

# JUMP ON BOARD

by Steve Case

## Coming Together

Halfway through the 180° Symposium, invited attendees went into two days of closed door sessions to brainstorm, report, evaluate and revise recommendations for secular campus ministry. For the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Andrews University seemed the appropriate location for this think tank. The Center for Youth Evangelism initiated the 180° Symposium and chose secular campus ministry as the topic for the 2009 gathering. Because this is an Adventist issue and concern, it would need to take place among Adventists. While Andrews University is a General Conference institution, for this symposium North America had a very strong representation, with Europe adding several attendees. Location and funding influenced participation, as did interest and availability. Not surprisingly, most could also speak from personal involvement in secular campus ministry.

Institutional and personal support came in the form of funding and visitation from the following:

Ron Whitehead, Center for Youth Evangelism

Niels-Erik Andreasen, Andrews University

Denis Fortin, SDA Theological Seminary

Rodney Grove, Lake Union Conference

Jimmy Phillips, Adventist Review

Japhet De Oliveira from the Center for Youth Evangelism coordinated the entire 180° Symposium. Chris Blake from Union College led the two-day, closed session for invited attendees.

## The Task and the Process

The dialogue itself showed a much broader arena than anyone present had worked in prior to the 180° Symposium. Of course some had more exposure than others, but everyone felt the stretch of ideas that seemed deeper or wider, innovative or passé, insightful or worthless, promising or frustrating.

Based on the papers discussed during the first half of the 180° Symposium, the group divided into four sub-groups to give special attention to the following four categories:

1. College and University campus ministry
2. High School and Elementary campus ministry
3. Networking (who? where? when? how?)
4. Resources (materials, money, personnel)

Each sub-group wrestled with identifying where the Adventist Church currently finds itself. Next came brainstorming regarding where we need to go and how to get there. Periodically the sub-groups reported to the large group, received feedback, and returned to their sub-groups to make revisions.

A clear goal for the conclusion of the two-day session was a set of recommendations for secular campus ministry for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Byproducts included the networking that took place during the 180° Symposium, encouragement and sharing of ideas, listening to stories of isolation and struggle, and hope from a small but significant collection of inspiring breakthroughs.

As could be expected for a task of this scope, sometimes things bogged down while at other times enthusiasm surged through the group. Debate and direction of discussions involved a clash and convergence of ideas and personalities. A moment of mounting frustration would get swallowed by a sense of spiritual infusion and hope. Other adjectives for this intensive include: difficult, multi-faceted, and worthwhile.

## Reports

1. *College & University campus ministry* – The statistics alone demand a thoughtful response and a focus for ministry. Even though some statistics are suspect or limited to a small population, the sense that a clear majority of Adventist students attend

colleges and universities outside the Adventist education system is the norm, and few seem to do anything about it. Various reports indicate 60-80 percent of Adventist students attend non-Adventist colleges and universities. In countries with no SDA college, 100 percent of the Adventists who attends college will be attending a non-Adventist school. The exception would be those who travel abroad to enroll at an Adventist school outside of their own country.

An equally startling statistic presents the evangelistic challenge and opportunity of colleges and universities. In North America, approximately 19,000,000 students attend these schools. This large number equals the total population of the five largest cities in North America—New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Toronto. Imagine ignoring these five cities in light of the Gospel Commission to take the Gospel to the whole world. Unthinkable!

The time has come to acknowledge and respond to the reality of SDA students attending non-Adventist colleges and universities. Whether it's a lack of programs offered at SDA schools or a debate about quality education and school status, or the issue of cost or geographical preference, it's time to set aside the defensiveness of supporting Adventist schools while ignoring students at other schools. With only 14 SDA colleges and universities among 4300 other private and public colleges and universities in North America alone, we must think more broadly and with greater inclusion. The shameful indictment can be seen repeatedly at SDA Churches located directly across the street from a large, non-Adventist college or university, with virtually no ministry to that campus. Unbelievable! Unconscionable! If SDA Churches have a mandate to reach their community for Christ, then those in prime locations for campus ministry clearly should make that their priority and minister accordingly.

