



08-C-33

**CAMPUS MINISTRY (1):  
«... the grace to be able  
to touch hearts»  
ST. LA SALLE.**

«Hey, Brother, got a minute?»

«Good morning, Brother; can I see you today? It's really important... I just need to talk».

«Bro. I got accepted at the University! Thanks for that recommendation you wrote».

«My grandmother's being operated on today, Brother. Would you say a few prayers for her please?».

... And so my day as coordinator of campus ministry begins. I haven't even unlocked the door of my office yet, but I've learned to expect the unexpected. I've learned to listen for what young people are not saying. Often it is in their silence that my role as minister is born.

Most of my time is spent organizing a four year sequential retreat program and coordinating the Christian Service of over 275 seniors here at La Salle Academy. It's a challenge, but one that I accept with the humility of knowing that I'm not in this alone. Because of his intense belief that the Gospel must not only be studied but «experienced», Brother Jerome Corrigan, our principal, has provided four full-time Campus Ministers. We are fortunate to have one Dominican Sister of Blauvelt, New York, and two Diocesan priests. Together we serve the pastoral needs of La Salle's 1,200 boys and girls and almost 100 faculty and staff.

Just what is Campus Ministry? This is certainly a tough answer to pin down but can best be addressed by taking a look at the different areas which comprise the work. It should be noted here that Campus Ministry most often reflects the talents and resources of the minister. One person may approach it from a religious-political view point and direct efforts to Advocacy stances. Another may see the role as purely pastoral ie counseling in areas other than college guidance. Yet another may stress service to community and liturgical celebrations. The list could go on. Here at La Salle we try to integrate the different modes by providing an experiential religious complement to the rest of the school's curriculum. It should further be noted that while addressing most of our attention to the students themselves, the faculty, administration and staff are also served through this ministry.

The four areas which form the nucleus of Campus Ministry at La Salle are: *Retreats, Christian service, pastoral counseling and special projects.*

## **1. Retreats**

Each of our students is expected to make a one day retreat every year. We conduct the retreats by homeroom which means that each group numbers about 30. The homeroom teacher is invited to attend with no responsibility other than equal participation. I have found this invaluable for gaining teacher support of the program. Teachers themselves marvel at the rapport they are able to enjoy in a non-classroom environment.

All retreats are conducted by our campus ministry team in the recently dedicated St. Miguel Retreat Center located in the Brothers' House adjacent to the school. The facility houses four small group rooms decorated with student-painted murals and one large conference room decorated with student-painted murals and one large conference room for presentations, movies, lunch etc.. There's also a modern chapel and a screened-in porch where students can relax and recreate. For retreat purposes, I strongly recommend using the sections of the Brothers' House that are no longer occupied. This brings students into the house who may never have had the opportunity to see how the Brothers live. Also, it saves time and the cost of transporting students by bus or car to a retreat center.

Many weeks we find ourselves conducting more than one retreat. Because of the size of the school, about 50 retreats per year are needed. All retreats begin at 8:30 a.m. and conclude at 2:30 p.m. Students must bring their own lunch.

The approach on each retreat is an integration of theology, spirituality, psychology, and group dynamics. The Freshmen day's theme is *Belonging*: to God, to school and to family. The Sophomores' day deals with *Values*. While the Juniors address the question of *Personal Identity*, the Seniors look to their future in a experience of *My Dream*. Large group presentations and small group discussions and/or exercises punctuate the day. Every retreat concludes with a Eucharistic Celebration tying together the day's theme.

I would also like to mention here that much of the Freshman and Sophomore program is conducted by trained Seniors. In January of each year a letter goes out to interested seniors to solicit help with the underclassmen. Actually, the seniors come into my office as early as September asking when they can sign up for the workshops to be trained. This is peer ministry at its best. The seniors give most of the talks and run the small groups for their younger classmates. An adult is always present to provide encouragement and guidance but the students themselves minister to their peers.

## **2. Christian service**

The Campus Ministry center coordinates a 9 week Service program for each senior at La Salle. This is a requirement for graduation and exposes the student to direct service with the poor. Two days per week are spent in a classroom setting teaching a spirituality of ministry as a gospel response in today's world. Once a week for 2 hours, during school time, each student is involved with the poor in some way. They are grouped in car pools and travel to work with the blind, the hungry, the mentally handicapped, the illiterate, the abandoned and the abused of our community. Later in the week they gather in small groups to process their experience and share their feelings. Sister Liz Engel, O.P. and myself not only teach the class but visit all of the agencies, almost weekly, to encourage the students and witness the many miracles which they perform in the hearts of the poor. However, the grace of the program rests in the transformation that takes place in the hearts of our young people. They are changed. Even the toughest kids who almost refuse to go out to serve are soon won over by the warmth of a child who needs them or the hollow look in the eyes of a woman who hasn't eaten for days.

The Gospel comes alive for the first time. They begin to see themselves as «holy» people. Learning that they *can* make a difference in the life of another person calls forth the best from them. Now Jesus doesn't seem all that distant or impersonal. He visits His people through them.

## **3. Pastoral counseling**

When I am not on retreat or accompanying the seniors on their Christian Service, I am usually found in my office listening to the needs of individual youngsters. Each day before I enter school, I pray the words of St. La Salle - «Love those entrusted to your care with all the affection of your heart». Some days this is easier said than done. Some days my heart is overwhelmed by the pain and confusion these young people must endure. For some it is physical or mental abuse at home, for others it is the pressure to succeed that causes them to hurt. So much of their suffering these days is self-inflicted and seemingly hopeless. Many talk of suicide, alcohol and drug dependency, abortion and crime. They cry out for adults who are compassionate and willing to walk along with them as they make sense of their lives. The moments when a young boy or girl allowed themselves to be vulnerable with me have been among the holiest moments of my life. Their trust in me continually shows me a new face of God; I am called to recognize Him again and again.

**Bro. Charles F. KITSON**