

WORDS of WITNESS AND WISDOM

The Legacy of Lutheran Campus Ministry

My Decade in Campus Ministry: At ELCA universities, like Texas Lutheran University in Seguin, Campus Ministry is woven into the life of the campus. The chapel itself is the central building on campus. There's a break in the daily class schedule for a twenty-minute chapel service three days a week. The school year begins with a festive Inaugural Service in the chapel and ends with Baccalaureate – with Sunday and Wednesday gatherings all year long. Many students choose TLU to have that church-relatedness season their time of growth and learning. They are elected to offices within the Campus Congregation and get experience preaching, leading, planning, and supporting people in their needs. They often become leaders in the church after graduation. These days I bump into former students everywhere I go. They are God's gift to us. And I look upon the ten years I spent as TLU's Campus Pastor as God's gift to me.

-Pastor Stan Meyer, TLU Campus Pastor, 1982 – 1992

We tend to speak in broad generalities, and with exaggerations . . . but quite literally, Lutheran Campus Ministry changed my life.

I showed up at Luther House near Oregon State University—an extremely shy girl. Painfully shy. Yet something happened there. I discovered and developed my musical gifts. These days I have the confidence to perform in front of hundreds or even thousands of people. I give most of the credit to the warm, safe environment at Luther House, filled with open and accepting students and campus ministers.

We had a group of students who would lead folk services at the local church on a monthly basis. We enjoyed it so much that we took our worship on the road and, in time, we visited the home church of every student who lived within an hour or two of campus.

On Wednesday evenings, we held an informal bible study and fellowship. Like the "guitar choir" (as we called ourselves), it was a safe place for me to take small timid steps out of my shell.

I made many close and lasting friendships from that group. Oh, and one of those friends . . . I married. Yes, love bloomed for me at Luther House.

A few years later, when my husband, Bob, was in graduate school, we joined the Lutheran student church near the Colorado State University campus. Again, it was a safe place to grow, and I took an active role in leading music there. A few

months before we left town, I held my very first solo concert at the church, something that I never would have attempted without the support of our campus pastor.

I still have some of that shyness in me, but I'm a far cry from that oh-so-timid girl who talked to shoes, instead of faces. And I owe it all to the encouragement I received through Campus Ministry.

It was a gift I never expected, and can never fully repay.

-Harriet Ames, Christ the Servant, Denton
Oregon State University, Corvallis 1972-76
Colorado State University, Fort Collins 1980-83

During my undergraduate study at the University of North Texas (Denton), I was grateful for the United Ministry Center, next door to my dorm. As a music major, studying piano, I lived with much stress and few true friendships (read: isolation) during my three years in that highly competitive environment. Additionally, North Texas was a commuter school at the time, and I didn't commute home to Houston! Fortunately, at the United Ministry Center, I was welcomed warmly, as I practiced there many hours a day, and I felt connected (although indirectly) to the ministry of the Methodists and Roman Catholics who provided for that space and that outreach ministry.

With no transportation, I was unable to worship at the Lutheran church of my choice, so I worshipped regularly with the Roman Catholic community on campus, right there next door to my dorm. Their acceptance of me during worship and at the Lord's Table, no questions asked, was deeply appreciated.

During the summers, I worked at Camp Chrysalis and Camp Shalom and met many college students whose lives were richly blessed by Lutheran campus ministry. Oh, how I longed for such a ministry on *my* college campus, where I could listen, study, grow, serve and lead. The Methodists and Catholics were welcoming and kind, but I was deeply rooted as a Lutheran, and I wanted a community of Lutherans for friendship, support and mutual ministry.

Now, our synod has such a ministry in Denton, serving the University of North Texas and Texas Woman's University. I'm very grateful every time Pastor Celene tells me of her ministry and that of the students, peer ministers, staff and professors – and the supportive ministry of Christ the Servant – in reaching out to the university communities in Denton.

May God bless this ministry richly!

