

From Wanda Kidd, CBFNC College Ministry Consultant

Where does my passion from college ministry come from?

My faith has been the filter through which I have processed the world since I was a young girl. Church was where I felt valued and known. I loved Sunday school, Bible school and everything in between. I even looked forward to Sunday night services where just the faithful gathered and my voice calling out my favorite song to sing at request time was just as valued as the chairman of deacons. And for as long as I can remember I have wanted others to have that same experience of belonging and relationship.

My first youth ministry job was when I was 21 at my home church and while I truly enjoyed it, I often felt ill equipped and alone. As I attempted to process the questions that plagued me while I tried to lead these young people, I wanted someone I trusted to talk to me about those thoughts. I needed someone I respected to offer me wisdom and point me toward authors that they trusted, but there was no one available for those conversations. That changed during my junior year in college.

I found that place at the Baptist Student Union at Western Carolina. I walked in the door of the BSU on a cold and rainy night in January of 1975 and was met by Joe David Fore, who said, "Hello, I am glad that you are here. Let me introduce you to some people." He told me he was the campus minister there, a type of ministry that I knew nothing about, but one that would change my life. Before I left that night I had met twenty or thirty people, had an after-school job keeping Joe David's children and the beginning of a life long friendship with his whole family. But what was truly life altering for me as I became involved in the BSU was the conversations about my and other's faith journey. These conversations were not only with my campus minister, but also with peers who were asking similar questions. These people came from a variety of backgrounds and were headed in a myriad of directions, but we informed each other's lives with conversation and deeds.

Because the structure and the design of the BSU offered us an opportunity to lead in an environment that had high expectations, but few permanent consequences for failure, we grew and saw new horizons we never imagined for anyone, but particularly not for ourselves. We were called to honestly look at our gifts and ask ourselves, "why not?" I found myself asking "Why not" to questions that I would never have even thought to ask at all. Assumptions were challenged and cages were rattled, tears were shed and a joy and peace were experienced that I didn't even know I was pursuing. As I graduated, I left the BSU at Western Carolina as someone who knew Christ more personally, who was less fearful of difficult truths and a person who knew that I desired for others the same possibilities that had been afforded me. I was and am grateful for the time, energy and financial resources that had been invested in campus ministry. I know many people who believe that campus ministry shaped them and impacted them in ways that are still informing their Christian faith today.

I share that belief and because of that, I wanted to offer students who were on a Christian journey the place and space to sort out their faith, ask hard questions of themselves and others, practice ministry skills without fear of failure and figure out that regardless of who we are, we are called to serve Christ in a variety of ways and with a variety of gifts. That is the same call that guides me today and my passion has not diminished, if anything it is stronger and more consuming than ever.

What are the challenges that churches face in reaching college students?

Fear is the greatest hurdle to reaching young adults. The church fears that young adults do not value the things that we have invested our collective energies in for the last 75 years. Things like missions, worship and building programs. We have served on committee after committee and invested our life's blood to make sure that these things are addressed and carried out, but our children and grandchildren do not seem to share our vision of ministry and that is frightening. I heard the Quaker author; Parker Palmer say at a Mars Hill College Chapel one day that "our greatest fear is the fear of being irrelevant." As my personal age gap continues to increase with this population, I have found that specific fear to nag at me on a regular basis, but I believe that the only remedy for the fear is to stay in relationship with young people.

Pay attention when they talk, listen to their fears, because their fears are almost consuming of who they are.

