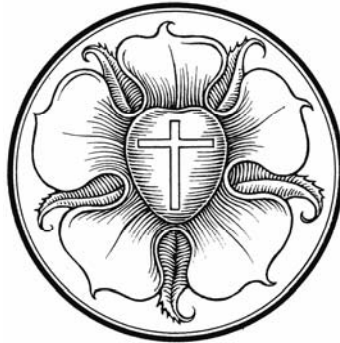


# FROM WITTENBERG TO WYOMING

## *The Church on Campus*



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### **Introduction**

The Lutheran Church cannot escape the campus; she was born on the academic turf of a German University at Wittenberg. Throughout her history she has not forsaken the campus. Campus ministry comes naturally to Lutheranism as there is a desire that her sons and daughters grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and mature in their faith at one of the most formative and crucial times of their lives and while they acquire the learning and useful skills necessary for life lived "in," but not "of", the world around them.

The Lutheran Church need not escape the campus either. The campus provides us with a challenging training ground where young people may be equipped to live as faithful confessors of Jesus Christ and His Word. In short, campus ministry is "in" the university, but not "of" the university! Like unto Athens of Acts 17, the university is a place permeated with religion. It is not a matter of there being religion on campus, but what religion it is! Our young people will be ministered to, but ministered with what, and ministered to by whom!

### **1. The Church and Her Ministry**

To talk about "Campus Ministry" we must first define "Ministry." In years past that term was nearly always associated directly with the office of the Holy Ministry, the Pastoral Office. Not so the case anymore, as the terms "Church" and "Ministry" now are defined in various ways and for many reasons. For instance, today the word "ministry" is tacked to just about every conceivable operation: we have "older adult ministry" and "early childhood ministry" and "campus ministry." Simply put, just about anything these days that involves some sort of "service" is called a "ministry." Strictly speaking, such definitions aren't wrong. But they aren't necessarily good, either. They are not precise. When you use a term too often and for everything, in the end the word really means nothing anymore. It has also been that way with the word "church" since medieval times. "Church" can mean a "building" or a "congregation" or "what you do at 10 a.m. on Sunday morning."

For our purposes today, the Church will be defined as it is in our Lutheran Confessions, namely where the Gospel is preached purely and the Sacraments administered in accordance with the Gospel. People

gather at the Holy Spirit's invitation around the Gospel, for He calls them to faith through it and then enlightens them - he opens their eyes through the Gospel - to see just what and who they are. People become part of Christ's Church as they die with Christ in Holy Baptism, and as they are raised up with Him to a newness of life. They are forgiven, fed, nurtured in the gifts given in Absolution and in the Body and Blood of Christ. Through those external means God's people are strengthened in faith toward God, and in fervent love toward one another. Without the Gospel gifts, we don't have church. We can't "do" anything. We are dead, because there is no life apart from His gifts.

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Ministry is best defined as the Office created by Christ for His Church to administer those very gifts. Christ wants to get them to His people, and therefore He has seen fit to put men in charge, men authorized to administer what He has given. *"As the Father has sent me, so I send you,"* He says to the Apostles in John. In St. Matthew we hear Jesus saying to the men in office, *"All authority has been given to me: I send you to make disciples by baptizing in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and by teaching them to hold, to keep, all I have commanded."* That's the formation of the Office of the Holy Ministry! His men operating under His authority with the gifts that He has given "make disciples" as they "go where they have been sent."

All of this happens primarily in the Divine Service where Absolution is present as Gospel is proclaimed and the Body and Blood of our Savior are administered. There Christ works. He works in us (vertically), and then His work in us flows from us (horizontally) just as we pray after the Lord's Supper that we be "strengthened in faith toward Him ... and in fervent love toward one another." Thus the mission of the Church flows out of God's service to us. Our vocation as members of God's royal priesthood flow directly from God's ministry to us through His Word and Sacraments. Now that is clear, isn't it? Nothing hazy about that! That is what the Church is and why it exists.

## **2. The Context of the College Campus**

Now, you say, "what does this have to do with Campus Ministry?" Everything! It IS campus ministry. In other words, it is the same ministry, but on campus, or Christ's ministry to those while they are on campus. The pastor serving the campus is doing essentially the same thing as the pastor serving your congregation. He is the giver of the gifts. Precisely the same things that strengthens in *"faith toward God and fervent love toward one another"* are essential for the life of the college student as they are essential for you. It is likewise these Holy things (and none other) that will best bridge the students previous life in their home congregation to the new home congregation that they will, by God's grace, seek to be incorporated in to after college. What is most profitable for students "before" college and "after" college is exactly what they need "during" college!

