

The VOICE

June 2021

Missouri District Newsletter



In This Issue: **CAMPUS MINISTRY**

From the President's Desk

Campus Ministry: A Team Effort

Retention of children, youth, and young adults is consistently one of the chief concerns expressed by members of Missouri District congregations. One of the things needed in retaining young people during their years attending university is intentionality. This issue of the Voice focuses on campus ministry. In particular, intentionality is essential from parents and congregations alike. Congregations can be intentional about this important time by connecting parents to campus ministries near to the respective colleges that their children will attend. Parents can be intentional about this by submitting their child's contact information to the Missouri District campus ministry network for colleges and universities in Missouri (<https://www.molcms.college/>). This will assist the campus ministry in reaching out to your young person.

There are many considerations for parents and young people alike in choosing a college. Cost and the majors offered are among the most important factors. However, pastors and church leaders should also encourage parents and young people that a place where they can grow and be fed spiritually is just as important. Each year, young people at universities across Missouri are involved in campus ministries through worship, study, service, and other activities. Sadly though, large numbers of young people from Missouri District congregations never attend worship services or campus ministry activities. Our prayer is that together we can work to retain our young people through our campus ministries and reach new people with the Gospel.

We are aware of the many challenges that our young people face on university campuses and how often their faith will be attacked. Yet campus ministries provide a safe and caring place for young people to find support and encouragement during these critical years. We invite your prayers and your support for our campus ministries across Missouri. Together we can intentionally prepare young adults and their parents for these years and connect them with campus ministries where they can grow in Christ. If you would like to learn more about the campus ministries of the Missouri District, please contact Leah Sieveking (leah.sieveking@mo.lcms.org).

A key component of our work as the Missouri District is Lutheran education—from early childhood centers through campus ministry and even onto the seminary. Look for some exciting updates and a special campaign as the summer goes on!

— Leah Sieveking

Fraternally in Christ,



President Lee Hagan



COFFEE AND CAMPUS MINISTRY

As our feature on campus ministry continues, here is a unique campus ministry in the St. Louis area: Reliant Church at Crave Coffeehouse. Reliant is close to the urban center of St. Louis, on property adjacent to Saint Louis University's medical campus and less than a mile from SLU's main campus. Travis Besel, Campus and Urban Missionary at Reliant, explains their unique ministry opportunities.

"Crave Coffeehouse is an amazing asset in bringing students into our space," explains Besel. "A coffeehouse is a relaxed and inviting environment which we try to leverage in meeting students and introducing them to our church and college ministry." Crave Coffeehouse and Reliant operate in the same 1868 building, renovated in 2005. Reliant worships on Sundays, while Crave serves delicious drinks and creates a gathering space during the week.



Over time Reliant's campus ministry has shifted from having "on campus" gatherings and events at the main SLU campus to using Crave as a meeting place. Besel notes that this has not only made hosting events easier, but has opened the door for students attending other colleges to feel more welcome and connected, "We have had students from St. Louis College of Pharmacy, Missouri Baptist, and St. Louis Community College in addition to our SLU students."

Besel has observed, though, that despite being a university in an urban setting, SLU still has a high percentage of students that live near or on campus. "The 'land-locked' mindset, I think, is a little bit unique for an urban campus," says Besel. "Students do like to explore the city and see what it has to offer, but overall SLU has a strong campus-centric community." This makes it useful when Reliant does events or advertising on SLU's campus, like attending the campus fair at the beginning of fall semesters.

Besel's advice to students: "College is not a time to take a break from your faith. Many of the people who do this, lose their faith for good. So as you begin college (or a new semester if you are already in college), make your faith a priority from the start. ... Schoolwork should not be an excuse to skip church and Bible study. Even if you are in a rigorous program, you have the time, you just need to be proactive with your schedule. If you can't find a good campus ministry or church at your school, ask your home pastor or youth leader for help in locating one. College is hard and presents some big challenges, but God's love is bigger. He doesn't promise things will always go well for us, instead he promises to be with us every step of the way!"



CAMPUS MINISTRY NETWORK

Connecting Colleges Across Missouri

Sometimes one of the most difficult aspects of starting something new is knowing *how* to get started. Whether reading this as a new student, a returning student, or a relative of a student, if the question of how to be involved with a Lutheran ministry while at college is on your heart, look no further than the Campus Ministry Network. The CMN is a District supported initiative and serves as an affiliation of the many campus ministries across the Missouri District. They serve students in two main ways: their resource website and building up those involved in campus ministry through leadership training, retreats, and fellowship.

The Website

The website <https://www.molcms.college/> serves as an excellent resource to connect interested parties directly with the contact person of that particular campus ministry. Whether a student, parent, Pastor, or church leader, contacts can be made. Rev. Dr. Kent Pierce runs the Campus Ministry Network. (He also serves as pastor at Campus Lutheran in Columbia). And he explains that one of the hardest things about campus ministry is making that initial contact. Schools used to ask students their religious preference and then pass on that information accordingly to the religious group selected. But now that doesn't happen, and there are a lot of students and contacts that get missed. This website helps bridge that process. Simply visit <https://www.molcms.college/>, click on the student's school, submit the form, and the information goes automatically to the person of contact with that campus ministry. It's a wonderful resource to help make Lutheran connections stronger.

