



reaching the collegiate generation

Three Principles for
Effective College Ministry

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contents

Introduction.....	1
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Campus-Based.....	5
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An effective college ministry meets students where they're at – literally.

Scripture-Centered.....	13
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An effective college ministry knows that relevance is dwelling deep, not scratching the surface.

Part Three: Relationship-Driven.....	19
--------------------------------------	----

An effective college ministry prioritizes people before programs.

Conclusion.....	23
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INTRODUCTION

In 1636, the Great and General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony founded Harvard College, the oldest institution of higher learning in what became the United States. The college was named after its benefactor, John Harvard, a young Puritan minister, and was established to train spiritual leaders for the church. A promotional brochure from 1643 described the college's purpose, "To advance Learning and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches."¹ Furthermore, in 1650, the charter creating the corporation of Harvard College read:

"WHEREAS, through the good hand of God, many well devoted persons have been, and daily are moved, and stirred up, to give and bestow, sundry gifts, legacies, lands, and revenues for the advancement of all good literature, arts, and sciences in Harvard College, in Cambridge in the County of Middlesex, and to the maintenance of the President and Fellows, and for all accommodations of buildings, and all other necessary provisions, that may conduce to the education of the English and Indian youth of this country, in knowledge and godliness."²

Nevertheless, in 1708, John Leverett became the first Harvard College president who was not also a minister. This initiated the slow process of higher education becoming increasingly intellectually independent from the church.³

- The Need Today -

Since there was no need for local churches to engage colleges historically, congregations often have no idea how to reach out to college students to this day. Benson Hines, former college pastor and author of *Reaching the Campus Tribes*, calls this "the collegiate attention gap." He says, "The most obvious problem for the field of college ministry is simply the widespread *absence* of college ministry practice, investment, or attention."⁴ Indeed, while churches pour massive resources into children, youth, and adult ministries, college ministries – if they even exist – lack necessary finances and staff to operate effectively. Consequently, this is having an incredibly detrimental effect on the spiritual health of university students. A 2008 study found that more than two-thirds of churchgoing young adults in the United States drop out of church between the ages of 18 and 22.⁵ Given this evidence, why aren't churches investing in the collegiate generation?

In an interview with *Ministry Today* magazine, Louie Giglio, college pastor and founder of the Passion Conferences, says that there really isn't a norm for collegiate ministry. "[College] campuses are like little mini-cities...and there is all different kinds of people on all different kinds of campuses." One reason why churches don't invest in college ministry is because of their diversity. Not all college students are alike; each campus has its own culture. An event or program that flops on one college campus could take off on another. Furthermore, Giglio says that many churches intentionally don't focus on college students, because they have a misconception that "they're transient; they're flighty; they're migratory...they don't tithe; they're not committed; they don't really plug in and serve; and you just can't really count on them."⁶ In fact, these characteristics are no misconception. College students are very transitory, and they generally do not have much money or significant time to offer a ministry or

church. The mistake is viewing all of these characteristics as negative. Giglio says that ministers should invest in college students, because when they graduate they can spread the gospel all around the world in countless career areas. Nevertheless, these unique and negatively perceived traits of college students translate into ambivalence from local churches that don't see the fruit they could bear for the Kingdom.

In response to churches refusing to engage college campuses, collegiate parachurch organizations have sprung up over the last 60 years. Parachurch organizations operate outside of local churches, and self-funded volunteers typically staff individual campus chapters. These ministries include InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (founded in 1941), Campus Crusade for Christ (founded in 1951), Chi Alpha Campus Ministries (founded in 1951), The Navigators Collegiate Ministry (founded in 1951) and numerous others. I will discuss these ministries in greater length in the next section.

- Three Principles for Effective College Ministry -

Although no norms exist in collegiate ministry, as Giglio says, there are strategies that can apply universally no matter which college campus a church wants to reach with the message of Christ. The following three principles are essential to having a truly effective college ministry:

1. Campus-Based: An effective college ministry meets students where they're at – literally.
2. Scripture-Centered: An effective college ministry knows that relevance is dwelling deep, not scratching the surface.
3. Relationship-Driven: An effective college ministry prioritizes people before programs.