Now it seems like a rather obvious concept, but trust me, it is easily forgotten, and many campus ministries can quickly become something else, and many honestly and unfortunately have. Such was the case in Wittenberg. God forbid it in Wyoming. The Church in Wittenberg had forgotten who and what it was, why it was there, and what it was that Christ had given it to give. Before long it was becoming something other than it was meant to be, and with such a shift came a corresponding movement away from that which was originally being taught and believed. We never want to fall into the trap of either assuming or taking for granted any of this, though we live in a culture that all the more begs us to! Ultimately, the Gospel that is assumed is the Gospel denied!

We also do not want to assume that our youth show up on campus ready to confess, defend and hold on to the faith that they have been taught. When a 17 or 18 year old finds themselves on a college campus they are confronted with great many issues of independence. For perhaps the first time they are away from home, their parents, their home town, and their home congregation, which hopefully have been anchors in their lives. They immediately find themselves doing many things for themselves that perhaps they have not yet had to do in their relatively young lives. They also are now able to set their own boundaries, hopefully based on the foundations that were set for them by others. They are also

immediately confronted with witnessing things that they have never ever seen before, and the circle of peer influence on their daily lives is greatly expanded. Not only do they have more peers with more influence and more pressure, but they have increased time with those peers, while less time with those institutions that had been their constant guides and companions, namely their parents and their home congregation.

Before they may even have their socks and underwear placed in the proper drawer or even show up for their first class, they have been confronted with some pretty big decisions. “Who will be my new friends?” “Do I go with someone I just met and don’t really know to a party at a place I’ve never been to?” “Do I drink and if so, how much?” “What do I say to a young man who asks me to go back to his place with him when I’ve only known him for two hours?” Add such things to decisions about what one wants to “do” with their life and who their future spouse might be and you have quite a maze of both confusion and potential.

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There will also be no shortage of different groups and organizations attempting to attract the college student to become a part of a new community. There are, of course, groups such as the Ski Club, the FlyCasters, and Campus Republicans or Democrats, but they will be seeking new members along side the various fraternities and sororities, the Coalition Against Marijuana Prohibition, Amnesty International, the Women Studies Coalition (a feminist activist group) and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Association.

All this and we haven’t even talked specifically about one’s life in Christ and the Church yet! As mentioned, there is no shortage of religion on campus. There will also be no shortage of influence from various contradictory religious organizations. You name it, it exists on campus, and if you can’t name it or find it, you have the opportunity to create it yourself, and many do. There are of course also all sorts of cults such as the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses’ as well as a whole menu of New Age “spirituality” groups to choose from. There are various other denominational and ecumenically based campus ministries, usually organized around a “peace and justice” agenda. Para-church groups such as InterVarsity Fellowship, Campus Ventures, Campus Crusade for Christ and the Navigators still roam the campus and simply offer a watered down and generic Jesus, seeking “decisions for Christ” at the altar of style without substance.

And then there is our LCMS campus ministry, in many ways a beacon of light in the midst of a dark maze of confusion. Within this maze there is no shortage of temptation for either our campus ministry or our sister LCMS campus ministries elsewhere, to seek to compete for attention and allegiance. using similar methods as the others employ. But our campus ministries don’t exist to be Campus Crusade chapters with a Lutheran twist, or just another organization among many to provide students with free pizza.

Pizza is great, but it isn’t the Gospel! There is a tug of war behind the scenes of the Church on campus just as there is one being waged inside each individual believer while on campus. Who will influence who? Will the Church influence the cultural context in which it is placed, or will the context rather influence the Church to be something other than it is? It can be the former, it must never be the later!

The reason why such interest in campus ministry remains is primarily because the Church is nervous. It is no secret that more of our young people leave the church than stay in it, and that the college years often become the black hole through which we lose them. There are indeed many variables that enter into the equation, that go all the way back to the time a child is born, baptized into Christ, the way they are raised and catechized in that new baptismal life. Yet, we lose so many. And thus we have a choice as the Church. We can either stop and return to what has always served the Church well and evaluate if we have been doing our level best to continue in it (i.e. the pattern of sound teaching), or we can look elsewhere to find something else that either works or looks like it works. I say the former. Looks can be deceiving.

Many times the Church seeks to counter balance such losses with new programs or initiatives designed to attract our youth to see Christianity as fun. From the cradle to the campus, over the last generation or so, we have often been tempted to think that as long as our youth are having fun in a Christian context, then they are therefore being fed and nourished appropriately. Now fun is great and we should have lots of it. But frankly, such thinking is naïve. All too often we're less concerned about the "one thing needful" than we are about the glowing report. All too often, it seems, we are about the "new, the innovative" and not about the calling, sanctifying and keeping work of the Spirit. Instead of folding our younger brothers and sisters into the "fellowship divine" where the gifts are given, we try to do something special that separates and in the end splits even the foundations.

