

LEAD THE WAY

by Steve Case

Abstract

The primary need for public campus ministry is leaders. For the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this has been the key element. Leaders direct mission, determine the emphasis, draw followers, extend their own influence, and develop stability for campus ministry. Calling leaders should take precedence over institutional approval, endorsement or funding. The call for leaders remains foundational for public campus ministry.

When it comes to campus ministry, don't expect the school to lead the way, at least not at public colleges and universities.¹ By its very nature, a public campus doesn't concern itself with either a foundational or intentional religious orientation. Yet campus ministry does exist to varying degrees on many public campuses. What makes the difference? Is it the school administration? The students? Faculty and staff? Local church involvement? The existence and persistence of parachurch ministries? A history of consistent campus ministry at a given school?

Without discounting the vital role of the Holy Spirit, consider the role of the human leader for campus ministry. While we pray for God's activity in our campus ministry, we anticipate He will work through people to carry out His will. That means a human leader will be God's instrument for leading other humans in campus ministry. The primary human need for campus ministry is leaders.²

Who Will Lead?

Promoting, pleading, voting, or even funding campus ministry won't make it happen. People are the way God reaches young adults on college campuses. Who will lead those ministries for the Seventh-day Adventist Church? The Church's primary resources for such ministry are found on Adventist campuses. But bemoaning or criticizing ministry on Adventist campuses rather than public campuses does little more than shooting ourselves in the foot.

The Adventist Church's primary resource for public college ministry presents seven models of existing Adventist campus ministry at public

colleges in North America.³ Tremendous variety can be seen in these models, including campus-based, church-based, conference-based, evangelistically oriented, fellowship focused, and even a home base with lodging for SDA students. But the common thread for each working model is a consistent leader. In fact, for each model a specific leader can be identified as the primary initiator of that ministry.

Because the Gospel Commission targets the entire world, even a modest visionary leader can see that public campus ministry stands as an ideal mission field for the Gospel—far better than most existing Adventist churches. That's where you will find significant numbers and varieties of people coming on their own volition for life training and new discoveries. Does the Gospel speak to these? Let the school's system of matriculation and graduation draw people and send them out. By reaching the campus, we will reach the world.

The Leader Directs Mission

Whether an official mission statement exists, gets posted, debated or presented for possible funding, the actual mission of a campus ministry follows the rudder of the leader. Frequently a leader's mission isn't articulated, voted or framed. But it reveals itself in the tone of the campus ministry, the types of activities that stem from it, and the people who respond to the ministry.

Some might formally revise an existing mission statement with a new reality. In other cases, official mission statements get relegated to paperwork, which rarely counts when it comes to actual ministry. But the leader's official or unofficial mission permeates the campus ministry. After all,

leadership is about influencing people, not managing a process or a program.⁴ If the leader truly is leading, then people are following. If not, then the “leader” merely holds a title.

In some situations a leader might lack clarity in the mission of the campus ministry, other missions might compete or people might not buy into the mission. A donor’s mission might not match the leader’s. Such scenarios usually result in status quo ministry at best and internal conflict at worst. But when a leader is clear and consistent in mission, others follow, and donors buy into the mission. The exponential impact indicates that the supernatural is noticeably at work.

The Leader Determines Emphasis

While a mission provides a grand purpose, the various steps and processes for implementing the mission must be fleshed out for it to become real. This reveals what emphases a campus ministry will have. The leader plays the crucial role. Will the campus ministry give greater emphasis to gathering students or sending them? Or will these be equal? Will the arena of faith be more about questions or answers; discussion or proclamation? Will things be campus-based or church-based? Is the target group fellow Adventists, other Christians, “regular people,” or antagonists? How will priorities show when it comes to worship, evangelism, faith development, fellowship, service, or merely socializing?

Whether the emphasis comes from the mission or vice versa, the leader determines the emphasis simply by putting forth ideas and plans, or by endorsing what others offer for the campus ministry. It may seem relatively small at times, but the leader’s essence shapes everything the leader does.⁵ Newcomers must follow the leader or convince the leader to buy into different ideas. Otherwise they, and their ideas, will need to find a place for expression or emphasis elsewhere.

For example, if the leader emphasizes gathering for fellowship, the word on the street as well as official information will communicate “Come to the Christian hang out,” rather than “Share your faith in the public square.” If the leader emphasizes integration into a local church, don’t expect a majority of the gatherings to take place on campus. If service receives the emphasis, be prepared to get

dirty rather than argue about correct doctrine. While individuals might have their own preferences, the leader initiates the campus ministry emphasis.⁶

The Leader Draws Followers

Followers empower a leader. And the greater the number or intensity of the followers, the greater the influence of the leader. With the annual cycle of campus ministry, those who begin in leadership already have a head start. The mission and emphasis a leader presents at the start of a school year will draw those who support or have an interest in those elements, which further increases the significance of the leader. A leader attracts those who are like the leader.⁷

At campuses where a weak or ineffective leader offers little vision, purpose, or clarity about the campus ministry, students will follow leaders of other entities. Without the necessary leader in a ministry, followers simply go elsewhere. Conversely, a strong leader for a campus ministry will draw more followers.