What this paper is not:

- A detailed history of the church's effect on higher education

- A step-by-step description of how to start a collegiate ministry
- A perspective on college ministries around the world
- A call for churches to start reaching out to college students

This is not a historical research paper, a college ministry leadership manual, an international perspective, or a persuasive piece on why every church should start a collegiate ministry. Although these might be noble endeavors to tackle, this paper covers none of the aforementioned topics.

Furthermore, regarding scope, this paper will not examine mainline campus ministry – such as the United Methodist or Catholic campus ministries. Despite these organizations' long history in campus ministry, this paper will only address non-mainline denominational ministries.

What this paper is:

- An analysis of three foundational principles that universally apply to college ministry

Compared to other ministry areas, college ministry literature is sparse. To this day, very few books and articles have been written addressing what makes an effective college ministry. In fact, churches are still so in the dark about college ministry that articles still say things like this: "If you like to 'hang out,' then you're a great candidate to lead college students!"⁷ The author is obviously emphasizing the importance of community in campus ministry, but reaching to the collegiate generation is so much more intricate, and intense, than simply "hanging out."

That is what this paper is all about – exploring universal principles of effective college ministry so that we don't have to keep flailing around in the dark. This paper is an in-depth analysis of the three most essential strategies, in my view, to most effectively reach the United States' collegiate generation with the message of Jesus Christ.

campUS-BASED

An effective college
ministry meets students
where they're at —
literally.

In 2004, Pastor John McGowan became director of The Gathering, the college ministry of McLean Bible Church, a more than 10,000-member church located in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. The church already had a thriving young adult ministry, called Frontline, but McGowan wanted to target college students specifically. He began hosting weekly worship services at McLean Bible Church's auditorium and more than 500 people were showing up each week. However, McGowan wasn't sure if these were college students or just young adults from Frontline enjoying another service. So, in the spring, he surveyed the congregation and found that out of the more than 500 of The Gathering's attendees, only 30 were college students. A few weeks later, McGowan shut down The Gathering and went back to the drawing board. The Washington, D.C. area has more than 10 colleges and universities, but The Gathering wasn't drawing students out to McLean Bible Church's campus in the suburbs. McGowan quickly realized that he would have to change his strategy if he was going to reach Washington, D.C., college students with the message of Jesus Christ. Over the next four years, his

new approach illustrates a key component to effective college ministry, as we will address later in this section.

Churches and organizations have many approaches to reaching college students with the gospel. But for the purpose of this paper, I will break down collegiate ministries into one of three categories – the Church Model, Parachurch Model, and Church-On-Campus model. All of these models can be effective, but there is one that is, in my view, most effective at reaching college students with the message of Christ.

Church Model

The Church Model of collegiate ministry occurs when a local church hosts worship services, Bible studies, or other activities for college students in their building. The leadership and all activities are based out of the main church building.

The Gathering, before McGowan changed his ministry strategy, is an example of the Church Model. Some of these ministries follow a similar philosophy to a youth ministry model, where churches try to use events and programs to attract college students to their building. Others are even simpler. Many churches, because they don't know what to do with college students, have small Bible studies or social events for youth who graduate high school. Youth leaders even staff some of these programs.

Overall, the Church Model has proven generally ineffective at truly evangelizing college students – mostly because it's extremely difficult to draw students off of their campus home. This is true for big and small churches alike. College pastor Bowden McElroy recently posted the following statement on SBC Impact, a Southern Baptist Convention blog:

"Who in our area does a good job of reaching college-aged young adults? Specifically, what church has an effective church-based (as opposed to campus-based) ministry that I can talk to? I thought it was a simple question; one I've been asking everyone in ministry in the Tulsa, OK area...No one has a really good answer for me. I was pointed toward a couple of mega churches with large

college ministries; but none of them were particularly evangelistic in their outreach (in other words, they appear to be attracting young Christians from their church and others). And, when you look at their collegiate ministry in terms of percentage of total membership, they're not doing any better than my church is at reaching college students."⁸

Students' lives revolve around the college campus. So getting college students off campus is a hurdle that Church Model ministries are often unable to clear. In fact, in my view, a college ministry is not most effectively reaching students if it requires them to attend worship services and events at a church building away from campus.

