

Mission of Campus Ministry

Rev. Eric Andrae

How many isms can you name? Secularism, modernism, postmodernism, Darwinism, Marxism, liberalism, scientism, materialism, consumerism, feminism, relativism—did I leave any out? Well, academia does not. Your local university is fertile breeding ground and provides sustenance for every imaginable ism. However, instead of being cheated by vain philosophies and empty deceit according to the principles of the world and men, we want students to meet one man in particular: God incarnate, Jesus Christ. Only in him will they be complete.

Studies indicate that as many as eighty-five to ninety percent of confirmed Lutheran youth are no longer in the church by age twenty-five. That's bad news. The good news is that similar surveys show that eighty percent of today's college freshmen report an interest in spirituality, while seventy-five percent are searching for meaning and purpose in life. The collegiate years are a crucial time of transition and searing soul-searching. The really good news, indeed the Gospel, is that as this generation of students searches for meaning, authenticity, and identity, the church gives that which they seek (Hebrews 13:8; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:1–18).

How does the church through campus ministry give this identity in Christ, this connection to the Father, this complete life in the Spirit? Here in Pittsburgh we are committed to helping all students grow into the Christian faith through the teachings of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. We foster a life and a loving community centered around the Gospel, the Scriptures, and Sacraments of Jesus Christ through worship, nurture, outreach, friendship, and service. As a campus pastor, I—in no particular order here—counsel, marry, baptize adults, play basketball, speak on campus to both Christian and non-Christian groups, pray, socialize, participate in service projects, lead worship, study, catechize, engage the (pop) culture, preach, evangelize, follow up with visitors, defend the faith, serve as chaplain for Lutheran Student Fellowship and International Student Ministry, share meals, supervise our English as a Second Language program, open my home, teach Bible study, seek out the inactive, foster a sense of community, hear private confession and absolve, recruit and train and meet with lay leaders, e-mail, phone call, attend conferences, visit with students,

contact and meet with prospective students, keep records, promote our activities, meet with college faculty and staff, sustain the faithful, write and publish, participate in ecumenical activities to the extent conscience and confession allow, etc., etc. Every week, every day is different. It is never dull, always exciting. I love it. I love being a campus pastor (Galatians 6:2).

All of this must be done with honesty and integrity, in other words, with the objective, concrete clarity of truth (2 Corinthians 4:2). Those involved with confessing Christ on campus must boldly declare who we are. We must be confident and honest in our identity.

We must be, believe, and proclaim who we are. The belief of the heart and the confession of the mouth is one act of faith (Romans 10:8–10). This entails both a clear understanding of what (more appropriately in whom) we believe and a consequent sharing of that faith with others. It means a commitment to the infallible Scriptures, and to the creeds, confessions, doctrine, and worship of the church as handed down to us by those who came before (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

We must teach who we are. We have the Lord's mandate (Matthew 28:18–20). The baptismal incorporation of a sinner into the life of the church and the body of Christ includes a life-long catechesis, an ever-present teaching of the concrete truth of the faith. And "The one who teaches well is the one who distinguishes well:" God's Word of the Law—His demands and requirements which, unmet by us sinners, always mean our death—and God's Word of the Gospel—His gracious and life-giving proclamation of the forgiveness of our sin on account of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Here, at the Christ-point, is where distinctions truly must be clarified on campus—where Allah, Buddha, the New Age, Wiccans, and many others all compete for the time and appetite of the scholar who saunters up to the smorgasbord of spirituality served on a regular basis. The person and work of Jesus Christ ultimately must be the center, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all mission and catechesis (cf. John 14:6). As such, when the campus minister finds himself amid Muslims, Jews, Hindus, or others, as he so often will, distinctions must be made between dialogue and prayer, between study and union, or if you will, between an inter-faith lunch meeting and leading worship together, between a book discussion group and mutual sharing in the holy things of God in the liturgy.

Nicole, a senior at the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt), came to First Trinity a spiritually-lost freshman, showed up at our Welcome Back Barbecue, and now leaves a confirmed Lutheran who is "truly sad to be leaving the one place where I always had people and God to count on." Queen, a Pitt graduate student from China, was an atheist two years ago. After we met at a Graduate Student Orientation Fair, she started attending worship and was aided in her understanding by the simple structure and uniformity of the Lutheran liturgy; she also found that the people at First Trinity "care for each one's life, thinking, problems. So more and more students visit this church and stay because we have found our home in both physical sense and spiritual sense."

Queen was baptized on Christmas Eve 2006!

I love being a campus pastor. My seminary years—through instruction, mentoring, worship, care for body and soul, and hands-on experience—equipped me to be the pastoral theologian and theological pastor I need to be.

I love being a campus pastor. I can think of nothing more exciting, important, rewarding, enriching, or meaningful. There could be nothing more crucial (“of the Cross”), nothing more vital (“of life”).

I hope and pray that you will consider this vocation.

Rev. Eric Andrae (CSL 1997) has served in both parish and campus ministry settings since 1997 and specifically at First Trinity Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, since 2001.