

All Saints Campus Ministry

by Vicar Wessel

What Methods Work for Outreach?

Having stepped into the campus ministry at All Saints fairly recently, I have had lots of opportunity to learn and lots of opportunity to reflect: what actually works? How is it that connections are made and fostered that can bring students in and give us the chance to share Christ with them? In one way or another, this is a question that any congregation has to ask, regardless of whether or not they have a specific ministry or outreach, like All Saints does with campus ministry. How is it that people are concretely and effectively drawn into the congregation?

As easy as it is to ask the question, the answer is much more difficult. There are certainly a lot of things that can and should be done to help reach out to people. Visibility and accessibility are both key, and there are so many ways to strategically approach these questions about how to let people know that you are there. This ranges everywhere from signage, to website layout, to involvement in community events, or the like. Note here, that I am not speaking about gimmicky attempts to replace the gospel of Jesus Christ with some kind of marketing scheme or trying to attract people to the church for any other reason than Jesus Christ crucified. I am instead thinking about the mode, or the manner in which we can give ourselves opportunities to share Christ with people.

I have certainly learned to appreciate and think about all of these means of creating opportunities and extending invitations. They are all important ways of getting people familiar with the congregation and can be avenues through which people are brought to the church. But at the end of the day, there is nothing that is nearly as effective as a personal invitation. Above all else, that is what works for outreach. There is nothing that can compare to a flesh-and-blood person interacting in real time and real space with another person to invite them in.

This should not be a surprise to us at all. While there are certainly sociological explanations for why this may be the case, it should also grow clearly out of our theology. Our salvation is found in the real, flesh-and-blood person of Jesus Christ. The eternal Son of God took on flesh in the womb of the virgin Mary to accomplish our salvation. He gave His flesh and shed His blood on the cross and bodily rose from the dead three days later to conquer sin, death, and Satan for us. He puts His Word in the mouths of ordinary people to preach. He tangibly gives us His forgiveness, life, and salvation through the physical elements of the Sacraments. Christianity has a very distinctly bodily character to it. There is no salvation apart from the body of Christ.

By faith we understand that we, the Church, are the body of Christ. And so, it makes perfect sense on a theological level why the most effective means to outreach is through personal means, working within our varied stations in life. This applies, of course, to those publicly serving the church. They need to be physically present to those they minister to in any but the most unideal situations. But this also applies to all Christians. God has given us our stations in life, and it is altogether fitting that we use them for His glory.

I have seen a lot of this over the past couple months as the new guy at All Saints. In spite of all the helpful supports we may have and develop, the end of the line is that God works through the means He has established, and those means are physical, flesh-and-blood means. The best outreach possible is not going to take place through signs and websites and advertisements, though those things most certainly have a good and right use that should not be neglected. The best outreach is when the members of the body of Christ are personally present to those around them to invite them in to the congregation. Jesus Christ in the flesh, our crucified and risen Savior is the center of our outreach.