Key Advantage

- Benefit from local church resources, including staff, volunteers, media and sound equipment, graphics, space, and more

Key Disadvantage

- Difficult to attract unchurched college students on surrounding campuses to a local church building

- Parachurch Model -

As mentioned in the introduction, a variety of collegiate parachurch organizations were established to fill the void of local churches not meeting students where they're at. Parachurch organizations operate independently of local churches – although some are founded by denominations. In these ministries, campus pastors are viewed like missionaries and are required to raise financial support to pay for their living expenses.

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the first collegiate parachurch organization in the United States, began in 1877 with a group of Christian students meeting together in

England at the University of Cambridge. As similar groups sprung up on other campuses, British InterVarsity was born. This organic student movement was then brought to Canada in 1928 and later to the University of Michigan in the United States in May 1941.⁹ Other ministries like Campus Crusade for Christ, Chi Alpha Campus Ministries, The Navigators Collegiate Ministry, and more, sprung up later to continue to fill the void left by local churches' inaction on college campuses. Chuck Bomar, founder of CollegeLeader and former college pastor at Cornerstone Simi Valley Church, says in an article on YouthMinistry.com:

"Because the church has historically done little to reach out to and disciple college students, parachurch organizations have stepped up in our place. So, to those of you that wouldn't settle for the detachment of college-age people and faithfully walk with them on campuses, I say 'thank you.'

Nevertheless, many in the local church, including Bomar, express concerns about the central role parachurch groups are playing in the lives of college students. He continues:

"[With] that said, I have some concerns with the role parachurch organizations have had to play in the lives of college students. First, when Jesus left the earth, He didn't leave Christian colleges or parachurch organizations to care for and disciple people. He left the Church. I personally think there's a place for parachurch organizations (I founded one), but these are supposed to support local churches in their life long discipleship of people. Campus ministers have had to temporarily fill in, but they can't fulfill the obligation."

Indeed, many assert that parachurch movement should fade out as local churches step in to fulfill their Biblical responsibilities.

However, setting aside the theological questions about parachurch organizations, what about practical issues? Organizations like InterVarsity, Campus Crusade, and Chi Alpha are growing rapidly nationwide.¹⁰ These parachurch groups have effectively reached college students where they're at – on campus. Instead of requiring students to travel off campus in the Church Model, the Parachurch Model

brings the church – or at least the gospel – directly to them. However, the number one practical issue for parachurch organizations is resources. Author and former college pastor Benson Hines says:

"Our present campus-based [parachurch] ministries are certainly not able to meet the full discipleship needs of the millions of college students in the United States...Both denominational and independent parachurch college ministries often struggle to receive investment or even notice from college students, parents, potential supporters, potential volunteers, and Christian leaders.

Without the support of a congregation, parachurch ministries have to operate on tight budgets. Campus ministers are required to raise their own financial support, and the ministries themselves are highly reliant upon the meager resources (sound equipment, promotional materials, etc.) provided by colleges and universities. This means parachurch campus ministers not only have to invest time in running their ministry, but also in raising and sustaining financial support. In addition, one university administration decision that limits club funding can cripple a parachurch ministry. The Parachurch Model is successful and effective due to its campus-based approach. However, it is not the *most* effective because of resource limitations that effect staff, promotion, discipleship, programs, and more.

