

THE THREE "C'S" OF CAMPUS MINISTRY

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Abstract

After secondary school many young people move away from home for higher education. A number of these have difficulty finding and adjusting to a new church while their parents are miles away. Absence of parental presence and guidance, and absence of mentorship from their faith communities cause these adolescents to make more decisions of their own, which are frequently influenced by their peers more than anyone else. When introduced to a new and often very secular environment, many university students find challenges in keeping their Christian identity and their religious lifestyle. Sadly, many leave home as believers, but go through an identity crisis at school and return as unbelievers at the end of their university experience. A lack of ministry presence on a secular campus makes it even harder for university students to keep their faith and practice their religious beliefs. To keep university students in the church, a nurturing environment would include the following three "C's" of campus ministry: Church, Community, and Campus.

The Reality of the Youth Exodus and Lack of Ministry Presence

The slow but steady exodus of young people out of our churches is a growing concern, and is a consequence of gaps in the ministry provided to them from childhood through adolescence and into their post-secondary educational experiences. These loopholes reveal gaps in ministering to our young people, resulting in the loss of young people from our churches. One of the most prominent gaps is the time when these youth leave home, often for the first time, to attend colleges or universities. Once these youth find themselves on secular campuses, away from their family and home church's influences, they slowly lose their spirituality in an environment that is often hostile towards Christian beliefs and standards, and contrary to their previous lifestyle at home. Many go through an identity crisis, finding themselves caught between the faith which they have been practicing for many years and a world view which is often foreign and which often contradicts their religious beliefs. As a result, many of the youth who attend secular colleges or university as believers return home as unbelievers. When youth pursue their post-secondary studies on secular campuses, their views on faith, Christianity and God often become confused because of the prevalent secularism in the college and university

setting, and because of the lack of positive choices and influences to maintain and further develop their spiritual growth.

The Three C's of Campus Ministry

To counter the negative effects of studying in a secular college or university where a young person's Christian lifestyle and religious views are often challenged, these young people must be provided with a safe and secure environment where they can be protected from the influence and the effects of secularism found on campus. To succeed in reaching and maintaining the spirituality of these post-secondary students, a support and mentoring system needs to be established and identified. Such a system will include the following *three C's*: *Church, Community, and Campus*. It is often very challenging to provide all three elements in the life of a post-secondary student.

I believe the following method is one of the most ideal ways of providing the three C's for a successful campus ministry. *First*, a student needs to be introduced to the local church, and should become an integral part of that church's worship and fellowship experience from the very start of one's college or university years. *Second*, someone from the local community, ideally a member of the church, should adopt the student as part of the

home-like community. When adopted by a church member into a community, the home-like influences of the new community fills the void the student has left in order to attend school. *Thirdly*, there must be an Adventist youth ministry presence on campus. For example, an Adventist chaplain or local church pastor or Adventist campus ministry mentors can initiate contact to serve in the role of spiritual care provider for the university students. They will need to engage in setting up occasions and opportunities on campus where the students can go and find an environment and intentional mentorship and nurturing away from their home and home church.

Tripod Campus Ministry

The successful growth of a post-secondary student's spirituality while on campus is dependent on ensuring the presence of the *three C's*. Just as a tripod can stand firm and secure only by having all three legs, a post-secondary student's spiritual growth while on a secular campus is dependent on the presence and influence of church, a home-like community, and campus ministry. It is a lack of understanding or implementation of this concept that causes us to fail in securing a continuous development of faith experiences in college and university youth. Let me illustrate this model by sharing two success stories of students who have successfully completed their university years both academically and spiritually. Their experiences will also reveal how we can continue to improve and develop Adventist campus ministries at secular post-secondary campuses.

A Foreign Student

More than four years ago I received a phone call from a young lady who introduced herself as a student from the Bahamas who was planning to come to Canada to study. Jane (not her real name) told me that she had been accepted at a nearby university and she was looking for a local church she could attend after she arrived at the university. She found my contact phone number from our church website. She was very polite and courteous and I was happy to provide all the necessary information. I asked her to contact me again when she arrived in Canada.

She did. And the first Sabbath morning she attended the church, I was happy to introduce her to

the church family. I asked them to extend not only a warm welcome, but also to provide love and care for this new university student since she was living away from home for the first time in her life. Ann (not her real name), a senior member of the church who had been recently widowed and was well known for her philanthropic work in the community made an extra effort to not only warmly welcome her, but also offered to give her a ride to the church every Sabbath morning. Soon Ann and Jane became close friends and Jane was very thankful and gracious for the kindness of this gentle and caring woman. From that point Ann became to Jane a family away from home. Every Sabbath they came to church together in time for Sabbath School. A generous church member adopted Jane, which provided a safe and secure home-like environment for her while she away from home.

Whenever Jane got sick, the church knew about it because of Ann's involvement in Jane's life—caring for her and letting the church know how they could help. In fact, one time when Jane was under some financial difficulties, it was Ann who informed the congregation, which led to church assistance. And Jane became involved by participating in Bible study groups with church members and even served as a teacher for the Junior Division. *Even though this church wasn't her mother church, she became an integral part of it.* Jane had found a church which was willing to welcome her, allow her to feel at home, and which made a conscious effort to extend love and care for her even though she was a new comer. Jane quickly found a home church away from home.

