

Developing a ministry to reach students when they return home for the holidays, on breaks, or on extended weekends

Report back by students to the congregation

Whenever there is a holiday break (Thanksgiving, Christmas, spring, Easter, summer), provide an opportunity for the students to gather and maintain community. Make sure to include time for them to report how God has led them, guided them, and used them in His service on campus, the mission field where He placed them. You may have them share for five minutes during the worship service, at a mission festival, a congregational meeting, a special congregational function, or during adult Bible class. Encourage the student and inquire if there are any other ways for the congregation to be supportive.

College-age Bible class

Whenever the students are on break, arrange for a college-age Bible class for study and sharing. Notify students about the class in the newsletter and encourage them to be present. Ask some parents to host the study, provide refreshments, and create a welcoming environment. Select a highly qualified leader for the group. The newsletters may provide good suggestion for Bible study topics. The young adults series “Forward in Faith” from CPH has two volumes of pertinent Bible studies.

If there already is a college-age group that meets regularly, encourage that group to invite and welcome returning students.

Addressing high school youth

Encourage the youth counselors or the high school youth Bible class leaders to invite one or more college students to share with the youth what college life is like, including their perspective on ways that the campus is like a mission field, and how God has used them to serve Him.

Planning for the “Service of Sending” Sunday

The “Service of Sending” Sunday should be held early, on or before the second Sunday of August, when the first students may begin to leave for their respective colleges and universities. By the second week in September, it is usually too late to reach a majority of students. Explore with your pastor the possibility of devoting the entire service as a send-off for these ambassadors, who represent Christ wherever they go. Some suggested Scripture verses for the readings or sermon text include Matthew 5:13-16; Mark 9:27-29; Luke 9:38-39; John 4:28-30, 39-41; Acts 8:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 or 1 Peter 2:9-12.

During the service, include an official send-off for the students, reminding them of their task as representatives of the congregation, serving Christ as ambassadors to the campus. You may use or adapt the following material into your order of service.

The Sending Commitment

The students are welcomed to the chancel area. The officiant addresses them.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: or

Dear (call each by name); or

Dear members of (name of congregation)

It is with great rejoicing that (name of congregation) recognizes your fitness and willingness to be an ambassador for Jesus Christ at (name(s) of university(ies)). Your educational pursuits take you from your home and congregation to another place. We are proud of you, and believe that by living and working there as a Christian, you will have the marvelous opportunity to serve Christ, who came to earth for you and gives you eternal salvation through faith. As a student, you will be able to tell the Good News of Jesus Christ in your contacts with the unchurched and non-Christians from our United States and other countries of the world.

*So I ask you: Are you willing to represent us on the campus to which you are going, participating in worship and Bible study opportunities with our campus ministries or sister congregations? Are you willing to join with other students who share the same faith and work in His kingdom-Bible studies, celebration, worship, and service? Are you willing to receive further training and equipping from our campus workers there for the work which the Lord has ready there for you to do? Then answer, **“Yes, trusting God to lead me with His wisdom and power.”***

The officiant will address the congregation:

Members of (name of congregation)

*You have heard the commitment(s) made here, commitments which warm our hearts. Will you pray regularly for these young adults who represent us there, so that they might maintain a strong faith in Jesus to practice and speak of their faith in Jesus Christ with students of every nation? Then answer, **“We will!”***

Officiant: Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for these student(s). you have made them Your children through Holy Baptism, nurtured and sustained them through Your Word and Sacraments, and molded them by Your Spirit. You have given them the desire to serve You and witness Your great love in word and deed to the unchurched and nonbelievers from here and overseas. Surround them at home and on campus with Christian friends who will support their faith. Fill them with courage and the right words to proclaim Jesus, the Christ, as the Savior of persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Addressing the students:

We send you to the universities and colleges you are attending, as well as our campus ministries there and the service the Lord has prepared for you. we are pleased and excited that through you we will be touching the lives of others from our state, our country, and our world. Remember that while we are apart physically, through faith in Christ we are bonded together as one. Our congregation will always be a home to you-and we are your brothers and sisters in Christ. May God guide us all, to keep in touch and encourage each other in our tasks.

The following hymn is suggested:

Hymn of Sending
Tune —“from Greenland’s Icy Mountains.”