Key Advantage

- Successfully utilize a campus-based approach to reach college students with the gospel where they're at – on campus

Key Disadvantage

- Problematic to overcome extremely limited resources, including staff, promotional materials, media equipment, and more

- Church-On-Campus Model -

So we've established that the Church Model provides college ministries with significant resources but lack of access to students, while the Parachurch Model successfully brings the gospel to the campus but has extremely limited resources with which to operate most effectively. Therefore, with these two models in existence nationwide, here is the situation: Large local churches sit nearby college campuses, which they refuse to engage, while parachurch organizations – unaffiliated with the churches nearby – are overwhelmed with lack of staff and resources.

That sounds ridiculous, right? Well, this actually happens – even within denominations. For example, Chi Alpha Campus Ministries (founded by the Assemblies of God) has local chapters on four college campuses in Washington, D.C. These ministries are parachurch chapters, with ministers raising their own support and relying heavily on university resources. However, Washington, D.C., is home to six Assemblies of God churches, including National Community Church, which has more than 1,500 attendees who are predominantly young adults.¹¹ These churches are unaffiliated with the Chi Alpha ministries nearby. This is sadly a common occurrence. Often, thriving churches, filled with resources and technology, are blocks away from college campuses where parachurch ministries are barely getting by with cheap promotional flyers and decades-old sound systems.

So what's the solution to this disconnect? In 1988, John Brittain, chaplain at the University of Evansville, Indiana, wrote a forward-looking article for *The Christian Century* magazine called "Revitalizing College Ministry: The 'Church-on-Campus' Model." In the article, he says that since parachurch ministries developed on campuses nationwide in the 1940s and 1950s, local churches have actively sought to distance themselves from these campus-based groups:

"Very often, what the local church wants most of all is for the campus ministry to stay out of its way. Local churches encourage campus ministries to adopt policies of noncompetition -with local churches: no Sunday activities, no

traditional Bible studies, [and] no educational enterprises. Campus ministers are to point their students to the local church for those. The campus ministry ends up being noncompetitive by being totally other, so that a divorce occurs between the campus ministry and the local church."

Brittain's solution to the problem is simple: the Church-On-Campus Model. He says that with the growth of higher education, local churches need to stop turning a blind eye to these colleges and universities and start investing in campus ministry:

"A wide spectrum of people especially those of typical college-age are turning increasingly to higher education both to meet their educational and developmental needs and to aid them in times of transition...Today the changing population of students calls for a conscious shift to the church-on-campus model."¹²

Worship services, Bible studies, outreach opportunities, and other church-related activities should start happening on campus, Brittain says:

"We need to take the general ministry of the church, the ministry of Word and sacrament, to campuses where it is absent and where a high percentage of the students will not seek it out but may be receptive to it in their midst. This way of doing college and university ministry will require rethinking not only by campus ministers and their boards, but by local congregations and judicatories, all of which need to understand that the church on campus is an extension of – not an annoyance to or a competitor with – the local church."¹³

This idea is revolutionary, especially for its time. Brittain discovered through his experience on campus that many students will not seek out a local church off campus. However, they might be open to a church if it met them where they're at.

Even today, local churches remain separated from parachurch groups and are hesitant to spend resources on trying to reach the collegiate generation in their area. But there have been some success stories. In 2005, Main Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, KY, collaborated with the Northern Kentucky University Baptist Student Union to create a new ministry called "Vintage," which offers Bible studies for college

students taught by church staff. Shane Garrison, associate pastor at Main Street Baptist Church, called the new partnership "a radical success." Carrie Baker, the student intern who developed the program, said:

"There are 14,000 students on campus and a significant amount don't know Christ. The best way to reach the students is for the church to come to the campus, and ultimately, that is what I am creating, avenues for the church to connect to the campus."¹⁴

The Church-On-Campus Model combines the staff and resources of the Church Model with the on-campus approach of the Parachurch Model. This is the most effective way churches can spread the message of Christ to college students.

