

WELS Campus Ministry at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee

Part II: 1986-2006

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Modern Christianity

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Campus ministry, by its very nature, is marked by change. Even in the most stable years, a percentage of students will move on to new careers, new homes, and new lives. In the most tumultuous years, pastors, funding, and buildings are added elements of change that disrupt any sense of continuity. And yet, in spite of these ups and downs and even in spite of the attacks on the faiths of these students by professors and friends alike, the Lord has fed and nurtured his young lambs at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee (UWM). Through his servants at the campus ministry of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, he has prepared his children for the varied vocations, both professional and spiritual, that await them upon their graduation.

In the early years, Pastor Ziesemer was the solid pillar that held together the campus ministry in Milwaukee. The limitations of the Synod's Campus House kept the group from growing beyond the 30 or so and with age Pastor Ziesemer lost the energy he once had. At his retirement, the Southeastern Wisconsin District Mission Board (SEW DMB) decided that it would be a poor use of their resources to support a full-time worker at this center for students. For the next six years, a combination of pastors, vicars, and assistants would continue to carry out the work of preaching the Gospel at UWM. Without a regular called worker constant change was the norm. Yet in spite of the obvious difficulties the students enjoyed learning from the various vicars they met who were close to their own age.

By 1986, the campus ministry saw its' third consecutive team of vicars arrive. Kenneth Frey, who served on the first three-man team, calls the arrangement, "The three-headed monster."¹ Joel Nitz, John Parlow, and Jeff Schone, seniors at the seminary, carried out their daily duties under the supervision of Pastor George Ferch. The SEW DMB realized the drawbacks of this setup: The lack of continuity from year to year (Or for that matter from day to

¹ Frey, Kenneth. Phone interview. 4 Dec. 2007.

day), became an insurmountable challenge for the workers and a detriment to the ministry. Something had to be done.

During that year a former campus ministry vicar, Rev. Jack Kelly, was canvassing on the east coast. He had graduated from the seminary in May of 1986 and was assigned to a WELS Outreach Team. He served the team until June of 1987 when he was assigned to the Milwaukee campus ministries as a full-time pastor. He unloaded his belongings from his pick-up truck into his new apartment on Oakland Ave, only a few blocks from the student center. The apartment would become his home for six years and his pick up truck would become a moving van for many students over those years.

The installation of Pastor Kelly took place at Grace Lutheran Church in downtown Milwaukee, followed by a dance at the UWM Student Union - DJ and all. The SEW DMB was able to bump up their commitment to the campus ministry in Milwaukee thanks to a \$30,000 grant from the newly-founded Campus Ministry Foundation. Three individuals from Madison whose desire it was to gather outside funding for campus ministries across the nation organized the foundation. Milwaukee would serve as their pilot project. The original plan called for \$30,000 each year for three years. The foundation expected the Milwaukee campus ministry after those three years to find supplemental income to keep up full-time ministry. With the additional funds, the campus ministry was not only able to support a full-time pastor, but a student assistant and secretary as well. Mark Anderson, a second-career senior at the seminary, devoted 20 hours a week to the ministry and Carolyn Bloedel, who would later become Jack's wife, worked 10 hours a week developing a national file of WELS students for the synod.

Although the plan called for two more years of funding, only halfway into the first year word came that there would be no more grant money. In addition, opposite the vision of the

Foundation, the mission board expressed their concerns that the campus ministry, in the words of Pastor Kelly, “not enter too forcefully into the competition for monies from the Milwaukee WELS churches.”² Under the Lord’s guidance, Donald Jahnke was serving on the district mission board as both the campus ministry representative and treasurer at that time. Mr. Jahnke understood the problem, “The mission board had other missions, too.”³ He also saw how difficult it was establishing a presence at UWM without a full-time pastor. With careful supervision, Jahnke stretched the initial grant of \$30,000 to last the entire six years of Pastor Kelly’s ministry at UWM.

Pastor Kelly continued the tradition of holding worship services on Sunday evenings at the campus ministry house located at 2215 E. Kenwood Blvd., directly across from the Student Union. The residential home had been transformed into a student center during the Ziesemer years with the removal of a few walls in the basement. In exchange for weekly duties at the campus ministry, the students, called housefellows, paid a reduced rent on the rooms located upstairs. A sign on the door invited UWM students to come in to the facility. Students could study, relax, watch television, and even use the computer for free. Through the years, many relationships would form in that house. Some would become lifetime friendships. Others would become life-long marriages. Wisconsin Lutheran Student Center was not only a place for worshiping and studying the Bible, it was a place where Christian friends could get to know each other and show their faith in lives of service. Jack Kelly spent much of his time building relationships with the students, and more time than he ever had imagined counseling these young believers in their often-tumultuous lives.