From homes across our nation,
From farms upon the plain,
From inner-city ghettos,
From small towns in between,
They are God’s chosen agents
To show His love and care,
To speak of Jesus’ mercy
To people everywhere.

These are the sons and daughters
Who’ve grown up by our side,
Received the Christian nurture
Our church and schools provide.
To many places scattered
They witness to the Name,
Of Him who loves them dearly
And died, their lives to claim.

Oh, grant to them, dear Father,
Protection for each day.
And praise to You, Lord Jesus,
Who washed their sins away.
Equip them, God the Spirit
With courage, power, and love,
That others through their witness
Might reach Your home above. Amen
—Robert E. Lange

Some Additional Suggestions

1. At the service of sending, consider giving each student an appropriate devotional book: For example, you might give a copy of C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity* (probes faith issues), Rebecca Manley Pippert’s *Out of the Salt-Shaker and into the World* (helpful for sharing one’s faith), Lawton Lau’s *The World at your Doorstep* (insights on how to serve the international student), Jane Fryar’s *I Believe, but I Have Questions*, Steve Hower’s *Sharpening the Sword*, or some other gift meaningful for their task.
2. Encourage members of the congregation to adopt a student each year. A good time for this may be at the “Service of Sending.” One congregation has an envelope containing information about each college student on the day of the service. The information included the student’s address (postal and e-mail), telephone number, major, year in college, birthday, and lists special interests. Congregation members are encouraged to pick up an envelope on a student to adopt and stay in contact with throughout the year, especially on their birthday, Thanksgiving Day, Valentine’s Day, and at Easter. It is nice for the adopting family to be made aware of events in the student’s life such as honors, awards, election to positions, graduation, etc. The information helps those praying for students about specific requests and Thanksgivings.
3. Consider asking a women’s group, or some other organization in the congregation, to send care packages at different times during the school year. This may be done at the beginning of the school year, at finals, on Valentine’s Day, Super Bowl Sunday, and at a birthday. The contents of the care packages should vary with the event, but also be fairly consistent from student to student. You may want to bring the care packages to the Sunday worship service

and invite members to pick one up and mail it to the students on the address label. This gives others an opportunity to support and stay connected with students.

4. Many campus ministries have a “peer ministry” or campus ministry associate” program for which they pay a student a stipend for specific leadership responsibilities in the campus ministry. The congregation might consider offering to pay the stipend when one of its members makes application for and is chosen to be a “peer minister,” a “Campus ministry associate” or serves in a comparable leadership position for which the campus ministry offers a stipend. Such an action helps unite the student, campus ministry, and home congregation, demonstrating to the student that the congregation supports also with its dollars the “sending” of the student to the campus as an ambassador for Christ.
5. The Office of Campus Ministry has free copy-ready resources which you can obtain and distribute to your students and their parents. These resources included devotions for students (beginning 10 days before the freshman year starts and for the first 10 days after college has begun), devotions for parents who have just sent a young person to the university, and topical or textual Bible studies written for college students. Call 800-433-3954, ext. 1314, to order these and ask about other resources.
6. If a student is attending a university or college where there is no active campus ministry or contact congregation, we suggest the following: (1) Discuss with the student before leaving a plan for a regular, personal devotional life and some options for participating in corporate worship and a Christian faith community while at college. (2) Explore with the student one or more specific goals which the student would willingly embrace as ways to be an ambassador for Christ on the campus. (3) Be ready to provide supportive counseling from a distance (telephone, letter, e-mail, and resources) to the student. (4) Inform the congregations nearest the university that your member is a student sent there by you as an ambassador of Christ and let them know your appreciation for whatever way its members can give the student their help and support.

Conclusion

This manual does not exhaust the ways in which a congregation can empower, encourage, and support its students in their role as Christ’s ambassadors, representing their congregation as they enter the campus mission field. Furthermore, the congregation should feel free to pick and choose the suggestions in this manual that will be most effective and likely to offer sustained ministry. We believe that your ministry will expand and offer blessings to students, campus ministries, and the local congregations. We commend this manual to you with the prayer that it will assist your congregation in ministering to your college students, providing them with spiritual direction, focus, and meaning. To God be all glory!