For one final example, let's return to The Gathering and Pastor John McGowan's predicament with how to effectively engage college students with a church-based ministry. McGowan realized that in order to effectively share the message of Christ to college students, he would have to bring the church to the students on campus. So, in January 2005, The Gathering launched its first ministry on the campus of American University in Washington, D.C. – complete with a weekly worship service and student-led ministry teams. In four years, The Gathering is now established on four college campuses in the Washington, D.C., metro area, and the ministry has returned to its 500-attendee count – but this time, they're all college students. By combining the Church Model's resources and the Parachurch Model's campus-based approach, The Gathering is *most* effectively reaching the collegiate generation in Washington, D.C.

SCRIPTURE-CENTERED

An effective college ministry knows that relevance is dwelling deep, not scratching the surface.

In their book called *Essential Church?*, pastors and church consultants Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer, III, discuss how local churches can become essential to the lives of young people. One of their main points in the book – in fact, they devote an entire chapter to it – is about getting the content right. Thom Rainer says:

"Today we are being told by some that we need to choose between a church that is relevant and one that teaches deep biblical truths. Absurd. Once again we are confronted with false dichotomies. Why can't a church be both relevant and deeply doctrinal? Why must we choose? Why should we choose?"¹⁵

Indeed, churches shouldn't have to choose between deep teaching and relevance. These are not mutually exclusive. And it's the same for college ministry. Many college pastors think they should teach the same, simple things in Scripture and avoid the complicated and controversial passages in order to most effectively attract college students to their ministry and the gospel. That couldn't be more backwards. Thom Rainer continues:

"Many leaders think a church can't be "cool" and deep at the same time. Or some argue, just because the teaching is deep, it loses its relevance – that young people are turned off by such teaching and preaching... Young people are more likely to drop out if the teaching is watered down. This generation is smart and eager to learn. They can and will learn the deep truth from Scripture."¹⁶

Remember that students are in college to *learn*. This means, they're going to have a desire to go deep in their study of Scripture. The most effective way to reach college students isn't to avoid difficult Biblical texts, but to *embrace* them in teaching and preaching.

- A Scientific Perspective -

Swiss philosopher and natural scientist Jean Piaget's theory on the stages of cognitive development includes college students in the "formal operational stage." This is the thinking stage, where young adults begin to reason logically utilizing information around them – often through a trial-and-error approach.¹⁷ Randy Keeler, college pastor at Bluffton College in Bluffton, OH, for 11 years, says:

"Jean Piaget's work in cognitive development reveals that young adults are at the prime of their ability to do abstract thinking and enjoy talking about deeper and more difficult issues. Unfortunately, many churches are uncomfortable entertaining these difficult questions; they may actually stifle creative and imaginative dialogue because it tests the strength of longstanding church doctrines or positions."¹⁸

College students desire to study Scripture intensely and challenge theology. Therefore, a college ministry needs not only to be prepared to respond to these challenges but also to recognize that students studying Scripture and questioning theology is a good thing. Ministries should understand that college students are in a logical reasoning development stage – where they're thinking more like a scientist – and respond with deep, Bible-based teaching.

- Embracing The Gray -

Chuck Bomar recognized this through his eight-year tenure as a college pastor at Cornerstone Simi Valley Church. He writes on his blog, *College Ministry Thoughts*, that churches tend to be very black-and-white in their teachings. Indeed, many pastors think congregants get great satisfaction out of simple truths in the Scripture. However, that's not how college students operate. Bomar says that although the church generally shades away from gray areas in Scripture, it's these issues and deep teachings that engage college students instead of keeping everything so black-and-white:

"Maybe we can help [college students] better by not trying to make everything so simple. I'm all for [being] understandable, but maybe we can also help them understand the fact that they won't be able to understand *everything*."¹⁹

Scripture has numerous passages that are difficult to understand – and difficult to teach. But it's a vibrant, deep theology that really attracts college students. Bomar addresses this same issue in an article for *The Journal of Student Ministries*. Local churches' teaching philosophy is presenting as much information as possible, as often as possible, in as many forms as possible (sermons, Bible studies, seminars, workshops) from the Christian perspective. In the article, he says:

"Many college students who've grown up in church aren't excited about the prospect of church now that they're away from home – especially when they're presented one-sided, overly simplistic information. They already feel as though they've heard it all (which, of course, they haven't), processed through it all (which, of course, they haven't), and want to explore other faith possibilities – or none at all (which, of course, they do). Here's the problem: They've been given some information from a Christian perspective – making them feel as though they're "educated" – but they've never really thought through the implications of that information. More importantly, they haven't been forced to think through these concepts outside of the Christian tradition. Consequently, they go to college and are challenged in shocking and sometimes faith-shattering ways.