GO Leadership Retreat

Another excellent resource for students in campus ministry is the GO Leadership Retreat. These retreats are hosted yearly (usually in February) in Columbia. They serve to help students solidify living out their faith while at school. Pierce notes that these retreats aren't just for students who serve in positions of leadership at campus ministries, but they are "open to all students," says Pierce. "We want to let all students recognize their identity as a baptized child of Christ. ... we want to give them some leadership skills so they can take those with them wherever God sends them to be."

This past February was the third year for the retreat and featured District employee Rev. Marty Hasz, PLPC as the keynote on the topic "Spiritual First Aid". Pierce says students learned how God created humans to relate to others and how to identify when someone is struggling with something and how to best come alongside them. Mark your calendars for next February's event!

Rev. Marty Hasz, PLPC leads students at the 2020 GO Leadership Retreat in Columbia



A MINISTRY IN ALL THINGS



Students enjoy a meal at partitions made by Pastor Schweigert (second from right.)

COVID-19 definitely brought some challenges to the Lutheran Student Center at the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg. But Rev. Jon-Michael Schweigert, who spearheads the campus ministry there, said they used it as a “bridge year” to get back to a more normal situation. In spring of 2020 students didn’t finish out the year. Fall of 2020 students were back in person, but with restrictions. One example was trying to gather for meals. Schweigert got creative and installed partitions so that students could still have that fellowship while maintaining college guidelines.

Top Tips for Campus Ministry

Schweigert notes that his years of campus ministry experience has taught him “don’t be afraid to be less than perfect.” Sometimes an event or ministry effort may have a poorer result. But it’s okay to try something and do it differently the next time. He says it’s also good to consider your goal. If you’re having a fundraising event, have a fundraising event. If it’s an outreach event, have it be an outreach event. Advertise well and don’t bait-and-switch. He reminds that it’s also important to respect the rules that the organization you’re serving has in place. And, ultimately, equip and empower your students to do the ministry. “Students become the lifeblood of the church,” explains Schweigert. “They stay with [campus ministries] 4 or 5 years, but then where do they go? To the congregations.”

Reaching new students can be challenging, but people wish to feel heard and connected. Ministries should remember to be *interested* more than interesting. Genuinely care about the people you meet. Schweigert also notes that it’s important to use language appropriate for your community. “I have students who don’t know what ‘Lutheran’ means, who think we’re associated with Martin Luther King Jr.” Ultimately, be real with the students: open and forthcoming. “You’re a ministry,” says Schweigert. “Don’t trick people and then work in Jesus later. The current generation is very hungry for truth and we have the truth from which all truth stems. Lead with Jesus... In the end, God and that person already have a relationship, even if it’s just being created in his image. So lean into it.”

With the new school year approaching, Schweigert’s final advice: respect the seeker. “Especially for people who are wanting to have a serious, deep conversation. “You’ve got to start with care and compassion for the other person,” says Schweigert. “Remember ‘it’s no longer I who live, but He who lives in me.’” Schweigert notes that during COVID-19 student centers and clubs didn’t experience growth, but “interest in God has skyrocketed in the 18-20’s age range, including in religious traditionalism. The current generation has seen ‘anything goes’ and it’s bad.” So they have a big recruitment year planned and are hopeful to do more targeted outreach. Plus, if all goes according to plan, they’ll have the fan favorites like the ice cream social and welcome back BBQ during the first week of school and pumpkin picking and visiting an apple orchard in the fall!



NAVIGATING THE COLLEGE WAY

Contributor: Gina Martens, Director of Family Life at St. Paul in Concordia

This summer many teens across Missouri will find themselves in new and difficult situations as they get ready to move into the next chapter of their life: miles away from home and sharing a room with a stranger, excited but nervous about meeting new people, unsure about that professor with the “impossible” reputation, walking out of the dorm and into a sea of faces... After four years of high school, routines have become comfortable so it is logical to conclude that transitioning from the very familiar to unknown can be stressful. Here are some guidelines for students and parents.

STUDENTS

Talk with others that have attended the same university. The people who have been around the block before can be a wealth of information as you get ready to make decisions about what college is best for you. They can answer questions for you or offer advice on things that you didn't even think about.

Plug into a Christian community and be involved. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” Find a community of support on campus as well as a church community. By plugging into a community of people with the same morals and values as you, you have connected yourself with a vital support system. God created us for community which is a necessity no matter how mature we think we are in our spiritual life. But you can't just sit passively in your dorm room waiting for opportunities, you have to be proactive in meeting new people and be willing to put yourself outside of your comfort zone.

If going away to college, stay connected to home, but from a distance. This can be a tough, since the urge to go home is natural and comfortable. However, spending weekends at home deprives you of those community building experiences in college. Know that almost everyone gets homesick in some way. And while that uncomfortable feeling might be soothed for a short time by going home, returning to the dorm room Sunday night is like going back to square one. You can't expect to grow in your community if you don't invest some intentional time to grow it. Alternatively, if you are enjoying your new found freedom and are involved in many things, don't forget to stay connected with your parents. They want to hear about what's going on with you. They miss you too. You don't have to have an hour long conversation with them, but let them know how things are going and what things you are enjoying about college life. They also make a great resource for questions and guidance.