-Pastor Carol E. Spencer
Associate Vice President for Marketing, ELCA Mission Investment Fund
University of North Texas, 1973-76

Lutheran Campus Ministry played a vital part of my life during my undergraduate years at North Texas State University, now known as the University of North Texas. When I first arrived at NTSU in the fall of 1981, I became involved with LCM. The pastor from my home congregation had contacted the campus minister to let her know that I would be a student there.

I felt at home and welcomed with LCM during a period of great transition in my life. I remember crowding in to Ann Nuechterlein's tiny office for Bible study on Sundays. On Sunday nights, we took turns preparing a "Cost Supper" at the Lutheran church for our fellow students. Since the dorm cafeterias did not serve food on Sunday nights, it was a fun way to get together to cook and have a cheap meal. It also gave us a chance to invite other students from NTSU and Texas Woman's University.

We had ecumenical partnerships with the other campus ministries, including Bible studies with the Canterbury House. (My husband, Brian, was active in the Canterbury House.) A group of us took a spring break trip to work for Habitat for Humanity in San Antonio with the Lutherans, Disciples of Christ and Methodists. We stayed in a convent in San Antonio. It was my one, and only, time to be in a convent. The trip was certainly memorable.

Some of my fondest memories involved our group's participation in Lutheran Student Movement. Our campus minister encouraged us to attend the retreats and events offered through LSM. At retreats in Fort Worth, Belton, and College Station, we met Lutherans involved in campus ministries throughout the state of Texas. At the national LSM conference that I attended in Erie, Pennsylvania, I met college-aged Lutherans from throughout the United States. It was a highlight hearing Walt Wangerin as the keynote speaker.

I credit Lutheran Campus Ministry with helping me remain grounded in my faith. I never went through a period of time when I was not involved with church. I felt the support of my campus minister and fellow students. When a question about faith came up during a midnight session talking in the dorm, I had somewhere to turn. My friends at LCM helped me search for the answers.

As the mother of a daughter at UNT, I believe LCM continues to play an essential role on the college campus. Students need a place to feel at home when they face the challenges of living away from family. These young adults need a group who will help them as they change and grow, both intellectually and spiritually. We need to continue to support Lutheran Campus Ministry and the vital work that takes place on college campuses.

-Dixie Pennington, Grace, Carrollton
University of North Texas, 1981-1985

While attending the University of Texas in Austin, my girlfriend came to visit. She was Lutheran, so we went to worship at the University Lutheran Center. I was amazed at the worship service (the whole service printed in the bulletin, a band of mixed instruments - no organ or piano, communion all the way around the altar!) and the pastor's message was inspiring, as well as intellectually challenging.

Pastor Curt Johnson (PJ) was a bouncing off the wall kind of guy who spoke the Gospel to young people moving from the hippie years to disco. Being a Southern Protestant, I was captured by his presentation of the Lutheran Gospel perspective inside modern images. He introduced me to the idea that faith was living with ambiguity, anchored on the certainty of a Lord who goes with us through that ambiguity.

I attended services even when my girlfriend wasn't in town visiting; I played catcher on the Lutheran Center intramural baseball team; I was confirmed in my Junior year (as seen in photo). I married the girlfriend (lady in red in photo!) and was affirmed by her and PJ to go to seminary. More than 30 years later, I remember fondly my time with Campus Ministry and miss the voice of the Gospel that PJ brought to the Church.

And what exactly was I thinking, wearing those purple pants to church?

Pastor Russell Vardell
Dean, NT-NL Parish Lay Ministry Academy
Pastor, Our Saviour's, Durant, Oklahoma
University of Texas

When my oldest two children went off to college, I looked to see if there was a campus ministry at their schools. I suggested to the boys that if they needed to meet a different group of people other than those who were in their classes, they should look into Lutheran Campus Ministry!