I believe that we should have fun and we should make it the best clean fun we can have, and of course, our youth need appropriate and safe social contexts. We are a family after all. But I also am convinced that we should make learning, learning and most importantly, we should also make worship, worship. We should recognize each for the gift it is, but be careful to not confuse the three. I myself am a product of a generation that grew up with little or no understanding of what worship is and why we do it. I almost left church for this reason, but I thank God that I now understand and cherish what I was never taught. But this process simply needs to be reversed, and I believe it can be if we simply can do our best at each of the above and to help our youth understand why we do all three. I myself have seen far too many young people leave the LCMS simply because they did not understand the difference.

There are, of course, many other variables, including our own expectations. Perhaps by default or experience, we almost "expect" those who are about 17 or 18 to take a little sabbatical while at college. After all, most people do it. Don't think our kids don't notice this. They see others who leave the church but then return 12 years later when they are married, 30 and want their new baby baptized. Thank God this happens, but there are far, far more that don't return than do.

Let us never accept this lest it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. I am not so unsure that many of our LCMS students don't show up on campus without an expectation that they really should be going to church, etc. Say, "Well, you'll probably fall away ... sow your wild oats .. whatever" and the Old Adam kicks in: you've just given permission! And this happens when the Catechism isn't taught, prayed, learned or even expected to be remembered after the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Since the Catechism is viewed as a text book, instead of a prayer book, it is quickly forgotten and seldom returned to. Thus, our children get off to the campus and they have little or no foundation to begin with. This is like putting the drunk in the bar and telling him to be careful!

***But the challenge today isn't  
to find some new gimmick,  
some new ploy or come-on: it  
is to speak the Word of truth,  
clearly, plainly, and without  
compromise in a context  
where students most often do  
not get it at all.***

Trust me, the flat out anti-Christian attitude that exists on most campuses today is a powerful tool of Satan! Even the most superbly grounded will find faith tested ... subtract the Divine Service from that and the Gifts of God given and received there, the very source and strength of life, and spiritual death will most certainly follow. Those who are not incorporated in the life of the Church on campus, will be incorporated elsewhere. But where? That is ultimately the challenge.

Because, you see, we are not able to do a thing apart from the Holy Spirit's work! He uses Word. He uses Sacrament. He uses catechesis, the teaching of the faith. Take those away, and you've got nothing, either on campus or off campus!

The answer also doesn't lie in some watered-down generalized ecumenical involvement, either, so common on our campuses! This is not the time for those grounded in Word and Sacrament, those who are rooted in the teaching of the church universal to say by their actions that all that isn't important and to support "Fellowship of Christian Athletes" or "Promise Keepers" or so-called "Christian sororities and

fraternities." All of those turn our faith into a mess of pottage, a wispy mass that means nothing to no one and everything to anyone. Oh, they are well-intentioned and quite inviting: but they are death. Join them and "Well, we can't talk about Baptism, can we?" "And communion, well, that's a stickler, too!" "Absolution? Well that means confession of sin, and that would damage self-esteem: out with that!" At best you have a name, "Jesus" which becomes merely a buzz-word for touch feely stuff that seems so nice but that quickly brings death.

The answer, my friends, isn't written in the wind. It isn't written in some new program or some newly developed video. The answer is just where it has always been- in Christ's Word and Sacraments. They are precisely what He gives us to use. There Jesus gives Himself to us. There and there alone is life. Sunday by Sunday He is giving His gifts wherever His Gospel is preached in its purity and the Sacraments administered in accordance with the Gospel. That's where faith is strengthened. That's where saints are sanctified and kept. This is what our young adults need, and perhaps in even greater measure during such a formative period in their lives, an era that will shape the course that set for the future, which will be either a future in, by, with, and through Christ, or a future without Him.

All of this, by the way, is clearly mapped out for us in the Catechism. It runs through the whole of it! There we have the words of faith and the words of life in simplest form, meant to be learned by heart! And that Catechism is at the heart of what we call "Campus Ministry" just as it is at the heart of every family and every person. The Catechism is the "layman's Bible." It is the crystal essence of the faith. It is a word to be heard and spoken and a word to be prayed. It is the "handbook for the royal priesthood."

You see, students on any campus, those marked with the sign of the cross, are first of all, saints! But their vocation while on campus is primarily to be students. That's right: they are not called to be "ministers" or "missionaries" but students! Quite frankly, the common push today in many campus ministry circles both outside of the LCMS as well as within, is to make students the "ministers" and "missionaries" on campus, often at the expense of having campus "pastors." This could not be more dangerous. Is it important for students to be involved in the life of the campus congregation? Yes, and this should be promoted and in many ways the campus ministry can be a training ground for teaching students how a congregation works, and perhaps prepare them for greater service later wherever God leads them. But this does not make them ministers, nor does it qualify them to teach and lead Bible Classes and the like at the expense of a pastor. This may be the time of their life where a student for the first time really understands just why they need a pastor. Likewise, are there opportunities for students to reach out to others with the love of Christ? Surely and indeed in great measure, but this does not mean that they are missionaries either, but simply reaching out to others with the love of Christ, as they continue to mature in their faith. This too can set a pattern for the future.