Find an organizational method or time management system that works for you. This is one consistent piece of advice that I hear from college students. Being prepared is key and having a system to help you be successful is imperative, whether that be a physical planner where things are written down, an app on your phone, or a whiteboard calendar. Do whatever it takes to help keep you organized. You will probably find that the workload is more than what you have been used to in high school, so keeping yourself organized can help relieve some of the stress. If you are involved in any extracurricular activities, having a plan for your time is even more important. You only have so many hours in a day and don't forget that you have to sleep, eat, and go to class. The hours that are left over are yours to manage wisely.





Ask questions and talk with your professors. Approaching a professor for the first time can be a scary experience, but time and time again I have heard from college students that it is so very important to ask questions early on if you do not understand something. Most professors want to see you succeed and are more than willing to help you, but they are not going to come to you. Take the initiative and ask for help. Use your professor's office hours, contact them via email or your learning platforms. This shows them that you care about learning. Universities have a lot of resources like study groups and tutoring sessions that you can be involved in to help you in understanding class material. Use what is available to you to put yourself in a position to succeed early on.

Take time for yourself. This is important because the stresses of college are real. Build "down time" into your schedule. This looks different for each individual. For some it might be hanging out with friends, for some it might be doing some type of physical activity, for others it might be taking a nap, or listening to music. You are responsible for your own health and well being. You have one body that God has blessed you with. Take care of it.

Develop a routine for yourself – you are responsible for you. In college, expect more responsibilities. You are responsible for getting yourself to class. (Also, don't skip classes. It may seem fun at the time, but you will regret that decision down the road.) You are responsible for keeping on top of your work. You are responsible for your education. You are responsible for getting yourself to church. You are responsible for doing your own laundry. You are responsible for taking care of yourself. (Eating right, getting enough sleep, exercising, having personal devotion time, etc.) Develop a routine that lists out your priorities and stick to it as much as possible.

Lean into your identity in Christ. This is one of the most valuable lessons to absorb. Your identity is found in *Christ*. Your identity is not wrapped up in the clothes you wear, the sports you play, the organizations you are involved in, or the accolades you accumulate. You have ultimate worth because God says so! He created you in His own image and you are His. "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:16a). Rest secure in that promise of love.

Pray daily! Keep God in your schedule. He wants to be a priority in your life. Talk to Him often, when you wake up, in the car, on your walk to class, before a big test, at the end of the day, when you're in a slump, and when things are going well. Download an app that gives you daily bible verses. Keep your bible close at hand. Do you get the picture? "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18). Your Savior desires to have a relationship with you. Take His hand and let Him lead you.



PARENTS

Be supportive, but don't be a helicopter. Your child needs some room to grow on their own, and that won't happen with you hovering over them. Sometimes it takes a little tough love by pointing them to growth and connections rather than caving in to their plea to come home. You want them to learn to be independent individuals, so the focus is on long term growth instead of short term inconveniences. You want them to be able to experience happiness and confidence knowing that they can be successful at taking responsibility as they grow into adulthood. Sometimes this means experiencing short term sorrow in order to point them towards long term joy.

Pray, pray, and then pray some more. Pray for your children. Pray that God would lead them in the way that they should go to best serve Him, and pray that your child will be open to His calling. It's tough to let your children go, it really is, but trust that God has a plan for them and that He will use them right where they are at this very moment in time to accomplish His work for His glory. Romans 9:17 says, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Pray that your child would know where their true source of strength comes from and that they would tap into that source daily. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

Discuss expectations. Discuss expectations before they leave for college— and sooner is better than later. Be open to their thoughts as well. They are going to be on their own. What expectations do they have of themselves? What expectations do you have of them when they are living away from home? Will they be working during the school year? What are the expectations when they come home for the summer? Even if they are not going away to college, those conversations still need to be had. The family dynamic is changing. It's better to be proactive than reactive.

Fiscal responsibility. This is a big one. It's important to be financially aware, both parents and students. What is your financial plan for college? What is the cost of tuition? Will your child be working during the school year? Do they have scholarships to help pay for college? What does paying back a student loan look like? Encourage your child to take the time to fill out scholarship applications. Even the lower dollar amounts add up. Filling out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is also a good idea as you could likely get money for filling it out early.

College is an exciting time for families, but the transition is made easier if planning and preparations begin taking place sooner rather than later. Keep those lines of communication open. Ultimately, we want to proclaim the name of Christ in our daily vocations, whatever they might be, giving Him the glory and working for His kingdom knowing that our true destination and reward lies beyond our life here on this earth.



Bach, Amanda, et al. College 101: A Christian Survival Guide. St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2010.

Gentry, Austin. 10 Things Every Christian Should Know for College: A Student's Guide on Doubt Community & Identity. Gentry Publishing, 2018.



Missouri District

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD