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Catholic Campus Ministers Need to Find Ways to Help College Students Face Moral Decisions

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CATHOLIC CAMPUS MINISTERS NEED TO FIND WAYS TO HELP COLLEGE STUDENTS FACE MORAL DECISIONS

DAYTON, Ohio — If Catholic campus ministers don’t find ways to help college students make moral decisions, the consciences of young adults will continue to be formed by a consumer-producer society, says the director of a study on the ministries of the nation’s 1,735 Catholic campus ministers.

“There’s more to being human than being producers and consumers,” says Don McCrabb, executive director of the Catholic Campus Ministry Association, a national organization for Catholic campus ministers based at the University of Dayton, “and it’s up to campus ministers to find ways of asking college students questions like what it means to be a human, a citizen, a social being.

“There is a lack of consensus in society about what is essential, about what constitutes the basic values we want to live by,” says McCrabb, who designed the study to examine the attitudes and behaviors of campus ministers regarding the effectiveness of campus ministry for conscience formation and for cultivating an awareness of environmental justice. “As we push that question farther and farther back we see the failure of the modern world. In the modern world, the story of life is a rags-to-riches story. But what we found in the quest for wealth is that people and the earth get destroyed. People go to war over oil and wage holocausts.”

According to the results of the survey, conducted in February and tabulated this fall, 70 percent of the campus ministers surveyed felt they were not doing enough to form the consciences of college students, and they identified lack of time and resources as the major obstacle to conscience formation.

In 1985 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote a pastoral letter on campus ministry, outlining six major aspects of work for campus ministers. Those aspects include forming faith communities, educating students on the Catholic faith tradition, forming the Christian conscience in students, educating students on justice issues, facilitating personal development and developing leaders for the future.

McCrabb says the survey revealed campus ministers see themselves as most effective in facilitating the personal development of college students and developing leaders for the future.

“We’ve made tremendous progress since the bishop’s letter in 1985,” McCrabb says. “It’s now time to stop, consider the progress that’s been made and develop areas that have

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been neglected. The intellectual aspects of campus ministry — conscience formation, teaching the faith tradition and educating for justice — are areas that are underdeveloped.”

Although campus ministers see their role as educational, the study indicates that campus ministers lack clarity about their role. McCrabb says that’s understandable because campus ministry is considered both an expression of the educational mission of the church as well as pastoral ministry.

“Campus ministry, like every ministry within the church, is both educational and pastoral. The university, however, which clearly values education, requires a strong pastoral presence to balance academic rigors,” he says. “In attempting to provide this balance, it appears that campus ministry has given little attention to its own approach to education.”

McCrabb says the study identifies two clear needs of campus ministry: developing a wholistic — heart, mind and soul — educational model and finding ways to invite, encourage and convince college students to stop and pause long enough to address moral decision-making.

“How do campus ministers convince students they have a need?” McCrabb asks. “As a society, we do a good job of convincing people who don’t have a need that they have a need for something unhealthy but pleasurable, such as cigarettes. But how do we convince people they have a need for something that’s good for them, although it may be painful — like regular exercise or conscience formation?

While McCrabb says the audience for the study is campus ministers, he wants the findings to catch the attention of church officials and the general public.

“This is a study that’s talking to campus ministers, but I hope everybody else in the church will overhear the conversation,” he says. “We want the public to know that these are the things campus ministers are concerned about, that these are some of the issues we’re raising and wrestling with daily.”

McCrabb says one of the key points he wants to underscore is the lack of time and resources available for campus ministers to develop the intellectual dimension of their work. He hopes church officials will be responsive.

“The Roman Catholic Church needs to take more ownership for the ministry on campus,” McCrabb says. “There are 4.2 million Catholics on campus. There are less than 2,000 campus ministers. It’s hard to imagine how anyone can minister to 2,300 people.”

The survey was based on a representative sample of 350 campus ministers, including 50 percent from public universities, 30 percent from Catholic colleges and universities and 20 percent from private and independent colleges and universities, McCrabb says.

Copies of the results of the survey are available from the Catholic Campus Ministry Association at (937) 229-4648.

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For media interviews, call Don McCrabb at (937) 229-4648.