² Kelly, Jack. “Campus Ministry in Milwaukee.” Email to the author. 6 Dec. 2007.

³ Jahnke, Donald. Phone interview. 6 Dec. 2007.

Kelly not only led Bible studies at the student center near UWM, but also reached out to other campuses as well. Since its inception the student center was always intended to cover colleges in the Milwaukee area, but with a full-time minister it was now feasible to hold Bible studies for the Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE) and Marquette students as well. Grace Lutheran Church hosted these gatherings at their facilities downtown. Pastor kept regular office hours at both Marquette and MSOE in the student life offices, and even made an effort to hold worship services on Sunday afternoon at Marquette. Kelly spent one year researching the feasibility of a regular campus ministry at Alverno without much success. Likewise, he made an intentional effort to connect students with area congregations like Grace, St. Marcus, and Salem and strengthen their relationships with other confessional Christians.

Likewise, the students and pastor alike brought an awareness of their ministry to the local congregations and high schools. Area congregations held campus ministry Sundays with presentations by Kelly and students. In Spring the pastor would go to Kettle Moraine, Shoreland, and WISCO to make presentations to the seniors. The earlier the campus ministry could contact students, the more likely they would be active at the campus ministry.

A highlight during this time was the National Campus Rally hosted by the Milwaukee campus ministry. From April 5th to the 7th of 1991, 240 students from 54 different colleges gathered at the Holidome on Mayfair Road. ComedySportz offered entertainment at the gathering, and various workshops kept the students occupied over the weekend. The theme chosen for the event was "God of our Fathers...God of our Future." Again in March of 1996, a regional campus ministry rally also took place in Milwaukee, but this time a number of campus ministries in the area sponsored the gathering. The theme for that rally was "Where Two or Three Come Together in My Name."

Things continued to change. The campus ministry committee for some time had served as a support and promotional organization. Pastors, vicars, mission board representatives, and laymen all came to the committee meetings. In the early '90s the function of the board began changing. The committee began to take ownership of the activities at the student center and eventually became the calling body.

In 1990 Pastor Kelly married Carolyn Bloedel. In 1992 Jack and Carolyn had their first child. Life was changing. He desired to continue his ministry at the student center, but realized that the Lord was calling him elsewhere. In 1993 he accepted a call to Terre Haute, Indiana. Kelly asked the Campus Ministry Committee to maintain a full-time minister at the student center when he left, but the board did not find a full-time worker. Pastor James Sonnemann, Pastor at Salem on the Eastside of Milwaukee, agreed to fill the vacancy for 6 months. After this period he called the Committee and asked when they would start looking for a new pastor. They responded that he would be their new campus pastor.

With one congregation already under his supervision, Pastor Sonnemann did all he could to, "Keep the lights on and the door open." The day to day operations at the student center drained him mentally and physically, and took him away from the congregation to which he was called to serve. Not only was he busy leading activities at the student center, but he also used much of his time doing paperwork and persuading the Synod that the student center, "Deserved a piece of the pie."⁴ Archie Broitzmann who had served on the campus ministry committee in the 80's and worked at MSOE, returned to help during the Sonneman years. Corey Tulledge, a student at the campus ministry during the Sonneman years, refers to the period as a "rough patch" for the student center. Yet he realized that Sonneman went above and beyond his call. The

⁴ Sonnemann, James. Phone interview. 3 Dec. 2007.

student center, he recalls, was in a constant fight with the synod over funding. The money seemed to be flowing to Oshkosh and Madison, while the synod continually cut Milwaukee's budget.

