

fundamental questions of life. We want them to ask, what am I living for and whom or what will I serve? We want them educated, in the rich and grand liberal education tradition of the universities.

How do we, the church, address such a ministry to those engaged in higher education? Some of it is obvious, such as programs, courses or discussions with students that raise these questions head-on. Some of it is like community organizing, in which it would be presumptuous for us to assume that we can or must introduce these concerns into the university community, but our task is more to provide occasions where people can get together to share the concerns they already have. When James Gustafson became a professor of Christian Ethics at the University of Chicago some years ago, he noted that one difficulty in calling the university to be a community of moral discourse was that, with the typical isolation of different departments from each other, it was not a community of discourse at all. We can provide situations and settings where people can transcend these everyday barriers to be a community of moral discourse.

Madison Campus Ministry seeks partnerships with local congregations, and feels that the church's ministry in higher education will not be carried out without such joint efforts. It seems apparent to us that efforts such as called for here are an obvious area in which we can work together, drawing people together to discuss the aims, purposes and values of education and its impact upon the lives of students and upon our society. We would love to work with your congregation on such programs. Explore the possibility with us. Let us hear from you.

For the MCM staff,

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"I am setting a plumb-line in the midst of my people..." Amos 7:8

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The Plumb-Line

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A periodic communication for
Madison Campus Ministry
by Wayland Minister, Cecil Findley

Professor Harold Hill knew, as he sang in an opening number in “The Music Man”, that to be a successful salesman, “you’ve got to know the territory”.

The same principle is true of ministry, and for us in campus ministry, it means we’ve got to know the territory of higher education. This means dealing with the largest agglomeration of 18-22+ year olds found anywhere in our society, who are in a time of transition from youth to adulthood. This rite of passage offers an exciting opportunity for opening up and blossoming out, but can also be fraught with dangers.

To know the territory means--for campus ministry and congregations alike--that we must find ever more effective ways to minister to these age-group needs, but more. We must recognize the needs, opportunities and challenges that come with being a member of a learning community, the university. Its impact on persons is not age-specific, but affects its members by its impact on their ways of thinking and on their values and commitments.

It has sometimes been noted that the university has had a unity of purpose. It did, for instance, when its agreed upon aim was to produce gentlemen. The male reference was intentional, and the content had to do with personal improvement and providing cultured leaders for

society. We do not yearn to go back to that day, but today the university has no comparable integrative center. This is what gives rise to the old jokes about the faculty of a university being a group of people with no common commitments but united by a common parking problem.

One strategy the church has used to address this problem is to sponsor its own institutions of higher learning, where a commitment to serve God has called for a commitment to humane values in and through education. At its best this has meant education that is geared to send forth servant leaders who are motivated to use their educated status and power to be of service to all of God’s children. It should be noted that the success of this effort has been spotty, because other values creep in. It should also be acknowledged that the impulse to educate in this spirit is present in the public universities, where persons with a Christian vocation are very much present.

In both settings, however, there are academic assumptions including the operative paradigms of the different disciplines, that tend to move education in other directions. Let me illustrate with several of my own experiences.

When I taught a college course on world hunger, I had a young woman biology major who became turned on to direct the resources of her discipline to the problems of world hunger. When she, at my suggestion, consulted with her major faculty adviser about what she could read that related the two, we found cold water thrown on our integrative enthusiasm. “You can read in biology,” he told her, “or in world hunger, but not both” Though he was a faithful church member and was employed by a church related college, his values had been shaped by his graduate study so that he believed that knowing was to be sharply separated from caring and from doing, and that knowing was

to be kept within the narrow walls of separate disciplines.

Or in a mid-western university where I was campus minister, I got into running arguments with the head of the sociology department. He led his students in studies of poverty in the city, and when I expressed pleasure at hearing that, he said, “It is a matter of complete indifference to me as a social scientist whether anything is ever done to solve the problems of poverty, or whether any of my students have their hearts moved to care about it.” He admitted that as a professed devout Christian he harbored some private hopes in those directions, but he assured me that he saw to it that those hopes did not seep into his professional work. His argument was that science required that kind of detachment. Mine was that he was out of touch with the deepest impulses and traditions of higher education, which ultimately value human amelioration. Neither of us ever convinced the other.

Those two professors do not speak for their whole disciplines, of course, and in fact are on one side (and I believe the losing side) of debates within them, but they illustrate a position in higher education that holds many in its thrall. I have found much of my effort to develop a theology and strategy of ministry to revolve around the question of how we address this kind of concern. This is a question of what happens to the people who study in our universities. It is a question of what happens to their values and their commitments. It is the question of the moral uses of the education they are privileged to receive. Over fifty years ago, Sir Walter Moberly wrote The Crisis In The Universities in which he said that people were being well trained for various occupations, but fundamentally they were uneducated, because they graduated without ever being asked to exercise their minds on the