They weren't really educated on the issues; they were just given some information."²⁰

Local churches aren't effectively preparing students for challenges, and often neither are college ministries. That's why teaching with depth in Scripture is vital to collegiate ministry. College professors will attack gray areas in Scripture – which most ministries refuse to address – and challenge their students' worldview.

- Depth In The Passion Movement -

College ministers need to teach deep Scriptural truths from multiple perspectives in order to engage students. In collegiate ministry, theology matters. Louie Giglio founded his college ministry at Baylor University and later the Passion movement on theology, not on music or programs. Consistent speakers at the stadium-filled Passion conferences include John Piper, a 63-year-old theologian, and Beth Moore, a 52-year-old teacher. This illustrates that Passion is a theologically-centered movement, not programmatic-centered. Although his ministry is known for its modern worship music, Giglio says:

"At the core, we're not really about songs, we're really about theology...And we really try to engage students on a mental level with theology because theology is the rock out of which springs all the emotive things that I want to see in the lives of people who are in love with Jesus. And so, we just keep opening the Word of God, we keep teaching the Word of God, we keep basing our assumptions on the Word of God and challenging students to live that."²¹

Furthermore, Giglio agrees with the survey data and general perception that many college students lack discipleship and deep knowledge of Scripture. He says:

"I would agree with a lot of the contemporary critiques that are out there. There are a lot of kids who say, 'I love Jesus' and 'I love this speaker' and 'I'm reading this book.' But then over in this other little corner of my life, I would say, 'I love this TV show and I love this musician' and there's a huge dichotomy between the

two, and I think that's systemic of the whole church at the present moment. And I think we're failing to raise the bar and challenge each other as to what it means to truly be followers of Christ. And so, at Passion we just want to keep putting that out there. We're not afraid of theology, in fact we rather, on the other hand, embrace it gladly and stake everything we do on it."²²

Giglio's ministry philosophy is more than just throwing the gospel out there at every event. So what is his strategy for being relevant and attracting the collegiate generation with the message of Christ? It's teaching the whole Bible, including deep spiritual ideas. Giglio offers the following advice to college pastors:

"I think you basically present truth – you teach from a Biblical point of view – and you allow Scripture to speak into people's lives at all levels. And one of the good trends that is happening, and I don't know a lot of people take this different ways, but some of the campus ministries that are growing the fastest in America right now are the deepest ones. I know Reformed University Fellowship, for example, is growing massively on a lot of college campuses. And it's because kids go there, they open the Bible, they teach Scripture, they teach systematic theology and kids are going 'I've been looking for this. I've been looking for somebody to teach me what the Bible says about these areas of life.' And I think there's a danger in our quest for relevance, which has sort of been the holy grail of ministry for the last 15 years or so in America – everything's got to be relevant – and I don't think there's anything more relevant than the truth of God's Word. And I think in our pursuit of relevance, we just have to be really careful that we don't neglect the teaching of the whole counsel of the Word of God, because ultimately that's what all of us are called to build our lives on."²³

- Scripture-Centered -

Passion utilizes incredible programmatic techniques in its stadium-packed conferences, but these attributes do not define the movement. Giglio's ministry has

enjoyed incredible success because it is a Scripture-centered movement. If a ministry attracts students with flashy technology and massive programmatic displays, they will need more advanced technology and bigger programs to keep them satisfied. Whereas, if a ministry solidly engages college students with deep, theologically-centered teaching, the Scripture is what will not just keep them around, but grow them into a mature follower of Christ.