In spite of the challenges, Sonnemann and the students kept the student center running. Pastor continued Thursday night Bible studies, and held regular office hours at Marquette. He also met once a month with other ministers from campus ministries around UWM. They respected his fellowship viewpoints, but were willing to share ideas and experiences. Counselors from UWM encouraged active campus ministries and even asked the pastors to do presentations at the campus. Corey Tulledge worked at the info desk in the union and found ways to hang banners in the union and place signs around campus. During the Sonnemann years the kitchen saw its initial restoration, which would be completed later during Kuske's years. The campus ministry council that Archie Broitzman had formed during his first term in the 80's, continued to meet. Students served as secretaries, treasurers, outreach coordinators, worship coordinators, program coordinators, public relations coordinators, and property coordinators. The students not only carried out much of the work, but also started new activities like a year-end picnic and weekly dinners. A website about the student center also began under Corey's supervision. The challenges were numerous, but the students realized it was their turn to step up and take ownership of things. It wasn't all work though. While there was much to be done, the students still found plenty of time for social activities as well. Students went to Camp Phillip, the beach, and horseback riding.

Due to his continually failing health and his congregation's desire to have their pastor back full time, Sonnemann realized in 1999 that he needed to step down. About this time the Milwaukee Federation of Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Churches, Inc. was drawing back its

commitments to Camp Phillip in Wautoma, WI. Sonneman, Broitzmann, and active students like Corey Tulledge and Steve Broekema worked together to petition the Federation for its support. A new layman also stepped up to fill Archie Broitzman's shoes. Jerry Siegmann was an active layman living on the eastside. He had been active in campus ministry in Madison and knew the founding pastor of Milwaukee's campus ministry, Richard Zieseemer. With funding from the federation and a change in leadership, a new pastor and a new secretary stepped in to take the reigns of the campus ministry.

Philip Enderle, pastor at Resurrection on the south side of Milwaukee, took over for Sonnemann. He would lead worship on Sunday nights and continued the Thursday night fellowship and Bible study. Steve Broekema told Enderle directly, "This is going to be a 15-20 hour per week task."⁵ The symbiotic relationship between Resurrection and the campus ministry would grow over the next two years through their mutual pastor, and both organizations benefited tremendously. Three young couples from UWM became members at the aging congregation, and Resurrection gave funds to continue the renovations at the student center. In addition, the members of Resurrection helped refurbish the original hardwood floors of the student center and purchased furniture.

The new secretary, Paula Herbst, helped alleviate the continuing challenge of keeping the student center open for the students throughout the day. In Corey Tulledge's words, "Things started to shape up when Paula came around."⁶ Paula would put in about 20 hours per week to keep the doors open during the day and the housefellow who lived upstairs would keep the center open at night. During this time Paula kept the student and alumni records up to date and

⁵ Broekema, Steve. Phone interview. 8 Dec. 2007.

⁶ Tulledge, Corey. Ibid.

assisted the treasurer by taking care of the day to day finances. She also kept students up to date on upcoming events and activities by sending out regular newsletters and weekly emails. Most important of all her duties was probably the time she spent getting to know the students, often while playing card games. Most of the students, however, remember Paula for her cooking. With the free-time she had during the day she realized, "I could bake for these kids."⁷ The weekly meals she prepare for after-worship fellowship grew to weekly dinners for the students.

Just as things started to run smoothly, however, Pastor Enderle took a call and once again the student center was left without a pastor. Paula hit the phones to local pastors asking anyone she could find to fill in for Bible studies. From June of 2001 to March of 2002 various pastors would come through the doors of the student center to assist without any sticking around for any length of time. The students were discouraged as they saw the student center drawing close to what seemed to be an inevitable end. By spring only a core group of students remained. It was one of those random pastors, John Kuske, who one day walked in and envisioned something more. After talking with some of the students his first night, he immediately committed to the campus ministry. Once the students saw that they would see the same face each week, it seemed easier to return. The campus ministry committee was willing to give the student center more time, but still planned to close the doors.

Kuske went about reviving the campus ministry. He began leading worship services again on Sunday evenings – not just with the "Sunday morning leftovers,"⁸ but with sermons prepared specifically for the students. He also realized the importance of being at the student center to lead the group, but at the same time letting them take control. With different personalities showing up

⁷ Herbst, Paula. Personal interview. 5 Dec. 2007.

⁸ Kuske, John. Phone interview. 4 Dec. 2007.

each year it was difficult building leadership, but Kuske nevertheless encouraged it in his own stand-off style. Corissa Nelson, one of the students during this tentative period, remembers putting up a sign in the window advertising "Free Food."⁹ Corissa also started movie night, which was an opportunity for students to invite their non-churched friends into the center without feeling pressured. Not only were students taking initiative at UWM, but at Marquette as well. Kuske showed up to do Bible studies, but by letting students take control student involvement continued to increase.

