

LUTHERAN CAMPUS MINISTRY STUDY

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS 2018

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The Lutheran Campus Ministry Study seeks to identify and explore characteristics, practices and challenges of faithful and effective Lutheran campus and young adult ministry in the current context of student sensibilities and ongoing changes in higher education and the church. The study:

- explores the contemporary world and life perspectives of young adults;
- provides a window on the mission of Lutheran Campus Ministry on university campuses;
- identifies significant Lutheran Campus Ministry outcomes;
- identifies effective campus and young adult ministry practices;
- sheds light on Lutheran Campus Ministry's challenges and vulnerabilities; and
- identifies promising directions for Lutheran Campus Ministry's sustainability and vitality.

THE STUDY'S METHODOLOGY

Four inter-related forms of investigation in the study draw information from a wide range of current research and stakeholders. The study includes:

1. a literature review of research and writing on young adult and campus ministry;
2. site visits and stakeholder interviews on 6 campuses in 6 regions across the country;
3. student surveys of 845 campus ministry participants; and
4. 10 campus pastor and campus minister interviews.

These investigations occurred during 2016 – 2017. The full reports and findings are available on the LuMin website: lumin-network.com.

EIGHT MAJOR FINDINGS

FINDING 1:

Lutheran Campus Ministry Draws on Faithful Commitments to Address Critical Ministry Challenges

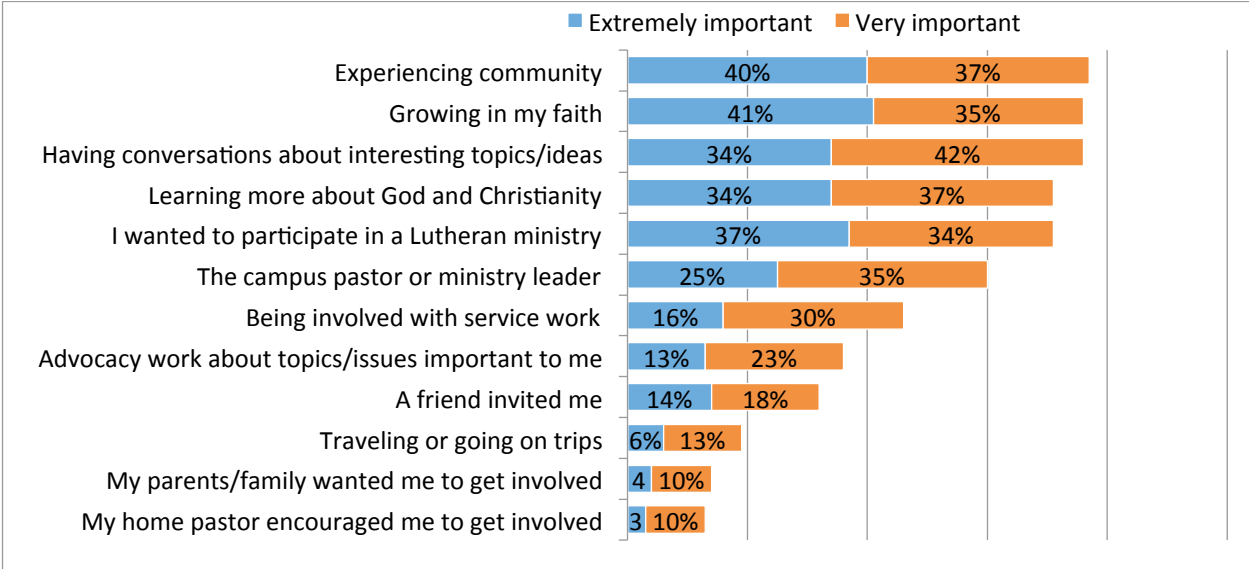
In Lutheran Campus Ministry's attempt to provide an imaginative, faithful, effective and sustainable ministry on college and university campuses, it encounters a number of challenges:

- the changing consciousness and lifestyles of students;
- the difficulty of outreach on complex and multi-layered campuses;
- the shifting and expanding roles of campus ministry staff and boards;
- the diversity and divisiveness of current university and societal culture and discourse;
- the changing relationship of campus ministry to congregations and the church; and
- the identification of sustainable financial models.

