

Topic: If you were responsible for providing opportunities on your campus to reach out to students struggling with their faith, what would you do?

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Matthew 11: 28 says, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Our society today is one that is fast paced and continually moving; it is easy to become weary and to carry these heavy burdens. However, I would argue that one of the best places to find these weary people would be on a college campus. After just graduating from Alma College, I can speak from experience that the amount of different loads college students have to struggle with are many and are overwhelming. A college campus is an easy place to loose yourself, and to loose faith in God. But it’s also a great place to rekindle your relationship with God and with a community of faith, searching for that same rest. Through this essay I will look at ways that I can help those on a college campus struggling with their faith find ways to develop their beliefs within themselves, their knowledge of God, and faith in their community around them.

One of the best things about spiritual life on a college campus is the diversity of religious beliefs and different faiths that come out. Knowing this, when someone comes looking for spiritual guidance, and comes looking for how to find their faith, the first thing that I would do is provide a list of all of the spiritual opportunities that the campus provides. The hope is that if the campus has a well developed spiritual life, there will be many different groups that this person could look into, to see which one fits their personality and beliefs. If the campus isn’t well developed in spiritual life, then changes

would have to be made in order to become more diverse and open to the development of spiritual life.

Spiritual life on a college campus isn't all about these small groups however. An extremely important part is for the college campus to know that we are here and to know what we are about. And the sole purpose of spiritual life on a college campus is to provide an environment where people can come and talk and engage in fellowship with others through God and Jesus Christ. It's a place where people can learn more about who God is; to learn that God is an "infinite, eternal and unchangeable" being (Shorter Catechism, 7.004). Having a group, either a fellowship group or bible study, can help enhance ones faith during the stress of exams, homework, social relationship troubles, and personal struggles. And having many different groups, which offer many different opportunities, allows students to be part of more than one group. Within these groups students can study the bible together, go to concerts together, worship together, and do mission work together. Through these bonding experiences students are working on their faith struggles, and maybe not even realizing it. It's important to be part of these groups, but it is just as important to find faith on your own. That's why in addition to having these groups available, it would also be extremely helpful, and appropriate to have an open space where students can come and go as they please to pray, meditate, or just be alone with their thoughts.

Now that we know that a community is important, and that alone time is important, it's right to look at what these groups and space can offer students who are struggling finding their faith. First, being alone provides a private spot for people to go and cry and pray. This maybe what people are searching for. They may not want a

group; they may just need that space and time where they can talk to God about what is going on in their lives. And second is the community and groups. In small groups a fellowship and bond is formed, which provides a safe place for people to share their feelings about faith and God comfortably. Having opportunities like a prayer group, where people come and share their joys and concerns with other, is an idea to form these connections. Offering prayer buddies, where you have just one person who you know is praying for you and you are praying for them can provide this connection on a more personal level. But for others, it's important to have a more informal setting. Therefore, some groups can just offer a place to gather and sing worship songs, create cards for people's birthdays on campus, and to just chat about current events and how their faith pertains to those situations. The main theme in all of this is that each person is going to find their faith in a different way. The connection between all of it is that each group glorifies the Lord through studying the scriptures and praying to God offering our thanks and praise for all that God has given us. It doesn't matter what brings you to the group that you decide to become a member of. The group could have main theme like, athletes are members, all female members, all male members, a Jewish group, a Catholic group, a non-denominational group, or a group for those interested in the ministry. Through these groups one can find faith and friends at the same time. And it doesn't matter whether the group that you belong to focuses mainly on bible studies, prayer, or fellowship, each group glorifies God, which is our purpose as God's people. And by glorifying God we deepen our relationship with God, which helps us find our rest.