Because of the efforts by Kuske and the students, the numbers of individuals active at the center bounced back. Pastor Kuske led Bible studies on Monday evenings. Tuesday evening was Bible study at Marquette. Daniel Tomczyk prepared Bible studies for Wednesday nights. Student watched movies on Thursday nights. And worshipers filled the house on Sundays until it could not fit any more people. Repeatedly throughout the history of the campus ministry at Milwaukee the size of the house seemed to prevent substantial growth. Kuske realized the problem and approached the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod who at that time owned the empty chapel only two doors down. He brought up the idea of purchasing the vacant building to the students at the WELS campus ministry and everyone seemed to get excited.

The problem, of course, was finding funds to purchase the building. The Federation found enough funds to rent the building starting in November of 2004. The rent would go to any future purchase. During the next year, Kuske along with others promoted the benefits of having the facilities at 2223 E. Kenwood Blvd. Not only was there a large chapel on the property, but the building included a furnished kitchen and fellowship all in the basement with a sizable entryway for fellowship before and after services. In addition, a house was attached to the chapel with

⁹ Nelson, Corissa. Personal interview. 3 Dec. 2007.

room on the ground floor for a lounge and several offices, and bedrooms on the two upper stories for several more housefellow, complete with kitchen and two bathrooms. The facilities had been vacant for several years. Considerable cleaning and refurbishing would be required, but the students went about washing, painting, pulling weeds, trimming bushes, refurbishing hardwood floors, and repairing drywall.

Donald Borgwordt from Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries also got behind the plan. Soon others saw the benefit of a building which could be used by several organizations in the area. In order to make a bid a group of individuals from institutions including Jesus Cares Ministries, Milwaukee Chapter of Lutherans for Life, the Milwaukee Federation of WELS Churches and the existing Milwaukee Campus Ministry incorporated into a new organization called, "Beacon Center Ministries, Inc." Beacon made a bid of \$1.2 million for the property which was accepted. The Missouri Synod agreed to lease the building to the group for one more year, but Beacon was unable to find the funds necessary to close. In January 2006, John C. Ibisich was elected as President of the Milwaukee Federation and brought the concept to the delegates of the Milwaukee Federation of Wisconsin Churches in February. They approved the project if "financially feasible," but the group still did not have enough funds to meet the purchase price. As the months passed, the Federation had an assessment done on the building which came back at \$900,000. Unable to get financing at the original bid, the Federation gave the LCMS a new bid at the reduced price, and they accepted. With the new price, the gifts of individuals, the Antioch and Christian Stewardship Foundations, and Thrivent matching funds, the sale took place on December, 22, 2006.

Early in 2006, as the number of students increased and with the prospect of a full-size worship facility, the Federation committed itself to doing full-time ministry. Kuske too realized,

“I wasn’t the person to carry it forward. I took the plant and nurtured it back to life. The new gardener makes a garden out of it.” After several calls, Bill Limmer, then a pastor at St. Mark, De Pere, WI, accepted the role as full-time campus pastor for the 100,000 students in Greater Milwaukee in December of 2006. This revitalized ministry has recently renamed itself, “The Point of Grace.”

The campus ministry at UWM has had a roller-coaster of an existence. Bouncing from full-time pastor all the way to no pastor at all, the student center has struggled to keep its presence in the community. With the LORD's blessing, the determination of a few committed called workers, the continual presence of Paula Herbst, and the hard work & initiative of many committed students, Milwaukee Campus Ministry has proven itself to be a lasting institution at UWM and beyond. A constant refrain among alumni is the friendships and relationships that have formed over the years. Above all, with the LORD’s blessing and by the Spirit’s working through his Word, the faiths of students and adults alike have been strengthened as they prepare for Christ’s return in glory.

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	Full Time Pastor	Part Time Pastor	Overseeing Pastor	Vicar	Vicar	Vicar
65	Ziesemer					
66						
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78						
79						
80			Witt	Wagner		
81						
82			Braun	Cordes	Kieker	
83	Schumann					
84			Flegel?	Frey	Hastings	Schoeneck
85			Flegel	Kelly	Janisch	Engdahl
86			Ferch	Nitz	Parlow	Schone
87	Kelly				Mark Anderson	
88						
89						
90						
91						
92						
93	Sonneman					
94				Mielke		
95				Hundley		
96				Tim Smith		
97						
98						
99	Enderle					
0						
01						
02	Kuske					
03						
04						
05						
06	Limmer					
07						