***This may be the time of their life where a student for the first time really understands just why they need a pastor.***

But in any case, the Divine Service is still the lifeline: they still receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation as they receive those gifts in an orthodox congregation. And this is precisely why the last thing our college students "need" (notice I said "need" and not "want") is a "new" a "different" worship "experience" while at college, but rather precisely the opportunity to better understand why we worship the way we do, so that they might cherish and cling to the rich and plenteous treasure that is our Lutheran liturgical life together. This is in fact a necessary anchor for them at a formative time in their lives when everything is changing and/or

different. Such experiments have been done across the board in campus ministries over the past generation, and overall, they have failed, precisely because they apologize for who we are as Lutherans, and perhaps most importantly, they do not provide the necessary link between the "before" and "after" of college.

In the life of that congregation gathered around Christ's Word and Sacrament, the college student is provided with an oasis in a culture that is thirsty but does not know it. Continually being nourished with that which alone can sustain them, they have opportunities to talk of the things that are challenging them,

to continue to grow in faith, and to be cared for and nurtured with those same gifts that have served them well so far, and by God's grace will best serve them for life.

In their daily conversation and discourse, attitudes, behaviors, and speech are molded and shaped by the Holy Spirit! Through that "hidden discipline," the Holy Spirit does work! And when they do have appropriate opportunities to "share the gift," they have words, words learned by heart in the Catechism, words shaped and filled in continually listening to Jesus! With those words in their hearts, they have something to go by as various challenges and opportunities come: they can check out this group or that organization by the Word that lives in them!

But foundational to it all are the gifts that God gives in the Divine Service. Necessary is that community gathered by the Holy Spirit. Without those things, there is no life.

## Conclusion

The life of God's people on campus flows from the Divine Service. Here we are given Christ's gifts. Our Lord's gifts enliven and sustain even in an environment that is admittedly often hostile to the truth of the faith we confess. In a culture marked by pluralism, we confess that Jesus Christ alone is "*the way, the truth, and the life.*" In an age of relativity, we gladly confess the reliability of our Lord's words, the truth and certainty of His promises.

The early church had its catechetical schools. I like to see campus setting which I serve as something of a catechetical school, providing a community of students an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and Lutheran doctrine, applying their learning to their vocation to live in Christ by faith and in the neighbor by love. The primary texts for such catechesis are the Holy Scriptures, Luther's Small Catechism, and Lutheran Worship (i.e. the hymnal). Using these books as foundational I strive to let the Lord's Word have free course in the lives of students, instilling in them a faith for the long haul, not a momentary religious experience. Of course, this separates us from almost every other campus ministry. Needless to say, it was the same in Wittenberg when Dr. Luther posted the 95 theses calling God's people back to a commitment to the truth of God's Word. As in Wittenberg, so too in Wyoming!

We aim for edification in the truth of Christ, not entertainment (although we do have a ton of fun along the way!) In short, the Church on campus can and should be first and foremost, a school of faith.

"Education is not about supplying wants, but teaching new wants. Providing this kind of education requires the university to be supported by institutions that stand against our culture's sentimentalities about happiness." (Stanley Hauerwas, "Honor in the University" in First Things (February 1991), p.29.

In reality then, there is no "Campus ministry" as some use the term: rather The Church on campus is simply a group of believers gathered together around Christ's Word and Sacraments, the same as in any congregation, though of course in unique circumstances. Thus, we gather as Church on the campuses of our land, in the hope that our young people might continue to be strengthened in faith toward God and in fervent love to those around them! They exercise their "priesthood," if you will, in their daily lives as students! Beginning and ending the day in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, they are "the church" in the classroom and in the commons, loving as Christ has loved them. Strengthened in faith, they can stand wherever they might be, serving the love of God to all those around, and even inviting them to come, and to see Jesus!

***Campus ministry serves the university community best by simply being the Church.***

Now that wasn't such a long trip, was it? Basically, your pastor gives you the same gifts. The Gospel we preach is the Gospel according to the apostolic Scriptures; it is the Gospel of the crucified and risen Savior. This Gospel stands against "our cultures" sentimentalities about happiness" drawing those who receive it into a life of dying and rising. Campus ministry is ultimately therefore no different

than “the” ministry in general. Most importantly, campus ministry serves the university community best by simply being the Church. We have no other reason to be on campus, but we have every reason to be who we are in Christ, which also just happens to be exactly what our neighbor on campus needs us to be too.