

# *A Religious Program for College Students*

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## Essential Elements

**T**HE FOLLOWING are some of the essential elements that are basically necessary in a religious program for college students:

1. An effective campus Christian program should be voluntary. Religion is a matter of creative living, and if a campus religious program is to be effective it must begin in the life of the student and be voluntarily expressed.

2. The campus Christian program should not only be voluntary and democratic, but also should have in it a definite discipline. There is, of course, among students, an interpretation of freedom that thinks of it as a *laissez faire* attitude in conduct that is without reference to the disciplines of procedure. In this connection it is well to think in terms of the discipline of democracy. Someone has defined democracy as that way of life wherein you take that which a person has to offer at the time and the place that he has to offer it and through the discipline of a group fellowship mould his or her contribution for maximum usefulness to the largest number. It is in this sense that a voluntary campus religious program should have a definite aspect of disciplined living.

3. The campus Christian program should have thought content. This is especially true in view of the prevalent religious illiteracy among students. It is a known fact that it is possible for a person to go through our public school system, graduate from the secondary schools and come to college without basic information concerning the essentials of the Christian faith, the content of our Christian culture, or what it

means to be a Christian. Therefore, a campus Christian program should help students to understand the central affirmations of the Christian faith and give content to their beliefs that is constructive and in full harmony with intelligent procedures and scholarship.

4. The campus Christian program should provide fellowship. Students need that identification of work in group efforts wherein they realize true Christian community as fellow workers in a common Christian enterprise.

5. The campus Christian program should give college students practice in projects of service. This is one of the most difficult aspects of student work for the reason that the campus is a highly isolated unit of society that is frequently set apart from what the rest of humanity is doing. Therefore, it requires an unusual amount of imagination and ingenuity to provide those projects of service that become an outlet for the idealism of students. It is one thing to hold the ideals of the Christian faith and it is quite another thing to put them into practice. Therefore, many times when the actual project cannot be provided it is necessary for students to do some rehearsal thinking in regard to projects of service.

6. The campus Christian program should train students in churchmanship. By this we mean an understanding and practice of Christian living through the church as an agency of conduct. We have in mind a definite meaning of the church as the body of Christ; as the value interpreting institution through the centuries; as the contemporary instrument of value judgments; and finally, as the sociological agent in com-

munity for building the Kingdom of God. This conception of churchmanship arises not from any casual understanding of the church, but roots deep in a theology of the church and marks churchmanship as effectiveness in intelligent Christian procedures.

7. The campus Christian program should train students in world-mindedness. These are the days when as citizens we can be nothing less than world-minded. Therefore, the Student Christian Movement seeks to provide a channel of service wherein students realize their oneness with all mankind.

#### **Some Historical Factors in Student Christian Work**

Dr. Clarence Shedd, the author of "The Church Follows Its Students," has pointed out for us some of the characteristics of the Student Christian Movement of the nineteenth century. They were:

1. The movement was evangelistic in the sense that students had a Christian faith and were anxious to share it.

2. There was a great deal of the study of the Bible in the student groups.

3. There was a definite expression of missionary service and one of the great contributions of the nineteenth century was the way in which the Student Christian Movement provided leadership for the mission fields.

4. The local student groups were active in social issues. They especially applied themselves to the problems of slavery and the question of temperance.

5. Student Christian work in the nineteenth century was intercollegiate and it paralleled the intercollegiate development of college athletics, debating societies, the development of the fraternity and sorority system, and all other aspects of intercollegiate organization.

Having looked at the essentials of the student work in the nineteenth century, it is now necessary to note some

specific developments that took place. The Y.M.C.A. was organized on the college campuses of this country in 1870. The Y.W.C.A. was organized in 1886. The Student Volunteer Movement was organized in the winter of 1886-87, and the World Student Christian Federation was organized in 1895. These organizations, namely, the Y.M.C.A., the Y.W.C.A., and the Student Volunteer Movement, constituted what was known as the Student Christian Movement and they made a rich and a valuable contribution to the life of this nation in that period of our history..

It is a matter of historical fact that the church is the mother of higher education in this country. The Methodist Church has a great educational tradition, and with the zeal of the Wesleys back of it had a large part in the establishment of these colleges. The General Conference of 1824 voted to establish a college within the confines of each Annual Conference. It said, "The church college is the arm of the Christian church." Thus the church college was founded with the intent of the church following its young people through the secondary school and through the days of college in order that they might have a rich religious experience. Thus the Methodist Church founded its colleges, the Presbyterian Church founded its colleges and other branches of the church founded the colleges of their respective denominations, or faiths, in the belief that thus they would adequately care for the religious life of their students. Following this very rich thrust of educational interest, the Methodist Church founded 200 schools and colleges between the years 1835 and 1860. By the year 1870 the church had established over 300 colleges of its own and of that number 125 are still in existence.

