministry success.
4. Embrace Risk: Take chances, don't hold back, and go for broke, not much to lose.

Overall, the conference was great, and the four of us who attended had ample time to discuss what we were hearing. I'm grateful to Classis for the financial support that allows me to attend conferences like this one.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment of the semester was the failure of the U of A Tolkien Society to make much progress. Because it's an official student group I'm required to take a very hands-off approach. As much as I'd like to wade in and take over I must allow the student leadership in the Society to run things. This requires no small amount of patience on my part as I encourage and gently push the executive to take care of business. As a result, the doorway that is *The Last Alliance* has only opened a crack.

Looking ahead, I'm excited for this semester. As I write this we're in the middle of the first week of classes. Students are sorting out their schedules, reconnecting with friends, lining up to buy textbooks at exorbitant and unjust prices, and resettling into the rhythm of academic life, all the while trying to stay warm. We had a good turnout for our first Wine Before Breakfast this morning. Tom Oosterhuis graciously brought us the word from John 9. Yesterday's Bible study was smaller as many participants informed me that their new schedules no longer allow them to attend. Such is the way of university life. I'm working to arrange for other times to gather together.

There are two upcoming events that I'm particularly excited about. The first is International Week. Taking place in February of each year, IWeek is a celebration of the international flavour of the U of A. Each year a particular topic is looked at, discussed and wrestled with through a variety of events. The Interfaith Chaplains Association is always invited to provide a religious/spiritual take on the subject. This year's topic is migration. I'm chairing the Chaplains committee that is planning our contribution. We plan to host an interfaith panel discussion entitled: *Migration, Homecoming, and the End of Exile*. Our society is marked by a deep dislocation that touches every aspect of our lives. Migration, whether forced or chosen, is just one example of such dislocation. For many faith traditions such dislocation is understood by the powerful metaphor of exile. This interfaith panel will discuss the reality of exile and the possibility of homecoming beyond exile.

A second event is the annual Student Advisors conference in March. The Chaplains are often asked to lead a seminar or breakout session at this conference. This year my colleague Richard Reimer and I will be facilitating such an event entitled *The Way of Wisdom*. Our post-secondary institutions instill an intellectual tradition that seeks new knowledge and information. Yet, isn't education more than the sum of these parts? Wisdom weaves patterns of knowing into the academic enterprise so as to cultivate holistic visions of life. This interactive seminar will explore the essential role of wisdom in 'the uplifting of the whole people'. I'm very excited about both of these events.

In the midst of all of this the Campus Ministry Committee continues to meet to discuss the shape and future of the campus ministry. Student committee member, Alyssa Cupido, has completed her service on the committee. We're grateful for her contribution. We welcome Kara Vyn, a first year nursing student from Ontario onto the committee.

I hope that this report conveys the excitement I feel about the campus ministry. Obviously there are many things that I haven't discussed. Please don't hesitate to bring up any questions you have to me at the March Classis meeting.

I would again like to express my gratitude to Classis Alberta North for your continued support of the Campus Ministry both financially and prayerfully. God is so good.

Peace,

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