In addressing these challenges, Lutheran Campus Ministry brings a distinct identity and a trusted reputation to university campuses. These campus ministries publicly engage academic life and campus culture in ways that intentionally and robustly connect faith and reason. These ministries have established, or are establishing, a particular brand of religious life and faith that is constructive and generative of societal and ecological well-being and student wholeness. They are doing so via graceful presence, hospitality, exploratory theological discourse, trusted relationships, community service, and advocacy.

These dynamics are evident in what students cited to be important in their involvement in Lutheran Campus Ministry:

Figure 1: Motivating Factors for Students to Become Involved and Stay Involved with Lutheran Campus Ministry (n=849)



FINDING 2: Leading Complicated Lifestyles, Students Are Pressured and Vulnerable

The students in this survey are facing an array of life transitions and cross-pressures. Most are living away from home and adapting to life with roommates. Almost all respondents are full-time students, many are working part-time, and most are involved in multiple extracurricular activities while still managing to maintain a significant online presence via a mobile electronic device. A student from Oregon State University described her feelings in the first weeks of college as “chaos everywhere,” but indicated she settled in when she learned to accept, “That’s just what college feels like.”

The pressure felt by the students comes from multiple sectors of life: academic, social, financial, familial, professional, and spiritual. The overall picture is of students struggling to hang on amidst life change and turmoil. Their tentative equilibrium was easily upset if a student deviated from established norms or experienced unexpected challenges or crises. Considering the survey items indicating the most severe trauma (death in the immediate family, rape, physical or emotional abuse, and attempted suicide), 45% of all respondents had experienced one or more of these. This included a third of males (34%), half of females (49%), and all but one of those identifying as transgender, non-conforming, or gender diverse

Electronic device usage was ubiquitous, especially around social media. 55% of the students in this survey indicated they were on their devices 3-4 hours or more per day. Major differences existed between women and men. Females were more likely to use social media apps (88%, compared with 71% for men). Males were more likely to use their devices for Internet browsing (63%, compared with 47% for women), video streaming (51% for men to 40% for women), mobile gaming (19% vs.10%), and sports apps (13% vs.2%).

In these pressured, complicated lives, students are vulnerable. Almost a third (29%) of student respondents indicated that they had been treated for clinical depression or anxiety; 45% had experienced a crisis or trauma themselves or in their families; and nearly a quarter indicated that they had seriously considered suicide.

On a more positive note, the vast majority of students indicated strong feelings of self-worth. The great majority of students in this survey (83%) agreed that they have important things to offer the church and the world.

FINDING 3: Lutheran Campus Ministry is Impacting University Life

Lutheran Campus Ministries represent a robust expression of Christian faith in the life of the university. While the form and extent of their presence and contributions vary from site to site, these campus ministries are engaging the university's academic research, teaching and learning, ethical decisions, and student formation. Their activities take place in complex academic and societal contexts that are often divisive, conflicted, secular and fluctuating. In this dynamic milieu, Lutheran Campus Ministries are centers of mission and ministry within the life of their universities.