Surveys show that teaching is significant in college ministry. Most college pastors don't expect their students to desire deep, Scripture-based teaching. However, in a 2007 survey of 18- to 22-year-olds, LifeWay Research found that more than 60 percent of students who stayed involved in church did so because they were engaged by their pastor's teaching.²⁴ In college ministry, dwelling deep matters.

RELATIONSHIP-DRIVEN

An effective college ministry prioritizes people before programs.

In 2005, Hill Country Bible Church (HCBC) planted a church on the campus of the University of Texas with the goal of reaching that campus with the message of Christ. After two years, attendance at HCBC UT increased massively from 12 students to more than 200.²⁵ Pastor Denny Henderson and his team celebrated that growth, as any college ministry would, but they were still discontent. Their "attractional" model of ministry – complete with large worship services and a calendar packed with outreach events – had produced significant growth in attendance, but what about "Kingdom growth?" HCBC UT counted just eight people who decided to follow Christ through their ministry in those two years. If their goal was to reach the University of Texas with the gospel of Jesus Christ, then the ministry wasn't attaining its goal. Instead, like so many college ministries on campuses across the country, they were just gathering up all the Christians into one place.

So in 2007, HCBC UT switched its model from "attractional" to "missional" – which, in my view, is actually a "relational" model. The ministry began to engage Christian students, equip them through discipleship and missionary training, and

empower them by sending them out onto campus in relational-based, "missional" communities. With this new model, Henderson and his staff literally transformed the church:

"With the operational model clearly defined, the HCBC UT leaders reevaluated every internal and external activity planned for the 2007-2008 academic school year to determine [the] degree of alignment within the essential actions for the missional model. Service projects, individual efforts, and program offerings that did not line up with Engage, Equip or Empower – however well intentioned – went under consideration for complete or partial removal. This marked an important turning point for the church, symbolizing a shift from church activity to community transformation. The focus turned to relationships and serving the community, which incited significant changes in resource allocation (both time and budget) and strategic outreach planning."²⁶

With this altered focus, HCBC UT transformed from a program-driven ministry into a relationship-driven ministry. The results were staggering. Students who made new commitments to Christ jumped from seven in 2006-2007 to 28 in 2007-2008 and 21 in just the *first semester* of the 2008-2009 school year.²⁷ Now HCBC UT wasn't just rounding up all the Christians on campus, but their ministry was transforming college students with the message of Jesus Christ. Henderson and his staff found that an effective college ministry wasn't driven by a worship service or successful events, but by students doing life together and building relationships outside of services. Effective college ministry is driven by relationships.

- Web 2.0 -

In an era where the internet and social networking are exploding in popularity, churches are trying to engage students through these media. Rhett Smith, a youth pastor at Highland Park Presbyterian Church in Dallas, TX, writes a blog about using social media and new technologies in ministry to young people. He says that a

ministry's online strategy should be simple in design and function and flexible to adapt to changes in technology. Smith says that some churches invest thousands of dollars into an extravagant website, but are unable to update it efficiently or even receive traffic from students.²⁸ Many churches and ministries invest significant time, resources, and even staff in websites and social networking tools in an effort to build community. However, even with the prevalence of Facebook and Twitter on college campuses, face-to-face interaction is still by far the most effective way to build relationships.

Justin Wise, lead blogger at BeDeviant.com, talks about the success of serving his young adult congregation through virtual office hours.²⁹ These concepts are great to experiment with and is certainly better than being disconnected with the people he is serving, but especially on a college campus, pastors should strive for in-person, face-to-face relationship building. If the internet is the way a campus-based college ministry is building community, then it probably has very little real community to offer – and will be ineffective at reaching its students.