Because a college campus becomes one's home for 4 years, it's important to provide activities for holidays. It's a good chance that many people can't get home for

Christmas or Easter. Providing services will give the students the spiritual uplift they need during this time. But also providing special activities during the Advent or Lenten weeks can help get students in the mood for these holidays. For example, having a movie night, where you watch a pop-culture movie and then talk about the religious themes in it, could help students to find God outside of the church structure and realize that religious themes run deep in many things all around them. Also, during the Lenten season having a bible study about sin, it's meaning, and what it means to be saved by Christ. When talking about sin, we can talk about the Ten Commandments, what it means to follow them today and what it means to break them today. I believe that one of the biggest miscommunications about the bible and modern society is that either the bible doesn't relate to society now, or we have to take everything that the bible says in context. There doesn't seem to be this middle ground that is important to look at. It's important to know what these people in biblical time were going through so that we can learn from it and see what it means for our time.

A big way that I've seen people find their faith is through helping others. Sometimes we have to see the worst to see how God is working in our lives. That's why I think it's important to offer these Alternative Breaks, where students give up their breaks to go and help others instead of going on a social vacation. And even though this isn't a new or original idea, it's something I'm passionate about and believe that students get a lot out of. I know from experience that many students go on these breaks, which aren't involved with on-campus spiritual life, and have a change in belief and a renewal in faith. For we know that when we hear the word, place it in our hearts, and take those words and use them in our lives, we are fulfilling God's will. Being able to be offered

the chance to travel and help others seem to be a popular idea for students. There is something about talking with people who have nothing and helping to rebuild a life that is refreshing to our own souls. And if these opportunities weren't available, I know many people wouldn't have found what they were looking for when they decided to go on the trip. So having this available does help these students form a deeper connection with their faith and with God.

Another opportunity that is important to have, especially for Christians, is the Lord's Supper. Being able to have this, at least monthly, can help students remember what Christ did for us and through this death we may have life in his name. But for those who are struggling, having this offered to all give them the opportunity to learn what the sacrament is and why it is that we partake in it. Through this learning opportunity students can be reassured of God's love for us. I believe that offering this sacrament through a worship service that is open to all can help define whose we are as Christians. Having an environment, first and foremost, where we can explore the meanings of the sacraments, and be able to practice them is a place where spiritual growth can happen.

Many students on a college campus struggle with finding themselves and with finding God. It's easy at our highest time of our lives to forget about God, to praise God, and to glorify God; so when our lowest times come, it can feel as if we are lost and without God. Having a campus with a good chapel program can help to provide activities and opportunities to refresh students in order to see God in all moments of our lives. And because people find their faith in many different ways, it's important to have a variety of opportunities to fit many different types of people. And if someone is still looking for something that the spiritual life isn't offering then it's time to start something new. There

is always room to change and openness for new opportunities that could end up helping more than just that one person. I believe however, that on a college campus, one of the most important parts is to have a community of faith where you can turn to when you are feeling lost. In these high stress environments, it is extremely helpful to know a group of people who believe similar ideas that you do and people who you know are going through the same things you are. I know from a personal experience that if it wasn't for the connections that I made through the chapel program at Alma College, then I wouldn't be headed in the direction that I'm going in. And sometime the reason that people are struggling with their faith is because they can't find a connection they use to have, either back at home or just in the past. Creating this kind of environment can make people feel more comfortable and more open to finding what they are looking for. Having a balance of formal activities and informal activities, worship services that offer both worship songs and hymns, group and alone time, paves the way for an "all are welcomed" feeling within the chapel environment. This is what I've strived to do in my work at the Alma College chapel, and what I hope to continue to do in my future ministries. For sometimes it's not easy to just say that we believe, but we have to do something and learn something in order to understand. It is important to turn to the Lord for rest. Because when we are struggling, and when we feel that we are lost, we tend to not see what is in front of us. We can be blinded to how God is working through us. Being a vital part of the college campus helps to get the word out there that if someone is in need for spiritual guidance or uplift that there is a place where they can go. By having a chaplain on campus and chapel workers, who represent the chapel and help the many groups in the activities that they want to do, also provides a resource to finding how students can become more

involved with the spiritual life on campus. This is a difficult concept at times because of everything else that people get involved in on college campuses, but if the chapel continues to reach out to the students, students will eventually reach back to find their rest.

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