After her introduction to the church, the congregation started working towards providing a ministry presence at the university, especially for the Adventist students. Soon Jane played a major role in setting up and arranging an Adventist students' club in partnership with the pastor of the church. Every Friday afternoon, the local church pastor went to the university campus student center to conduct Bible studies and group fellowship meetings. Students from the neighboring university also joined the club. They named it "The Blue Rock Christian Fellowship" and invited to other students to join. After four years of successful university life both spiritually and academically, Jane graduated from the university, still actively participating in the church. This success

story demonstrates how to apply the *three C's* model of a tripod campus ministry to ensure that no university students are lost while away from home and their home church.

Introduction and Adaptation to a New Church

Parents can play a major part in introducing their children to a nearby church when their child leaves home for college or university. One Sabbath morning at church I noticed four unfamiliar faces. Two mothers had brought their university children to church since they had just moved to town to start their studies. It was very inspiring for the church family to see that these mothers cared enough to find a church they were hoping their children would attend. As they were being introduced to their new church family, the church was asked once again whether anyone would adopt these new students while they attended university away from their homes. One family with three little children volunteered to care for Karen (not her real name) and from that point on Karen had a home-like community away from her home. The fact that their mothers made an extra effort to seek out the local church and attend Sabbath worship services with their children allowed these students' university experiences to begin positively in a spiritual way.

Since then Karen attended the church faithfully, helped with the Junior Choir, and occasionally played the piano for the church. She also became an officer of the Blue Rock Christian Fellowship campus ministry chapter at the university. She graduated this year after four years of study and returned to her home and to her home church even more spiritually active than before.

Conclusion: What Worked Well?

Even though I shared two impressive success stories regarding Jane and Karen, there are many other stories of failure. What worked so well in these two situations that these students lived out their Christian faith and beliefs and defied the odds of a secular campus environment to change them negatively? I believe it is due to providing a complete ministry presence through inclusion of all *three C's* of campus ministry.

First, *Church*: No time was wasted before they found their new church. This is often a daunting task

considering that they have to meet new people and find new friends in an often new and foreign environment. The church's eagerness to welcome these students created a non-threatening and supportive atmosphere for them to feel at home. Even though they were away from home, the students had a home-like environment where they felt cared for and where they experienced Christian love coming from their fellow believers. They didn't have to wait before they found themselves an integral part of their new church. Both a willing and determined church and a faithfully attending and actively participating student in that church provided a recipe for spiritual success and growth in the life of the university student.

Second, *Community*: These students had a community that adopted them and included them as members of their family. This is not possible without selfless and generous church members who are willing to adopt a student into their family. Community is more than a church experience where you attend services once a week. It is continuous and intentional interest and care extended beyond the weekly worship hour to an intentional concern for the well-being of these students on a daily basis.

Third, *Campus*: Jane and Karen were both self-motivated and eager to create among themselves a safe environment where their Christian faith and their beliefs would not only be appreciated, but also be encouraged. They were not passive in seeking a spiritually friendly environment. Instead, they were intentional in creating their own spiritual environment with the support of the local church. They made positive choices that would engage them in vibrant religious expression through involvement and service. They played a major part in providing care for other students as well. They chose to play an active role instead of a passive one on their university campus.

What Must We Do Now to Ensure Successful Campus Ministry?

To ensure a successful campus ministry and to ensure the spiritual growth of students during their university years, three conditions have to be met.

First, *Student*: The student has to be self-motivated to diligently seek or create an environment that will be conducive for the student's faith journey.

They often lack spiritual resources such as parental guidance, spiritual mentorship from adults including youth ministry professionals, faith experience opportunities, etc. Add to that the often overwhelming secular influences available from the internet, media, and their peers, university students are challenged to maintain a spiritual focus. To counter this, university students have to be self-willed and self-motivated.

Second, *Spiritual Mentor*: There has to be ministry presence to university students where they can be instructed and taught of their beliefs and how to continue to live their Christian lifestyle. A spiritual mentor can be anyone who is godly and willing to care for the students by providing continuous and intentional attention, interest and affection. This spiritual mentor can be a pastor, an elder, a church leader, a church officer, or another spirit-filled church member. Merely attending church once a week may not be sufficient to effectively equip university students to overcome overwhelming influences of the secular world.

Third, *Spiritual Community*: This describes an environment and a group of people where students can worship and fellowship with others who share common goals and objectives in life.

As the silent exodus of our youth becomes a growing concern to our churches we must become more aware of potential gaps in ministering to our young people. We must realize their need for positive choices, positive influences and people in their lives who will extend to them spiritual, physical and emotional care and concern on a regular basis while they are away at school. The gaps can be closed with regular and positive mentoring at the church, in the students' daily lives by caring individuals, and on their campus through Christian fellowship groups. The spirituality of our young people can grow so that their years of study may not be ones where they become more passive in their faith, but where they may reach a stage of spirituality that actively pursues their Lord and Savior through dedication and service to Him. If the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of university students are met through a complete ministry of the *three C's*, we should not be surprised to see young people standing up for Jesus, and becoming lifelong soldiers of our King!