1. We have told them to be afraid of stranger, yet we expect them to come into a church of strangers and make themselves at home.
2. We have taught them that institutions can not be trusted with other people's investments, then we can not understand why they do not want to give their money to a church run by people they do not know, being spent on things that they do not feel a part of.
3. We are afraid to listen to the music that they have on their IPODs for fear that we will not like what we hear, but we want them to come to church and sing our songs that are foreign to their lives. We church-going adults gathered to sing our songs of faith multiple times a week as we were growing up; we learned to play them during piano lessons and even when we gathered at people's homes. For many of us, hymns have a place of comfort and familiarity, but even our children who have been in church all of their lives, have not experienced hymns on anything more than a glancing experience. If they came to church 50 times a year for 20 years at 3 hymns a week, they only heard 3000 hymns in their lifetime. They often hear that many songs in a month of IPOD listening.
4. We are afraid that they will not like us so we decide to avoid the possibility of rejection by hiding behind institutional invitations and we ask them to work with our youth, keep the nursery or sing in the choir. We don't ask them to sit with us during worship or go with our families out to eat after church. Conversely they are afraid to sit with us or ask our advice, because after all it's not their church and it's not their place to make the first step. Until we look around and we wonder where did all of the young people go and we say, "Oh well, they must have not liked us," not realizing, they left thinking the very same thing.

The greatest challenge is deciding to lay down our fears and our safeguards and love these people who are our children and our grandchildren. These young people are desperate for a word of acceptance and to be told with assurance that they are “Beloved Children of God, brought into reconciliation with this world of uncertainty through the love, death and resurrection of Jesus. They want to know Jesus and they want to be introduced to Him by someone who knows Him personally. It is not a matter of should the church invest in young adults, but how can a church engage young adults and that cannot be done with a new staff position alone. It must become a desire and a mission of today’s church or the church of tomorrow will be crippled by our fears.

Why am I interested in this position with CBFNC?

Developmentally the years of processing and personally defining faith, coincides with the traditional years that people are in college. Balanced campus ministry encourages young adults to ask questions, stretch their faith and seek a personal and corporate relationship with Christ that integrates all areas of their life. Since the 1920’s the Baptist tradition of providing young adults with this environment for faith development has produced an amazing pool of leaders. Along with local congregations, BSU helped to grow missionaries, pastors, passionate lay people and the people who shaped the ministry of Baptist life in the 1950-70’s.

When things began to shift toward the fundamentalist concepts in the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980’s, for some reason, campus ministry was virtually untouched and remained so for many years. Baptist Campus Ministry was not a touch stone for the men developing this paradigm of conservatism. Most of the leadership for the fundamentalist movement came from men who were directly mentored by those providing foundation and leadership for the counter direction of the convention. Their leadership development was done in small groups of like-minded people who had an agenda and a goal. They were virtual untouched and unaware of the guiding principles of Baptist Campus ministry.

Conversely, the moderate component of the SBC was largely comprised of those who were impacted by traditional Baptist Campus Ministry. It is ironic that because campus ministry was virtually ignored by the fundamentalist, it was allowed to maintain its autonomy in most state conventions. That allowed the moderates, and CBF in particular, freedom to focus on the issues that were more directly under stress; which were missions and theological education.

That freedom seems to be changing. Twenty years into this schism there is a renewed interest in ministering to young adults in both the fundamentalist and the moderate groups. As far as CBF goes, one only need to attend one Fellowship gathering to know that we have not been all that effective in including and growing young leadership. In its defense, since early in the life of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship there have been national efforts through small groups and conferences, to address and include young

adults. It is my belief, however, that while national events are important, campus ministry seems to have its most lasting impact, when it is done in community with invested leadership.

That is why I am so delighted that CBFNC has seen a need and is putting feet to that need. There is a great deal of support and excitement about this initiative. People who know how important it is to be present with our daughters and sons as they answer the Christian call on their lives are speaking out. Last summer Rick Jordan, the CBFNC staff person responsible for leadership development, and I wanted to respond to the people in North Carolina who shared a desire to talk about this issue. We sent out an open invitation to anyone who was interested in talking about the investment of CBF churches in campus ministry to come to College Park Baptist Church in Winston Salem. We expected 10-15 people and were stunned when 43 people gave up their Saturday to come together and talk about their concerns and willingness to work along side young adults in spiritual development. There was a deep sense that we must be a part of something that will reach out to 18-30 year olds who are among us and those who are not being reached by anyone.

That gathering got the ball rolling and the momentum is very exciting. We are hopeful about our ministry with young people. There are many of them who want to be invited into leadership development, mission opportunities and into meaningful discussions about their relationship with Christ and we want and need to be there to help any way that we can.