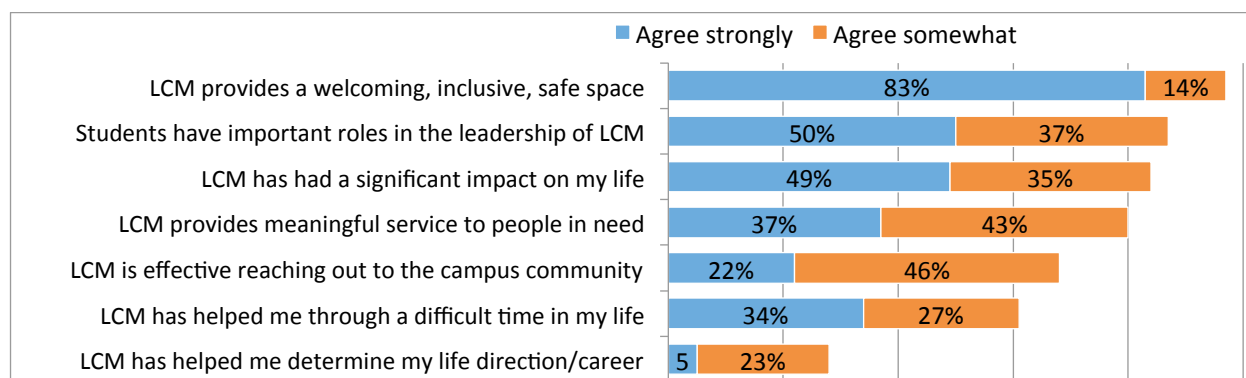
Lutheran Campus Ministries are centers of mission and ministry in differing ways on each university campus.

- Some university officials and campus ministry staff people spoke of Lutheran Campus Ministry as “a distinctive and active, radically welcoming, critical thinking Christian presence.”
- Some university staff spoke of Lutheran Campus Ministry as “the go-to place for honest, inclusive convening and discussion that helps the university develop language and direct approaches to delicate issues.” They said “Lutheran Campus Ministry establishes clearly defined, trusting relationships with students, staff and faculty through active response to issues from common values.”
- Some university staff and campus ministry staff people spoke of “Lutheran Campus Ministry setting ‘messy tables’ on campus for conversations on controversial issues.”
- Other staff members spoke of campus ministry making contributions to “deliberations on ethics” and “conversations on religion and science.”
- Some university staff said “the university relied on Lutheran Campus Ministry to provide spiritual support and guidance in times of student and campus crises.”

FINDING 4: Lutheran Campus Ministry is Making a Real Difference in Students' Lives

The vast majority (88%) of student participants reported that involvement in campus ministry was meaningful to them and had significantly influenced their lives. Lutheran Campus Ministry matters in particular ways to students on each campus as a result of effective relationships and practices. Students indicated that:

Figure 2: Student Perceptions of Lutheran Campus Ministry (n=849)



Thus, Lutheran Campus Ministry makes a difference in students' lives in identifiable ways. Some of the impact is specific and dramatic, shaping lives, and changing students' life directions and callings. One student declared: "Campus ministry literally saved my life." He went on to describe conversations and intervention from the campus minister and supportive students that brought him out of the depths of despair. Another student shared the struggles of losing a parent during college and being involved with what he described as an emotionally and spiritually unhealthy romantic relationship. "I was kind of lost," he reflected, "but in the last two years, I've not only found myself again; I've been more proud of myself and just who I am and accepted that." He went on to describe the support of the campus ministry community as the catalyst for his recovery. "They didn't go away," he said, describing how the community affirmed him and welcomed him back to group gatherings after a long absence.

Some of Lutheran Campus Ministry's influence is more general by contributing to student development at the university. Some of this influence sustains students during their high-pressured transitional years in college. It also expands the students' faith horizons and deepens their values by providing opportunities to pursue their questions, to serve others, and to make a genuine difference in their communities.

For a great number of students, especially for the 82% of students that had been active in their faith communities and the faith practices of their families, Lutheran Campus Ministry served as a continuation and expansion of their faith journey from childhood and their teenage years. Lutheran Campus Ministry offered continuity of experiences and practices, most especially worship (84% of the students worship weekly or more) and supporting personal prayer (62% of the students praying weekly or more).

- **Reaching Out to Others in Service** – The community made a difference in other people’s lives and provided students opportunities to participate in these meaningful service activities.

These Lutheran Campus Ministries were niche, anchoring communities on huge campuses. A student at UNC-Chapel Hill said, “Campus ministry has been a place where I feel like I can come, and I can be safe, and I can wrestle with life’s problems. And it’s a community that I know that no matter what’s going on out there, they’re still going to be here for me and also for other people.”