Consider a leader who champions debates on current issues. Those who enjoy participating or observing debates will find themselves drawn and involved. Those without an interest in spiritual topics might still participate just because of the thrill of clashing ideas or to sharpen their own skills. Conversely, those looking for an opportunity to kick back and relax or to meet people in a mingling atmosphere of warmth and acceptance will go to another place where somebody leads and ensures that type of environment.

The Leader Extends Influence

Because a leader draws followers, the influence of that leader extends farther because, like concentric rings emanating from a pebble thrown in a lake, followers influence those beyond the initial impact of the leader. A leader who emphasizes Sabbath commitment and observance will equip followers with reasons and experiences for it. When those followers come in contact with others outside of the leader’s sphere, the followers will utilize what they have received from the leader. In this way, the leader’s influence extends beyond what the leader alone can do.

This may repel or draw others to the original leader. If it repels others, the follower can easily return to the leader for more input. If it draws others, the follower will take new followers to the leader. Like another stone thrown into the water, the ripples move out yet again.

If a leader fails to make an impact, the lack of influence being extended results in the campus ministry making little impact and possibly resorting to merely a campus club. When you find a vibrant campus ministry, you'll see a leader whose influence gets extended by the followers.

The Leader Develops Stability

A new campus ministry carries out the vision of the initial leader. When new leaders replace departed ones, they often provide their own stamp on ministry. While change can spice up a lethargic ministry, it can easily destabilize an active one. People refer to "grooming new leaders" as part of the job description for existing leaders, especially when they expect or anticipate a change of leadership.

When it comes to campus ministry, the transitory nature of students increases the likelihood of short-term and often unstable ministries. Students in official leadership roles may serve for only a year or two. A theoretical model recruits a college freshman for involvement the first year, assisting leadership the second year, and possibly becoming the leader the third or fourth year. But what about students who change schools or drop out? What about those who turn their focus towards their major, graduate school, or significant relationships? And then there are unexpected surprises, such as possibly finding a life partner, family distress, financial considerations, and even loss of faith.

A long-term leader develops stability for a campus ministry. This is more apt to occur when the leader is not a fulltime student or possibly not even a student at all. A church member in the community, a professor on campus, or a hired campus ministry chaplain can provide continuity so that the ministry builds on past experiences rather than starting new each year. Like a steady motor that keeps the boat moving regardless of how strong or weak a short-term paddler might be, the on-going leader's

stability moves the ministry farther and more consistently than the fluctuating intensity of merry-go-round leadership.

Leading the Way in Campus Ministry

Instead of begging for institutional support or pleading for budgets, look to the supernatural God to work through human leaders for campus ministry. That's where significant ministry and the Gospel-in-action take place. Because "support" is usually a follower rather than leader, those who wait for it will never lead. If we look to institutions or donors to make this happen, we'll brag when Adventist campus ministry presence increases from its current 1 ½ percent to a mere two percent,⁸ or we'll retreat and create reports to maintain funding one more year.

The better option is to rely on God to work through leaders of campus ministry. Place the call, like the one sent to Isaiah, "I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here I am. Send me!'"⁹ Jesus used the same model to start His Church—a handful of leaders and the power of the Spirit. That is how to "lead the way" when it comes to campus ministry.

Who will respond to this call?

Endnotes

¹On a Christian campus, typically you can find hired, elected, and even volunteer leaders for ministry as an integral part of the school and its mission.

²The initial 180 symposium in 2008 focused on retaining youth and young adults in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. "Leadership" emerged as one of the five themes for that topic, too. Dudley, Roger with Allan Walshe. *Ministering with Millennials*. Lincoln, NE: *AdventSource*. 2009, 4.

³King, Kirk and Ron Pickell. *The Word on Campus*. Lincoln, NE: *AdventSource*, 2008, 254-330.

⁴Maxwell, John C. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998, 14.

⁵Cloud, Henry. *9 Things a Leader Must Do*. Franklin, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2006, 18.

⁶Maxwell, John C. *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999, 70.

⁷Maxwell. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. 97.

⁸According to CollegeBoard, there are currently 3,856 colleges in the United States (Google search for "number of colleges in the United States" made 24 Sept. 2009. The first choice was http://collegesearch.collegeboard.com/search/adv_typeofschool.jsp?s_kwid=list%20of%20colleges!2621493404). Adventists report just over 60 groups that have registered with "Adventist Campus Ministries." (see King and Pickell. 254)

⁹Isaiah 6:8 (NIV).