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THE CHURCHES, THE COUNCILS AND CAMPUS MINISTRY

Norman J. Threinen

“The student, fresh from the comfortable atmosphere of the local church and home, is suddenly confronted with serious problems, and no very close friends. He is expected almost overnight to become adult in many attitudes. He is given much more freedom and operates under far fewer restraints than he did at home . . . Furthermore, there is a strong pressure for conformity amongst freshmen; and previously-frowned-upon customs suddenly become live options, dictated by the necessity to keep up with the rest of the class.

“These external pressures are matched by classroom shocks. These may be problems of ability to handle the increased volume of work required in university, or they may be serious intellectual problems . . . Often the student will be required to rethink his whole philosophy of religion as a result of the challenge of intellectual coherence at the university . . . There must be a bridge built between what we learn of life and religion in the local church, and what we discover about life and religion at the university.”¹

These words, contained in a 1955 report on student work to the Canadian Lutheran Council, describe some of the basic rationale for the concern of the Lutheran Churches in Canada as they engaged in campus ministry during the past 2½ decades.

A CHALLENGE CONFRONTED

Already at the 1952 organizational meeting of the Canadian Lutheran Council as provisional chairman Mars A. Dale held up a vision of what this new organization should be doing, the area of student service was highlighted. Summarizing what the churches had been doing up to that point in ministry to students on the campuses of Canadian institutions of higher learning, Dale said, “The National Lutheran Council has been trying to do something in this regard . . . but trying to work from such a long distance, besides having the various Canadian groups in several regional set-ups, has not made it easy for anyone to function efficiently. The Canadian National Commit-

1. Minutes, Canadian Lutheran Council, December 6-7, 1955.

tee, LWF, has tried to do something, and was almost forced to have a hidden item in its budget for this work. However, the Committee was limited in scope of function and finances.”² In summary, very little was being done in Canada by the churches nationally, to work with Lutheran university students.

To be sure, ministry was being carried out through local congregations adjacent to the universities or at church schools through interested faculty members or administrators of these Lutheran institutions of learning. Also of vital significance was the Lutheran Student Association which was important for conserving “valuable leadership personnel on the level of the professionals.”³ At the same time, however, the involvement of the churches nationally was essential. The result was that the Canadian Lutheran Council formed in 1953 a Commission on Lutheran Student Service to actively promote student work.

Behind the formation of this Commission lay a lengthy report of two ad hoc study committees appointed to collect data about the state of student work in Eastern and in Western Canada. The report shows the most active Lutheran student work being carried out in Western Canada; most of it through locals of the Lutheran Student Association. Some of this strength in the west came because of involvement of students attending the two seminaries (Saskatoon), the Lutheran Colleges (Camrose and Regina), and the two Bible Schools (Camrose and Outlook). However, there was also an active local at the Edmonton and Calgary campuses of the University of Alberta (the latter now the University of Calgary). In addition to these National Lutheran Council-related ministries, student work was carried out in Winnipeg on a pan-Lutheran basis in affiliation with the Missouri Synod-related Gamma Delta. In Eastern Canada work among university students was being done in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, London, Waterloo and Hamilton.

The Eastern Study Committee observed that students on university campuses must not only be conserved but, in many instances, be won for Christ. It further observed that the problem of student service work needs to be seen in the light of the total public relations program of the Lutheran Church in Canada. A Lutheran Students’ Secretary for Canada, or one for the east and one for the west, was required. Furthermore, cooperation rather than competition in this area between the Canadian Lutheran Council and the Missouri Synod was important. Apparently both were being experienced for the report asked, “If Missouri in London cooperates, why not in Toronto?”