FINDING 6: Lutheran Campus Ministry Embodies Promising Practices for Young Adult Ministries

On these campuses, there were a variety of practices that seemed to be making a difference in young adult faith and life. While each practice was engaging and impactful, several of the practices were creating greater impact and generating greater ministry momentum. The following ten practices reflected some of the most significant elements in these campus ministry programs. While these ministry practices were identified among young adults on university campuses, they might well be transferable to faith communities engaged in young adult ministry most anywhere:

1. welcoming, connecting and supporting young adults in authentic, gracious community;
2. exploring ways to embody, conceptualize and narrate God’s presence in daily life;
3. meeting and deeply knowing young adults in their own life contexts and settings;
4. providing a safe place where young adults can explore challenging questions about life and faith;
5. providing a listening ear and consistent support for young adults, especially during times of transition, stress and crisis;
6. involving young adults as creators and leaders rather than simply consumers;
7. providing a faith community that integrates both physical presence and virtual connections;
8. establishing a sacred space where worship can be experienced authentically, contextually and multi-sensually;
9. including experiences in traditional and newly designed faith practices that include Scripture reading and study, personal and corporate prayer, and times for silence and reflection; and
10. providing significant opportunities for meaningful service and advocacy that promote the pursuit of justice and wholeness for all.

FINDING 7: Lutheran Campus Ministry Leadership Is a Key Factor in Its Effectiveness

No other factor had more influence on the strategies, character and effectiveness of these campus ministries than the campus pastor or campus minister. Among interviews with university staff, board members, and especially among student survey responses, campus

ministry leadership qualities and tenure were consistently highly valued, celebrated and consequential.

Students, unsolicited, said and wrote: “Pastor is trusted.” “Pastor is full of the love of God and wise.” “Pastor is someone who listens, asks and invites questions, and spends time with us.” “Pastor is open and caring and makes Bible study interesting and fun.” “The chaplain supported me and accompanied me in my sinfulness and brought me to baptism.”

University staff members, especially those in student services, spoke of the importance of the perspectives, presence and trust-worthiness of Lutheran campus pastors and ministers in support of the university’s mission, and the pastors and ministers’ participation in student development and crises. Both university staff and campus pastors and ministers spoke of the importance of longevity, i.e., developing and sustaining trusting, informed working relationships over time. They also spoke of the disruption when a long-term campus pastor or minister leaves.

While campus ministry staff members, given their particular interests and capacities, influenced their universities each in their own ways, the most prevalent, influential characteristics of these campus pastors and ministers were:

- highly relational and collaborative;
- well-informed, constructive theologians, speaking, writing and expanding theological horizons and advancing faith and learning across campus ministry and their campuses;
- deeply committed to matters of diversity and justice, and spearheading these values and activities at the university and its surrounding community;
- developing the organizational structure, strategies and leadership in their campus ministry; and
- empowering university systems and staff, faculty and students to do more effective work.

Across these campus ministries, student peer ministry was deeply valued by students, and it served as a major contributor to these ministries’ effectiveness. Students appreciated the opportunities afforded them to develop as leaders. One student put it: “I enjoy my LCM crew very much; it’s a place to develop my leadership skills; peer ministry opportunities are important.” Participation in campus ministry leadership was among the most reported factors that kept students connected to Lutheran Campus Ministry throughout their university years.

Campus leadership teams in Lutheran Campus Ministry mattered greatly to students. Students valued trusted relationships with their campus pastors, campus ministers and peer ministers, especially relationships in which they felt heard and understood. Leaders who accompanied them in asking and pursuing their questions were important. Students noticed when Lutheran Campus Ministry leaders embodied the gospel and the Christian faith.

