



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Article on Campus Ministry - Part 2: During COVID-19

*“But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?
And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?
And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?”*

Romans 10:14 (NRSV)



(Source: [St. Mary's University Webpage](#))

Early on in my formal training to be a Christian Youth Worker, a wise professor told me:

“Provided that a young person has one trusted person in their lives in whom they can always confide and who, they know, will ‘go to the wall’ for them, chances are pretty good that that young person will turn out okay in the end.”

Bearing this in mind, Richard Vann (a HealthWatch Officer with FaithAction, in partnership with LifeLine Projects, for the London, UK

Borough of Barking & Dagenham) notes in his March 21, 2019 blog, "Why Young People Need Trusted Adults":

"Young people will experience many different relationships throughout their teenage years; short lived friendships, ones that have been built on trust over a number of years and ones that will continue to grow throughout their adult lives.

"However, life in their final years at school, college or sixth form tend to be periods of transition, preparing them for what is next. This can often look like a series of monumental changes which leads them to evaluate the existing relationships that they have as they embark on something new.

"At this time, it is paramount that they have at least one strong relationship. This should be someone they trust, somebody who is more experienced and somebody who's heart is in the right place for them.

"HealthWatch Barking & Dagenham met with 138 students from a local school, college and university with the focus of discussing Mental Health & Wellbeing.

"... 60% (of respondents) indicated that the most important people and influence in their lives was their families, with guidance and a sense of safety being the main form of support that young people indicated they benefited from.

"... Overall, having someone to speak to about all the different aspects of life is something that is really necessary for young people. Building trust can be hard, but it is down to those who have hearts for young people such as parents, teachers, faith groups and youth leaders to make a way and allow for this opportunity - as it is key for their development into adult life."



(Source: <https://www.faithaction.net/blog/2019/03/21/why-young-people-need-trusted-adults/>)

As alluded to in the first installment of this three-part series (in the Trinity 2021 edition of the “Anglican Catholic Chronicle”), the mission of any viable and effective campus ministry should be something like:

“To build relationships with youth with the intent of reaching and discipling them for Jesus Christ, nurturing them as they build significant relationships with each other and with Jesus Christ, while motivating and equipping them to be active followers and disciples able to minister in relevant ways in their world.”

And to achieve this, the objectives for such a ministry should entail:

- † Meeting with young people, getting to know them, and, hopefully, building a healthy relationship with them – one based on trust and respect. (Please note: this particular step can take a very long time and may not always be successful.)
- † (Eventually) introducing young people to Jesus Christ – if they do not already know Him – and giving direction on how to have a personal, saving relationship with Him.
- † Equipping young people for Christian Ministry through teaching, discipling, and leadership development.
- † Providing young people with opportunities for service within their church, in their community, and in the world.

† Offering encouragement to parents, school administration, and staff by establishing and maintaining a “Contacting Ministry” with them in order to build community and to help them better understand, and relate to, the young person (or persons).

All of which, as previously mentioned, takes prayer – LOTS of prayer.

To be sure, such an undertaking is daunting at the best of times; however, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in earnest across Canada magnified the difficulty immeasurably, with the immediate closing down of all Alberta university campuses, including St. Mary’s in Calgary, to most administration and staff – and all students – effective Thursday, March 12, 2020. (Alberta campuses did not open again to the wider university community until Tuesday, September 7, 2021.) During these nearly 18 months, all St. Mary’s University classes and Community Masses (which were, given the circumstances, only sporadically offered) were relegated to being delivered on-line; in addition, all science labs were closed. Moreover, most damagingly, no social events or gatherings whatsoever were permitted on campus.



(St. Mary’s University parking lot during COVID-19; Source: ADE Archives)

To say that this once-in-a-century catastrophe had a detrimental effect on the spiritual, emotional, and physical health of students, staff, and administration at St. Mary's University (as well as at other universities and high schools across Canada) would be putting it mildly. While relatively few cases of COVID-19 ended up being reported among the St. Mary's community, rates of anxiety and depression (not to mention spiritual "backsliding"), skyrocketed alarmingly over time.

Many St. Mary's students, who did not adjust well to the on-line format for classes and lack of face-to-face social contact with their peers, saw their mood and enthusiasm decline precipitously to the point that:

- ⚠ **their grades plummeted;**
- ⚠ **they switched programs or schools; or**
- ⚠ **they quit classes altogether.**

Likewise, several disillusioned faculty and administrative staff sought and found employment elsewhere, causing those "left behind" to feel more and more abandoned – and alone. **To say the least, those 544 days were very dark indeed.**

Even so, those directly involved in Campus Ministry at St. Mary's, most notably the:

- † **Pastoral Ministry Faculty Advisor;**
- † **Director of Campus Ministry;**
- † **Campus Ministry Student Assistant;**
- † **student leaders; and**
- † **concerned clergy,**

remained in close contact with one another, and prayerfully strove to keep the remaining students, administration, and staff motivated and "in touch" (especially during the first lockdown year) through:

- ☞ **social media (most notably, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Discord, Facebook, and YouTube);**
- ☞ **on-line individual and group meetings, including the celebration of Community Masses and other services, when possible (using Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, Duo, or Google Teams);**
- ☞ **frequent texting and emailing;**
- ☞ **regularly updated university and church websites;**
- ☞ **telephone conversations; and**
- ☞ **(even) “old-fashioned” card and letter writing.**

In short, anything was used to stay “plugged in” with each other.

Eventually, as social restrictions began to be lifted, sorely needed “live” celebrations of the Mass in the previously empty St. Mary’s Student Association Building were conducted (using masks and proper social distancing, as required); also, off-campus events such as campfires and get-togethers at local restaurants were organized.



(Source: St. Mary’s University Communications)

What was of paramount importance throughout this time is that someone who genuinely cared was readily available and willing to meet one-on-one with those – young and “not-so-young” alike – who were either struggling to cope or who “just wanted to talk about stuff,” for as Richard Vann stressed at the beginning of this article:

“... having someone to speak to about all the different aspects of life is something that is really necessary for young people ... it is down to those who have hearts for young people such as parents, teachers, faith groups and youth leaders to make a way and allow for this opportunity ...”

Realizing that we’re all in this together, and that, as my sage professor once counselled:

“Provided that a young person has one trusted person in their lives in whom they can always confide and who, they know, will ‘go to the wall’ for them, chances are pretty good that that young person will turn out okay in the end.”



(Source: St. Mary’s University Communications)

And just in case we think that our Lord Jesus Christ does not care about such a small number as “one”, we need to bear in mind that the main objective of campus ministry (and, certainly, in all our callings as followers of Christ) is to introduce others – one-by-one – to Jesus and to guide them on how to have a personal, saving relationship with the Lord, in full knowledge that Jesus Himself declared (twice, in fact!) in St. Luke 15:7 and 10:

“... I tell you that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents ... In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Truly, let us, then, as our Lord Jesus commanded (St. Luke 10:27):

“Go and do likewise.”



Dearest Reader in Christ:

This article, as printed in the Autumn 2021 edition of the “Anglican Catholic Chronicle” [the newsletter of the Anglican Catholic Church of Canada (ACCC)], is offered for your prayerful consideration and spiritual encouragement.

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