The report of the Western Study Committee highlighted four basic needs that student work placed before the Lutheran Church at that time. They were correlation of work between campuses, continuity of program, creation of general church interest, and counselling help.⁴

The already existing cooperation in student work with the Missouri Synod prompted the council to adopt a positive statement on this approach and to authorize the council’s executive director to approach Missouri Synod representatives “for the purpose of strengthening this correlation of effort and extending it to the work at other educational centres in Canada.”⁵ However, when this directive was implemented,

2. Minutes, Canadian Lutheran Council, December 4, 1952.

3. Minutes, Canadian Lutheran Council, December 3, 1953.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

the official attitude which the Missouri Synod adopted in the U.S. over against National Lutheran Council campus ministries was maintained also in Canada. This was cooperation only in areas which do not affect either the program or the spiritual ministry of Missouri Lutheran students, e.g., determining of Lutheran student population at the opening of an academic year.⁶ Thereupon the Canadian Lutheran Council's student work was planned, organized and developed without the Missouri Synod. The latter similarly went on its own way, calling Pastor F. Gumz as full-time student pastor for the University of Toronto in November, 1954.

WORKERS PROVIDED

As a way of confronting the challenge of providing national support for student work, regional secretaries seemed to be a first-level answer. The initial fact-finding committees had proposed this action and it was strongly supported both by the Maple Leaf Region in the west and by the Eastern Canada Region of the Lutheran Student Association. To assist the process and to make such staff support financially possible, both LSA regions offered to work out supplementary Aid Grants. Consequently, seminary intern, James Hendrickson, was appointed student worker in Western Canada and Pastor Robert Langen in Eastern Canada. Both appointments were for one year beginning August, 1955. Langen, a graduate student in Toronto, also served part-time as lecturer at Waterloo College.⁷ In addition to these two workers, the Commission appointed Lutheran contact pastors for all of the university and college cities.

In 1956 the newly constituted Division of Student Service provided greater permanence for work with university students by selecting Pastor Donald Voigts as "chaplain for students" in the west. Headquartered in Edmonton, he arranged privately for the purchase of a seven-room brick house near the University of Alberta campus to serve as a Lutheran student centre and as the residence for the new chaplain. The venture was a pilot plan which set the pattern for student work in Canada. A Lutheran Student Foundation was later set up to hold ownership of the property, finance it and supervise its operation on the local level.⁸

A parallel development occurred in Eastern Canada in 1957 when Pastor John Vedell accepted the call to fill the post left vacant the previous year when Langen accepted a teaching post at Waterloo College. Initially stationed in Toronto where the Missouri Synod was carrying out an intensive campus ministry, Vedell soon moved to London where a student centre was purchased.⁹

In 1959 Voigts was designated "Western Regional Secretary" and moved to Saskatoon. Pastor Herbert Keil was called to be chaplain-in-residence for Edmonton. The following year "Eastern Regional Secretary" Vedell moved to Montreal and Pastor Donald Johnson was named chaplain-in-residence for London.

The year 1962 saw the establishment of a full-time office of Executive Secretary of the Division of Student Service, an office to which Voigts was elected. The same year Pastor Robert Pearson became chaplain-in-residence at the University of B.C. in

6. Minutes, Canadian Lutheran Council, December 8-9, 1954.

7. Minutes, Executive Committee, Canadian Lutheran Council, April 19, 1955.

8. Minutes, Canadian Lutheran Council, November 29-30, 1956.

9. Minutes, Canadian Lutheran Council, November 26-27, 1958.

Vancouver. The following year Pastor Walter Goos accepted the call to serve as chaplain-in-residence for the University of Saskatchewan and in 1965 Pastor Del Beier became chaplain at McMaster University in Hamilton. Thus, by 1966 when the Canadian Lutheran Council gave way to the more inclusive Lutheran Council in Canada, the Division of Student Service could report six full-time chaplains and five seminary interns in campus work. In addition, Pastor Glen Johnson had become part-time assistant to the executive secretary in 1965, being replaced the following year by Pastor Marvin Haave who divided his time between this national responsibility with that of chaplain at the University of Manitoba.

A MORE INCLUSIVE VEHICLE

A varied pattern of interrelationships between the Canadian Lutheran Council-related campus ministries and that of the Missouri Synod marked the decade of rapid expansion described above. Except in Toronto, where work had been left to the Missouri Synod, the latter generally took a "town-gown"¹⁰ approach to campus ministry. Notable exceptions were Vancouver and Saskatoon where separate ministries were established by Pastor Herb Fox and Pastor Roger Humann in 1961 and 1965 respectively. In both locations a worshipping campus community, focused on a word and sacrament ministry, was developed alongside of the more program-oriented chaplaincy ministries of the Canadian Lutheran Council.

