



BCM and Church Partnerships

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Excerpt from "BCM and the Local Church:
A Great Commission Partnership as We Begin Our Second Century of Ministry"
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"You served as a pastor in Birmingham for years. Do you have any advice for me as I transition from AUM to serve as campus minister at UAB?" I asked Buddy McGohon, the Director of Missions of the Montgomery Baptist Association this question in 1999. His response began to reorient my view of campus ministry, its connection to the local church and my role as campus minister. Buddy replied: "Re-discover the director's hat that campus ministers have largely put aside. BCM was stronger when campus ministers were called directors and saw themselves as coordinating collegiate work with churches, not merely doing collegiate work on behalf of churches."

Sometimes advice we receive in ministry is ignored, but I couldn't get his advice out of my head. I began thinking about how this suggestion to "coordinate work with churches" could dovetail with my philosophy of viewing the campus as a conglomeration of affinity groups. Or, in mission terminology: People Groups. I asked myself many times: "What would BCM need to do and look like to do campus ministry with churches to reach, evangelize and disciple the vast number of people groups at UAB?" In late 2001, I pitched a strategy idea to Gary Fenton, pastor of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church. This is what I presented over a casual breakfast meeting with Dr. Fenton:

- Let's partner together to reach and minister to students enrolled in the UAB School of Medicine and Dental School.
- Assign a staff member to share the teaching of the weekly Bible Study.
- Split the cost of food each week between BCM and Dawson.
- Realize this is a missions effort on campus. Dawson can promote any ministry of your church that would be appropriate for the students to participate in, but we must affirm student involvement in other churches as well.
- I'm asking for a minimum three-year commitment. After three years, Dawson or the BCM can terminate the partnership (We are in the 20th year of this partnership).

A similar conversation took place with Denis Tanner who served on staff with Shades Crest Baptist Church to reach and minister to the students involved in the UAB Marching Band. A year later I approached Chris Harris, who was on staff with Lakeside Baptist Church, to partner with BCM to reach students involved in fraternities and sororities.

There was a learning curve that required some adjustments in the partnerships. I learned the partnerships are stronger when the pastors and/or executive pastors are brought into the conversation. If the pastor is unaware of the partnership a staff member may be reassigned and there is no one to carry



on the partnership. Similarly, if a staff member leaves for another church and the pastor or executive pastor isn't aware of the partnership, and all it entails, there is a danger that it will not be a priority for the church moving forward. So, here are the guidelines I use to initiate partnerships with local church to reach different affinity groups on campus:

1. Meet initially with the college minister, if the church has one. If not meet with the pastor, executive pastor or missions pastor.
2. Share with them the "People Groups" on campus that are under-reached.
3. Ask if they would be interested in a partnership to reach and minister to one of these groups or another group they may know and have connections with. If the response is yes, then ask for the following.
4. Ask for a 3-year minimum commitment with the partnership.
5. Offer the use of the BCM Student Center for a 2-3 hour block of time each week to help facilitate the partnership. Emphasize that the use of the building is to reach the targeted group of students, not create another come one, come all ministry.
6. Tell them the BCM will actively recruit interested students to assist in the partnership.
7. Ask them to split any expenses 50/50. (Some churches end up covering all the expenses)
8. Ask to meet with the pastor or executive pastor to bring them into the loop on the agreement and purpose of the partnership.

I have found the partnerships are unique depending on the affinity group that is being reached. Here is a list of our current partnerships and how they operate.

1. Christian Medical Fellowship (Medical, Dental, Optometry and other students pursuing a degree as a Health Professional in partnership with Dawson Memorial Baptist Church).
 - Campus minister and church staff share teaching the weekly Bible Studies 50/50.
 - Church purchases food for lunch for the Fall semester and the BCM purchases food for lunch for the Spring semester.
 - Church produces the publicity for the weekly meeting (Mondays at Noon in the Medical School Building).
 - Enlist a student leadership team comprised of students who attend the weekly meeting.
 - Church is able to promote its ministries.
 - Mission opportunities are shared.
2. UNITE Greek Fellowship (For fraternity and sorority students and their invited guests in partnership with Hunter Street Baptist Church).
 - Meets at the BCM on Tuesday evenings.
 - BCM and Church share expenses.
 - Weekly meeting that includes some food and a Bible Study or a Discipleship Curriculum.
 - Enlist a student leadership team comprised of students who attend the weekly meeting.
3. Chinese Bible Study (For International Students from China in partnership with The Chinese Christian Church of Birmingham).



- Meets at the BCM Building on Friday evenings.
 - The Bible Study is held in Mandarin.
 - Church provides teacher.
 - BCM students provide childcare.
 - Church provides all food.
 - This ministry meets year-round.
 - This ministry primarily targets Chinese students.
4. Doctrinal Study in Mandarin (For International Students and Scholars from China in partnership with Shades Mountain Baptist Church).
- Meets at the BCM Building on Saturday afternoons from 4:00 – 6:00pm.
 - Church provides all food.
 - Church provides teacher who teaches in Mandarin.
 - This ministry has one 8-week course each semester.
 - This ministry primarily targets visiting Chinese scholars.
 - BCM students help with childcare.
5. Commuter Bible Study (For commuter students in partnership with Fultondale FBC).
- Meets at the BCM on Thursdays at 12:30.
 - Church provides teachers for the weekly Bible Study.
 - BCM purchases food for the Fall semester. Church provides food for the Spring semester.
 - BCM students help with the preparation of the food (grilled hamburgers or similarly easy preparation).
 - Church leaders are able to publicize church ministries.
 - There have been discipleship groups led by the pastor after the Bible Study.
6. Resident Assistants (For RAs in the Residence Halls in partnership with Lakeside Baptist Church)
- Annual Appreciation Dinner for RAs during their training just before school begins in the Fall.
 - Care Bags during the school year.
 - Plans to expand ministry to include small group Bible Studies/Discipleship Groups.
 - BCM students and lay people from Lakeside prepare and serve the Annual Appreciation Dinner.
7. ROTC (For ROTC cadets at UAB and Samford University. Currently enlisting a new church partner to work with our Freshman Ministry Team to continue this ministry).
- Prayer Breakfast once each semester.
 - Care bags during the school year.
 - Provide a military Bible from Lifeway for those cadets who want one.
 - Occasionally we do joint service days with BCM students and ROTC cadets.
 - Small group Bible Studies/Discipleship Groups. (I want to enlist a church that has some retired military servicemen and servicewomen to lead these small groups).
 - Breakfasts are prepared by our Freshman Ministry Team (the new church partner will be able to assist in this as well).



What is the effect of these partnerships? Do they help reach, evangelize and disciple students who would not otherwise attend a BCM weekly meeting or ministry offering? Here are some numbers that indicate they have a positive impact on our ministry efforts:

1. During the 2018-2019 school year we had 49 professions of faith in our ministry. 32 of these professions of faith were through our church partnerships.
2. During the past 10 years we have had over 175 Chinese students and scholars accept Christ as their Savior.
3. Each one of these churches have seen UAB students attend and join their churches – small, medium and large churches.