



Rev. Jack Diel's Reflections
for the
"Remembering" Portion of the Liturgy of the Worship
in Celebration of the
70th Anniversary of United Campus Ministries, Terre
Haute
April 27, 2014

The church and higher education have always been inextricably bound. Many of our denominations have been involved in some form of campus ministry since their beginning. I offer but one example today. John and Charles Wesley, the founders of Methodism, were profoundly influenced by their involvement in their equivalent of a campus ministry: The Holy Club at Oxford University. That group helped nurture their faith development and provide mutual support and accountability. These are some of the ingredients found in campus ministry throughout its history, to the present day.

In this country, most of our oldest institutions of higher education began as seminaries for the training of clergy. As the young republic began to take shape, it was extremely important that there be an educated citizenry, as well. Many of the functions that we would now call Residential Life and Student Life began through ministry in higher education. That tradition has continued through this campus ministry, into the present.

During my thirty years as campus minister here, I witnessed several ministries begun by the campus ministry that became programmatic goals of the colleges in this community. When I arrived in Terre Haute, I found that Indiana State was still relating to students as though all students were the 18 to 22-year-old traditional student. Of course, that had not been the reality for some years. Responding to the need, United Campus Ministries started the Graduate and Nontraditional Student Group, the first group on campus specifically designed for such students. We met weekly for faith development and mutual support and accountability. Sound familiar? After three or four years, the University helped establish a student group for such individuals on the campus. In

campus ministry you learn not to be territorial about such things, but rather celebrate that this campus ministry was a part of expanding the vision to include such students.

I always understood ministry in higher education to be just that; that is, ministry for students, faculty, and staff. And so, within the first year or two of being here, Dr. André Hammonds and I began a Faculty and Staff Luncheon Series as a way to reach out in ministry to those persons. ISU President Richard Landini gave the inaugural presentation. By the second year, André recommended that we expand our vision to include church and community people as well, and so, the Campus and Community Luncheon Series was born. What Dr. Hammonds helped me understand was that the institutions of higher education and the churches are both part of the larger community, and therefore, campus ministry was in a particularly unique position to provide a bridge of understanding and ministry among the institutions of higher learning, the churches, and the members of the larger community. Moving forward, this ministry consistently saw its responsibility to be first to the students but also to faculty, staff, church people, and community people.

Campus ministry has a long and proud history of providing service and mission opportunities. By the second year of my tenure, a colleague from the University of Illinois, a Mexican pastor, and I cofounded Intercambio Cultural Maya (Maya Cultural Exchange), a mission and service project with the Maya people of Mexico. Although many campus ministries did service and mission projects, few created their own with such an elaborate outreach. For twenty-nine years, we took students, faculty, staff, health professionals, and others to the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico to live with the Maya people and to work on a construction project together. We also provided medical, dental, optical, and health education services to the people in remote, jungle villages. As the name suggests, our greatest hope for these projects was an in-depth, people-to-people cultural exchange ... going both directions. Every trip demonstrated the power of experiential learning to broaden the horizons and break down the barriers between people. Over the years we saw many hundreds of people changed for the balance of

their lifetime. In those days we were one of the few who offered such an opportunity. Today, service learning is all the rage in the academic world, as well it should be.

In this culture, the campus is the location where the new and exciting and transformative very often begin. Campus ministry has always been one of the outposts for the church reaching out to discover ways to be relevant and impactful alongside the unfolding cultural phenomena. I inherited from the Reverend Duane Sinn a ministry that had navigated the tumultuous waters of the Vietnam era. During my time here, we tried to keep alive the campus ministry tradition of relevant ministry responding to the times. Often we worked in cooperation with other units on the campuses or agencies in the community to accomplish the task. Here are some of those ministries. We cosponsored an interfaith worship in Mansfield, Indiana, highlighting the inclusive love of God at the same time that the Ku Klux Klan was holding a rally on the other side of town. We cosponsored the first workshop in this community for clergy and other helping professionals on ministering to persons with HIV-AIDS. The presenter was an HIV-positive pastor from Indianapolis. We cosponsored the first workshop for clergy and other helping professionals on ministering to adult survivors of child sexual abuse. We cosponsored bringing the AIDS quilt to Hulman Center. Leading up to the execution of Timothy McVeigh, we cosponsored a workshop featuring the stories of two fathers who had lost daughters to violence (one of those fathers lost his daughter in the Oklahoma City bombing). Both fathers bore witness to a truth that we know as people of faith that retribution and vengeance accomplishes nothing but destruction of others and self. We cosponsored a protest demonstration on the grounds of the federal penitentiary on the night our government took the life of Timothy McVeigh in the name of all of us citizens. On the first anniversary of September 11, we were invited to cosponsor with the Rose-Hulman Student Government Association a service of remembrance that featured readings from sacred scripture by a Jew, a Muslim, and a Christian.

But it was not always an historical event that demanded ministry on campus. This campus ministry has often been there when death has invaded the lives of students on our campuses. After a student athletic trainer at ISU died on the football field, we were

asked to create a service of celebration of the life of that student. On several other occasions, we were asked by different departments to do Memorial Services for students who died tragically during the academic year.

Programs or events are merely a context in which students learn and become the people that they will be for a lifetime. Alongside any programmatic ministry is the personal pastoral care and faith development that takes place in small groups or one-on-one. And so, this campus ministry has a strong history of worship, Bible study, faith exploration groups, and opportunities to put faith into action. I spent literally hours providing pastoral care to students who were dealing with all kinds of difficulties: extreme homesickness; living with a stranger as a roommate; relationship difficulties; vocational choices; lifestyle choices; ethical living questions; faith crises; to name but a few. As a pastor, I consistently was helping others on their faith journey. Some met Christ for the first time at the campus ministry. Others attended a Student Christian Gathering for the first time in their lives. Some felt the call to church vocation in this campus ministry. Others met their mate for a lifetime at the campus ministry and invited me to officiate their wedding. I've even had the pleasure of assisting with the baptism of children when alums have extended that invitation.

The college years are one of those times in life when young adults are making critical decisions about vocation, lifestyle, ethics, and faith ... and the Christian voice needs to be in the mix as those decisions are being made. Campus ministry has been an extremely important part of that voice and will continue to be in the years ahead. Godspeed to all of us as we continue the journey.