A new development, however, began to take place in the educational life of our country, in fact, it might be re-

ferred to as a migration, for college students began to attend state universities in increasing numbers. This developed to such an extent that it was noticeable as a definite trend in higher education as early as the 1890's, and by the turn of the century it began to alarm the church when it was realized that a surprisingly large number of the sons and daughters of the church were not attending the colleges of the church. The result was that in the decade of 1900 to 1910 the church "came alive" to this new trend and realized that because of the policy of separation of church and state in this country some provision would have to be made for the religious life of the students attending state universities. The result was that the Guild Hall Movement developed at the University of Michigan as early as 1887. The Disciples of Christ gave a particular answer to the problem of the state universities in the establishment of Bible Chairs that later were developed into schools of religion. This movement began as early as 1893, and it is to be noted that after 1900 a number of the churches began to appoint persons who were especially selected to become pastors for students. For example, in the year 1906 the Presbyterian Church began a new work or religious ministry to students at state universities. This was true in the Congregational Church in 1906, the Baptist Church in 1904, the Lutheran Church in 1905-06, the Episcopal Church in 1910. In the former Methodist Episcopal Church a joint committee was appointed in 1916, and a policy of religious work at state universities was adopted by the Methodist Episcopal Church South in the year 1920. Thus in the period from 1900 to 1920 there was an awakening and a development of a definite organizational procedure on the part of the church in an attempt to meet a particular religious ministry for her students attending state universities.

It is now necessary to realize that the Student Christian Movement, which was the Y.W.C.A. and the Y.M.C.A. and the Student Volunteer Movement on the American college campuses, had continued its excellent work in this same period and now the churches became a new factor in the development of student Christian work in this country. Thus there was a voluntary campus religious program under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. and parallel with it, and here was a fast developing program of student Christian work in the churches because the churches were becoming concerned about the religious life of their students. It should be noticed that this concern was not only for students attending state universities but also for students who were going to colleges and universities of the church.

It is now necessary to notice some developments that took place insofar as history is concerned that pointed rather definitely toward a united student Christian work in this country. In 1915 a National Commission on University Work was organized, composed of national staff persons who were responsible for the religious program of the churches. In 1925 the National Intercollegiate Christian Council was organized, which was a Council of the staff and students of the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A. In 1934 the United Christian Youth Movement was organized and it had what was called a Joint Program Council. It was in this Joint Program Council that the national staff persons of the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A. and the churches were brought together for the first time to pool the resources of their program materials and to face together their common tasks.

In the meantime, another development took place with reference to the relationship of the Student Christian Movement of this country to the World Student Christian Federation. It has already been noticed that the Federation

was organized in 1895. The policy of the Federation at that time and in the present is that it will recognize only one nationally organized Student Christian Movement in any one country. Therefore, in 1895, and subsequently until 1938, the only nationally recognized student Christian movements in this country, insofar as the World Student Christian Federation was concerned, were the Y.M.C.A., the Y.W.C.A., and the Student Volunteer Movement, which were combined, as noted above, under what was known as the Student Christian Movement. The question of the relationship of the church student movements to the Federation came up for consideration. It is interesting to note that the question was raised by the Lutheran Student Association of America. In the days preceding World War II the Lutheran students who were organized in Student Christian Movements on the Continent were feeling the increasing pressures of the totalitarian ideology and were needing the fellowship which could be provided by the Lutheran Student Association of this country. Therefore, our Lutheran friends took the leadership in asking why the church student groups should not be recognized in this country in the Student Christian Movement. The result was the organization of the Provisional Council for the United States of the World Student Christian Federation in 1938. In this Provisional Council, there was representation of the Y.M.C.A., the Y.W.C.A., and all of the churches. Then came the war and with it the development of the voluntary chaplaincy in relationship to the student trainees who were on college campuses. This was met by the development of the War Emergency Council, and once again the student Christian groups were brought together in common unity as they attempted to face a problem together. Probably the next most significant step that was taken in the direction of larger unity in campus Christian work was

called the Wooster Conference, a Conference on the World Mission of the Church held at the College of Wooster, Ohio, in the winter of 1943-44. This Conference was in the tradition of the great Student Volunteer Movement conferences of preceding years and definite steps were taken toward the development of some kind of a united campus Christian work in this country. The Wooster Conference was followed by what was known as the Bernardsville Conference, which was held in April, 1944. Representatives of all the campus Christian agencies came together and planned for the development of a definite organization. This was consummated in September, 1945, and it became known as the United Christian Council. The war having ended in the meantime, the World's Student Christian Federation, in the summer of 1946, was able to hold its first General Committee meeting since 1938. It was at this meeting that the United Student Christian Council, representing all campus Christian agencies in this country, being a single national organization of the student Christian movements of the United States, was admitted as a national unit of the World's Student Christian Federation. This historical picture is given in this paper to bring out the fact that the student Christian movements of this country, feeling the pressure of the common problems which they face, and having behind them the great ecumenical thrust of the Christian church, joined in a common campus Christian agency that is representative of the twelve churches nationally organized in student Christian work in this country, the Student Volunteer Movement, the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A. This development is a definite part of the ecumenical spirit and we are proud to record the fact that it is being manifested in campus Christian experience.