Board leadership is a large factor in campus ministry effectiveness. Several board members understood their roles in connecting campus ministry to area congregations and their synods. Some had a critical role in fund-raising. Many saw their task, in large part, as supporting the campus pastor or minister, so that person would be free to do ministry. One board member said they wanted the campus pastor “to feel empowered to make the changes to programming or start new programs as they see fit.”

FINDING 8:

Lutheran Campus Ministry: Great Ministry, Greater Potential . . . Yet Vulnerable

Within these faithful, impactful ministries embedded in the university and the Church, there is ongoing promise for greatly influencing the university's and the Church's missions, and most especially the lives of students.

Coupled with this promise, however, there are complicating disruptions, not only in academia, the Church and campus ministry, but in society at large. The changes are creating challenges as well as new opportunities for shedding ineffective approaches and continuing and expanding the promising practices of Lutheran Campus Ministry. In this study, indicators of the challenges and opportunities for new intersections of engagement emerged often, and in certain patterns.

What can be accomplished going forward appears to be largely dependent on how campus ministry leaders and the Church surrounding them respond to three arenas of challenges.

Changes in campus ministries' constituents and contexts:

- Shifts in student consciousness and lifestyles; increasing pressure and stress experienced by students.
- Less effective faith formation of incoming students.
- The character and expression of religion including Christianity has greatly diversified.
- Challenge of outreach to students, faculty and staff, many with fewer faith connections.
- Higher education and the Church are disrupted and are in multiple transitions.

Long-standing models of campus ministry are dated:

- Theological commitments and expression need to be more full-bodied and engaging.
- Campus ministry built around worship and chaplaincy is becoming less engaging and possible with new generations of students and other university constituents.
- Responding to the shifting role of spirituality in campus culture and student outcomes is now critical.
- Virtual ministry resources and approaches, while complicated, are often enabling campus ministries to engage students more intensely, and to reach larger audiences.
- Outreach is a major challenge. Imaginative campus outreach via trusted presence, new buildings and spaces, integrated engagement, and greater visibility is underway.
- There are more and more demands on campus ministry staff, especially in an era of staff cuts and fund-raising demands. Burnout is a real possibility.

In many places, resources in support of campus ministry are diminishing:

- Where will campus ministry professionals of the future come from; how will they be developed; who will support them?
- At a time when active, engaged boards are more and more critical to campus ministry effectiveness and sustainability, board members are often difficult to recruit and are often accustomed to reactive roles when proactive participation is needed.
- In most cases there is less money. However, within the decline, some campus ministries are expanding, and new and more integrated funding sources are emerging.
- As financial resources shrink, there are fewer funds for staff and programming, thus there is more pressure on the campus ministry staff person to raise money while doing

more of the work of ministry. All this weighs on the spirit and resiliency of those in campus ministry, limiting their scope and staff longevity. It has become clear that expanded fiduciary leadership is needed.

WHAT NEXT?

The rich data of this study's investigations call for ongoing interpretation, especially by campus ministry practitioners. Groups of campus ministry staff members on particular university campuses might well reflect on the study's findings especially with an eye toward drawing thoughtful conclusions and developing its implications on their context.

There is much here that calls for widespread distribution across the Church. Lutheran Campus Ministry is a critically important ministry of the Church at work under the radar. This study's portrait of Lutheran Campus Ministry begs to get out.

Many specific concerns and promising possibilities across the face of campus ministry call for action. Leaders in campus ministry at all levels might well take initiative, experiment, perhaps seek funding that would support their getting to work on these innovations.

All dimensions of this study raise more questions even as they shine light on these faithful and effective practitioners of campus and young adult ministry. This study is but the beginning of an inquiry that might well continue for the sake of the Church's important presence in the lives of universities, their students, and young adults in non-academic settings.

WITH APPRECIATION TO THE ADVISORY TEAM

Throughout this research project, a team of four Lutheran Campus Ministry practitioners served on an Advisory Team, and provided real world insight and perspectives that helped shape the direction and scope of the research. We offer words of deep appreciation to these gifted campus ministry professionals:

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