John McGowan, pastor of The Gathering college ministry, says he tried doing online office hours using an instant messaging program. However, most of the students who logged on did so to remain anonymous. "I don't think there was one online instant message conversation with students that translated into a face-to-face meeting," McGowan recalled. He quickly dropped that idea and instead put additional focus on meeting with students face-to-face – and on campus.³⁰

Web 2.0 – especially Facebook and Twitter – is a great way to promote a ministry and effectively communicate with college students. Nevertheless, an effective college ministry knows that online communication cannot substitute for building true relationships.

- Relationship-Driven -

College students are relational people. However, ministries need to learn how to be intentional with these relationships. As I mentioned earlier, some churches believe

that if someone enjoys "just hanging out," then they are perfect candidates to be college pastors. Looking past the oversimplification and gross lack of depth, one can see that this statement comes from the truth that college students are, more than anything, relational.

In *The Nurture Assumption*, psychologist and author Judith Harris argues that friends, not parents, are the most important factor in the development of adolescents and young adults.³¹ An article from the National Baptist Collegiate Ministry also emphasizes the importance of relationships in effective college ministry:

"Students travel in packs like wolves. If we seek to create a ministry that will truly reach lost students and disciple student believers then we must create a community for them. For too long we have viewed community-building activities such as retreats and fun events as a waste of time and a distraction. Many have felt that these 'fun' activities distract us from evangelism and discipleship. However, this generation must have community as a foundation before anything else can be done."³²

College students are relationship-driven. Therefore, college ministries have to offer meaningful relationships in order to engage them. Large worship services, successful events, and other programs are great tools, but building through *relationships* has to be the strategy.



CONCLUSION

Collegiate ministry has intimidated the local church for years. Bob Hetzler, ministry consultant and director of young adults for the Momentum youth conferences, says:

"College ministry is not new to churches. Most churches have had something for those who have graduated from high school, even if it's just a group that hangs out at the youth leaders' homes."³³

But the problem is churches either don't know how to effectively engage college students, or they don't think they are worth the investment. Furthermore, the surge of parachurch organizations on campuses nationwide has provided local churches with another excuse to sit on the sidelines in the battle for our nation's college students.

But as mentioned previously, although these parachurch groups have done a great job at filling the void for years, they cannot be a permanent solution. Both theologically and practically, it's the local church's role to evangelize and disciple all people – including college students.

In addition, although the collegiate generation is extremely transient, and generally doesn't have significant financial support to offer churches that serve them, they are worth the investment. College students matter, because when they graduate, they travel all over the world. Therefore, if local churches start investing in these students, the collegiate generation will take the gospel of Jesus Christ with them across the country and the globe.

- A New American Dream -

The American Dream is changing dramatically across college campuses nationwide. College students no longer desire only financial success. The large house in the suburbs with the white picket fence is going out of style. It's not that college students still don't desire these things. But the typical American Dream is being replaced by something different. The collegiate generation now has a fervent passion for significance.

Louie Giglio has recognized this trend and through the Passion conferences, has effectively shown college students how they can be significant in Christ. He says:

"Students...have sort of become really disenchanted with the American Dream. And what maybe 25 or 30 years ago, was a pretty popular idea, which is make good grades, get a great degree, get a really good job, get on the fast track, get promotions, and start making money, and doing that whole normal American success story path. I'm finding a lot of students now that couldn't give a rip about how much money they earn over the course of their lifetime. They want to make sure their lives are significant. And they may not use those words, but I think what they're looking for is a sense of meaning, which is greater than dollars and cents. It's greater than what neighborhood we bought the house in or what company we got the job for. They want to know that at the end of the day, their time on this planet counted for something."³⁴

College students now desire meaning in life – even more than financial gain – and the gospel is the perfect thing to offer them.

The collegiate generation is ripe for harvest. They desire something significant, something bigger than a fatter paycheck or nicer car. However, college ministries need to learn to be effective. Ministries should be campus-based and meet students where they're at. They should be Scripture-centered, finding relevance through deep teaching, not by shying away from the gray. Finally, they must be relationship-driven, because college students are relationship-driven. If college ministries follow these three principles, then we'll be well on our way to effectively reaching the collegiate generation with the message of Jesus Christ.

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