### **Development of a Sense of Responsibility Toward the Church**

The Methodist Church now has what is known as the Methodist Student Movement, which is a conscious, cohesive and definite church student movement. The church offers within her own body and life the opportunity for her own young people to find local and intercollegiate Christian expression in a Church student movement that is of the Church, in the Church, and through the Church. This church student movement as received some opposition from outside of Methodism because there is the fear that students have "gone denominational." The attitude here has gradually changed and it is a recognized fact that in the Student Christian movements of this twentieth century, and particularly of the last twenty years, there is a general trend in the direction of church student movements. In spite of opposition, leadership within the Methodist Student Movement has gone steadily forward in this development of a church student movement in the belief that it is a part of God's purpose in history. The ecumenical church means the awakening church, the renewing church, and we are happy to have this manifestation within the student life of Methodism. It is with a humble sense of pride that we point to the fact that leaders of the Methodist Student Movement have, with others, taken the leadership in the formation of the ecumenical movement of campus Christian life in this country through the United Student Christian Council and helping to bring the students of the world to a new consciousness of the church through the World's Student Christian Federation.

The Methodist Student Movement is an agency of the church that provides within campus experience an activity program of religious life and service. This aspect of student work can, by those unacquainted with what it really does, be greatly underestimated. It can

be thought of, on the one hand, as religious piddling, or, on the other hand, as in-service training. It can be thought of as more or less useless and time-consuming committee work, or, it may be regarded as the natural expression of churchmanship in college days. It may even be thought of as childish by some, or it may be regarded as a mark of spiritual maturity in lives that are not content merely to have ideals, but must practice them.

The best illustration of the religious activity program is in the student council. The policy of the church in regard to Methodist Colleges is to begin at the heart of the college itself, because the college is an arm of the church, and work from the heart of the Methodist college toward the church that is beside the campus. Thus the Methodist Student Movement supports, works with, and undergirds those interdenominational campus Christian councils that are common on practically all of our Methodist college campuses. Procedure in a Wesley Foundation is exactly the opposite, for Wesley Foundations are located at state and independent colleges and universities. Because of the separation of church and state, the church cannot go to the heart of a state university and work in the same way that it can at the heart of a Methodist college. Therefore, the church selects a Methodist church that is nearest the campus of a state or independent college or university and establishes its locale of work in this church; however, the procedure is not merely to contain the work in the church, but to move from the church to the heart of the campus. There are usually organized Wesley Foundation Student councils which are the councils of Christian college students who seek to grow through the experience of expressing religion in campus life. Thus we find college students in the Methodist Student Movement whether in an interdenominational campus religious council on a

Methodist college campus, or in a Wesley Foundation at a large university in a council that goes through some such procedure as herein described.

The students come together in a retreat, or a planning conference, and fundamentally face this question, "What are the religious needs of our campus, our community, and our world this year?" They match their Christian idealism against the question and they come up with the answer in terms of a program that they are seeking to develop. They usually organize their council by commissions and thousands of students have found God's will for their lives simply because they have set out with a few other fellow students to render some service that their own group has helped them to see the necessity of accomplishing. It becomes an experience in churchmanship — a practice of faith. In it they have found new fellowships and a sense of community which the university so often fails to provide. Those who are interested in the statistical side of this development should realize that we have 125 Methodist colleges, 160 Wesley Foundations and about 200 other local units that are the basic working units of the Methodist Student Movement. These groups are organized into 35 state, or similar regional groups, and they are nationally organized, working both as a part of the National Conference of Methodist Youth, and at the same time as a functioning unit of the United Student Christian Council which, as previously stated, is the American unit of the World's Student Christian Federation. Thus, a college student, if he cares to do so, can, in a voluntary campus group, feel himself in and a part of a church student movement that is at once a part

of his own church youth movement and is at the same time a part of a national and world wide intercollegiate expression of campus religious life.

In closing, it is perhaps well to realize the fundamental objectives of the Methodist Student Movement which were adopted as the first National Methodist Student Leadership Training Conference at Berea College in June, 1939. They are:

1. To lead students to become followers of Jesus Christ and into a vital personal relationship with God.

2. To develop a supporting group in which individuals will mutually strengthen one another in Christian living.

3. To help create a new world order (the Kingdom of God) embodying Christian ideals and conserving the highest human values.

We believe that the Methodist Student Movement stands on the threshold of a greater future. It has been, and is, an effort to capture the imagination of the students of the church and to provide a church student movement as a channel for the effective expression of their Christian idealism. There must continue to come from the campus generations of committed Christian and lay and professional leaders. We believe that God can, and is, speaking through these young people in our church student movement. We believe that God's message consists in being not conformed to the things of this world and of the campus, but of being transformed by the renewal of the mind, proving what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.\*

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\*Romans 12:2