My oldest child, Richard, went to University of Texas at Austin. He was spending all of his time in his dorm room reading and not getting out much. His roommate was involved in LCM study groups. Richard checked it out and ended up playing intramural sports with them. Eventually he was elected to the council. He later served on the call committee. At LCM, he's had many chances for service, including trips to Mexico and Costa Rica. He's been camping with UT LCM and LCM groups from other campuses. Lutheran Campus Ministry has given him many opportunities to grow and make new friends. He graduated this past December and was asked by his Pastor to prepare a promotional video about Lutheran Campus Ministry. He is still active with the group in Austin.

My second child, Ryan attends Texas A&M in College Station and is involved in Aggie Lutherans, which meets at Peace Lutheran Church in College Station. He, too, has

made many friends there. Ryan went on the Luther tour in Germany this past spring break. He has also been on camping trips. They had a great time at the Austin and College Station (UT – A&M) campout. That was on neutral territory!

My third child, Robin, is a junior in high school. She's been at Briarwood every summer since completing the 2nd grade. As a part of the LYLE program, she's met high school and college students from all around and she looks forward to continuing these great connections when she goes to college through campus ministry.

As a parent, I feel that all these experiences have helped shape the character and faith of all my children. For that, I am extremely grateful. I wholeheartedly support these programs where my children can safely grow in their faith and spiritual lives.

-Terry Reiningger
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Garland

I was very involved at the Lutheran Campus Ministry at the University of Texas. As I went through my college years—and even now immediately after graduating—Lutheran Campus Ministry has been of great importance in my life. In it, I found a community where I can share my own beliefs and continue to strengthen my own faith. Several of my best friends have come from LCM, so I can hardly imagine my life without it. It was such a wonderful environment that allowed me to truly search and discover who I was as a person.

I think when you look at the campus ministry model, especially the one down at UT, you can see what a church can truly be. People attend because they want to and not out of habit. New and sometimes outrageous ideas can be entertained. Students are the community; if they don't work, then it doesn't happen. It trains people how to be leaders and get involved with their own spirituality.

-Richard Reiningger, Gloria Dei, Garland
University of Texas 2004-2007

When I came to college, I didn't know any other Lutherans on campus. I had plenty of friends that went to church, but none of their churches felt like home. Through Lutheran Campus Ministry, I found a great college Bible study group and a number of wonderful churches in the area. Lutheran Campus Ministry let me know that even though I had left my hometown and home church, everything I needed to continue to learn and grow spiritually was still available and that there were loving people who sincerely cared for me in my new home.

-Bart Klaus
Baylor University, 2005-present
LCM Peer Minister

I entered Texas A&M in June 1945. My home church was First Lutheran in Waco, Texas. Upon arrival at A&M, I was told that Sunday services were held in the campus YMCA on Sunday evenings. At that time, a pastor commuted to A&M from Brenham, Texas – some 51 miles away.

Very soon Pastor Fred Mgebhoff accepted a call to the new church, Our Savior's Lutheran (ALC), at College Station. This was a very small congregation, but they willingly accepted student attendees, and made us feel welcome. Soon Pastor Mgebhoff organized a Lutheran Student's Association group on the A&M campus. This was a predecessor of today's Lutheran Campus Ministry (LCM). We elected officers and held regular meetings, as well as attending worship services on Sunday. Between 1945 and 1949, the year I graduated, the enrollment grew from about 6000 to 9000 all male students.

Pastor Mgebhoff provided not only ministry activities, but coordinated a visit by Dr. Morris Wee, from the National ALC headquarters, as an inspirational speaker. Also, he arranged for us to visit the LSA groups at Texas Lutheran in Seguin and the University of Texas at Austin.

For me the LSA filled what would have been a large void in my life, at a challenging, yet rewarding time, and I sincerely hope and pray that the mission of the Lutheran Campus Ministry can be encouraged and supported substantially as any other mission might be. It is an important **LINK** to keep Christ present in the student's life during a challenging time away from home.

-Edward S. Anderson, Trinity, Fort Worth
Texas A&M University, 1945-1949