Higher education provides a fertile environment for people in transition. Some experience a new quest for knowledge and need forums for spiritual discussions to also progress. These students are the church right now. Let's not ignore them. Because of the transitions, where will community develop? Commitment at such volatile times may be absent or short-lived. Does that mean we should abandon the task or does that make our presence even more

vital? Congregations and individuals within a congregation can apply their spiritual giftedness to reach college students. At the same time, college students can be recruited to infuse local congregations with life and additional service. The Churches of Refuge model offers an identification of college student-friendly congregations.

2. *High School and Elementary campus ministry* – For individuals and families, which institution becomes the hub of community life—the church or the school? For those involved at an Adventist school, the two often function together. But for the many who don't attend an Adventist school, church and school function in separate worlds. That can change!

Start with impacting your own child and that child's circle of friends to be a positive influence in the community. Volunteer at your child's school. Do this simply to help rather than to "evangelize." Simply be a caring adult who wants to help. This might involve menial tasks like clean up or food preparation or decorating. It could include tutoring, playground supervision, office projects, or campus beautification. Work with your church and local schools to come up with a list of what parents and other adults can and cannot do. Then volunteer accordingly.

Consider adopting a school in your community. Start with adopting those where students from your church attend. These are "your kids." Then expand the term to include the other students as "your kids" as well. For many families, the school is the hub of community life. Instead of waiting for them to possibly attend your church, go to their world and get involved at the local high school or elementary school. By adopting them, they have become your mission field. The same thing can and should be done if your church has an Adventist school in the community—adopt it!

Some see this as a "sowing" campaign rather than as a "reaping" campaign. In evangelistic terms, this might be accurate. But it also provides current retention for Adventist young people attending public schools. Some have already found reclamation by being on the public school campus. Evidently being present has both current and future evangelistic results, with a service orientation rather than an evangelistic one.

Some campuses are open to an overtly religious club that your adopted students could galvanize. Consider linking with other ministries in the community or initiate ministries and invite others to join. Pathfinders might be a more neutral gathering than Sabbath School. Your church's ministry might occur at the church facility as well as at the school or other places in the community.

With such a local emphasis for ministry, would it be helpful for high school and elementary ministry to be part of ACF (Adventist Christian Fellowship) with its college and university target group? This question remains unanswered. College students could be part of a local church's adoption of local elementary and high schools. Perhaps the recent collegiate ministry publication *Word on Campus* needs a spin off for high school or elementary school ministry. Without question, children and youth need to be filled with God when they are young, not merely when they head off to college. Adventist colleges could get involved earlier in the recruitment stages by providing ministry events like "Standout" in conjunction with existing high school campus ministry programs.

While the initial ministry might be to Adventist students on a public school campus, the real target should enlarge to include the entire campus. The school provides a microcosm for the community. What an ideal place for a congregation to be!

3. *Networking (who? where? when? how?) and Resources* (materials, money, personnel) became difficult to differentiate; so they will be reported as one group. The strongest item for both networking and resources came in the form of a person who would pull all of this together. This might necessitate a superman or superwoman with magnificent spiritual gifts, commitment, experience, availability, charisma, organizational skills, enthusiasm, and a low-budget salary!

With existing campus ministry personnel and programs still at the fledgling stage, it becomes difficult to imagine providing the additional resources to network with others, especially on a national and even international arena. Some can report occasional and sporadic points of contact or interactions between Facebook friends. But the plethora of blips made possible through technology doesn't result in quantity equaling quality. The need

to sift through data and make good connections screams for attention and would provide a starting point for a campus ministry point person to set priorities for the Adventist Church.

It didn't take long to recognize the mammoth size of this job. Taskforce additions seemed like an economical means to tap into the creative and energetic pool of campus ministry volunteers already involved. This could provide an annual thrust of new vitality to resource a growing network.

Debate ensued regarding where to locate this position/person. No particular existing campus ministry seemed to be the catch-all or operational center for such a broad service. Two agencies/institutions emerged. The General Conference (GC) and the Center for Youth Evangelism (CYE) at Andrews University.

The GC seemed like a logical spot due to its organizational hub for the SDA Church and typically has a more global perspective than any given local institution. But with little representation from the GC at the symposium, current buy-in wasn't available. However, those present developed tips and strategies to include the GC in the recommendations from the 180° Symposium. The quarterly publication *Dialogue* comes from the AMiCUS branch of the General Conference Education Department. A campus ministry would need to include youth ministry, education, and potentially evangelism in new forms.

The CYE also seemed like a logical spot, especially since it hosted the 180° Symposium. With this point of reference, along with the start-up of Churches of Refuge, linking a new campus ministry position might be good based on current synergy.

Those in attendance spoke in favor of both the GC and the CYE, although some certainly leaned much more in favor of one or the other. The deciding factor might not be based on what is ideal but on who funds the position. That might also determine accountability and obvious influence.

Funding seemed to be the golden egg those present wanted, but nobody seemed to have. Fund raising from an institutional perspective involves taking data, voted recommendations, endorsements, and some type of lobbyist to the powers that be—

administrators. What arguments or carrots could be presented to these leaders? Potential future and current evangelistic budgets seemed like reasonable sources to those present. Fund raising outside of the institution gained little ground since nobody offered the names of any significant donors in this arena.

Website renovation and appeal seems like a “must” these days. Facebook gets the current nod for networking via the internet. Cell phones have their place as well.

In addition to the primary importance of a person, a large-scale event for students to attend could provide grassroots networking and future resources. But that would probably begin on a small scale with existing ministries and then it could grow.

## Recommendations

The 180° Symposium in October, 2009 provided a necessary exposure and increased awareness to secular campus ministry. Individuals and small but significant ministries operate under the power of the Spirit. The coming together revealed success as well as tremendous need. Placing all the hopes and expectations onto one person in a new role serves as the visible “next step” for recognition, networking, and moving forward. It will take visionaries to take this step. If you are one, paint the picture and display it!

The potential paradigm shift is not based on a single miracle worker. It comes from labels, and changing existing ones. For years we have used the adjectives “secular” and “Adventist” when it comes to describing campus ministry. The 180° Symposium started with the term “secular campus ministry.” Occasionally discussion differentiated between “Adventist campus ministry” that seems challenged and yet robust in comparison to “secular campus ministry.”

Here’s the recommendation: drop the adjectives! Let’s refer to this as simply “campus ministry.” Instead of supporting one or the other, let’s support both as one. Let’s enlarge the campus ministry at Adventist schools to include those on other campuses as well. Let’s link the campus ministry at non-Adventist schools (public and private) with the campus ministry at Adventist schools and churches. Both would be stretched. Both would benefit—in the

short term and in the long term. Let’s begin to speak with one voice.

Education continues to be fundamental for our society. Instead of segregating ministry based on systems of education, let’s change our campus ministry models to target not only our campus, but others nearby. Schools already do this with athletics, music, debate, science, and more. Ministry should certainly include a very local application, but it must reach beyond as well. Otherwise, we’ll lose our connection to our church or the world we seek to connect to God.

The matriculation process of schools supplies a steady supply of newcomers with new life, new ideas, new people! And they continue to graduate their students and send them out all over the world. Contrast that with joining an institutional ghetto (church or school) in which people stagnate and rarely go outside of their protective bubble. Instead of “losing students each year,” you automatically get to send them out annually. You have a guaranteed flow instead of a standstill.

Instead of ignoring or wistfully holding on during the school years, let’s be intentional in going to where people are—those who have an affiliation with the church and those who don’t. The call of Christ is to not only give our lives to Him, but for others, too.

When we reach the campus, we will reach the world.