The birth of the more inclusive Lutheran Council in Canada in the latter part of 1966 set the stage for closer coordination and cooperation also in campus ministry. Two divisions of the new council gave attention to campus ministries; both of them were staffed by Voigts and Haave. The Division of Campus Foundation Activity provided the national umbrella for the ministries formerly carried out by the Canadian Lutheran Council and did not have the participation of the Missouri Synod. The Division of Educational Services, which also included the Missouri Synod, had a number of research, study and program support objectives but served primarily "to encourage the cooperation of participating bodies in establishing or sharing common facilities for campus programmes, and in developing mutually acceptable patterns for joint campus programmes."¹¹

A student centre, constructed at the University of B.C., was owned jointly by the Lutheran Campus Foundation of B.C. and by Missouri Synod's Alberta and British Columbia District. After a period of complementary ministry in this shared facility, a unified ministry emerged. A similar convergence of two campus ministries occurred in Saskatoon. At both of these locations, the merged ministries began to be funded by the churches through the Division of Educational Services in 1971. In Calgary, a sub-committee of the Division of Educational Services, known as the Joint Committee for Lutheran Educational Services in Alberta, considered the plans then under way for the

10. Letter of Philip Fry, April 2, 1979. The term "towngown" is commonly used in Missouri Synod circles to designate an approach to campus ministry which is carried out by a pastor whose church is near the campus and whose congregation is made up of people other than those attached to the university. Programs involving students are part of the congregational program and normally occur at the church rather than on campus.

11. Minutes, Lutheran Council in Canada, February 1-2, 1967.

development of two Lutheran campus ministries in that city. The sub-committee concluded that such a development could not be justified and recommended a unified campus ministry in Calgary. The resulting new ministry, begun in 1968, was immediately funded by the churches through the Division of Educational Services.

A crisis in campus ministry funding, aggravated by a breakdown in communication, resulted in a council study and re-evaluation of this work in 1972. As a result of the study, there was a restructuring resulting in direction and funding being placed in the hands of three regional boards who were directly responsible to the churches. National perspective and some staff assistance was still given by the council through its now reduced Division of Educational Services and Campus Foundation Activity. A crisis in funding for the council as a whole in 1976 resulted in a reduction of council staff, with council responsibility in campus ministry reduced to that of coordination and liaison through its new Division for Mission and Ministry.

CONTINUING COMMITMENT

Although one sees various configurations of how campus ministry was carried out by the churches, it is significant that the commitment to engage in this type of ministry has continued and remains strong. It must properly be acknowledged that this ministry in Canada was "influenced and guided by the vision of one man, Pastor Voigts."¹² Yet the commitment to this task precedes the time of Voigts' involvement and continues beyond it. From this study one sees that the churches used the two councils to channel their commitment to carry out this important ministry, particularly in the developmental stages. Today this work is under the responsibility of three regional boards. This has resulted in more limited national perspective to the work. However, it has also brought campus ministry into a more direct relationship with the church jurisdictional bodies.

Campus ministry has both reflected and effected a closer working relationship between the churches in Canada. This is true particularly within the context of the Canadian Lutheran Council churches but also and significantly with the Missouri Synod.

Relationships between campus ministry and the churches did not always experience smooth sailing. Campus ministers, who discovered unity among themselves even though they were members of different Lutheran bodies, often became impatient with the snail's pace of unity talks in the churches. Also, working in the university context, campus pastors necessarily adopted approaches which seemed at times to be at variance with the concern and practice of one or the other Lutheran bodies. These circumstances occasioned tensions which, however, were creative in that the churches were challenged to re-think their idea of mission and their ministry in Canada.

12. "Report on Campus Ministry," p. 2 attached to the Minutes, Executive Committee, Lutheran Council in Canada, May 24, 1972.