

# **PARTNERING WITH THE PARACHURCHES: A NEW APPROACH TO COLLEGE MINISTRY**

*Citylife Church Boston, College Ministry*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Traditionally, one of the more difficult challenges in doing college ministry has been steering through the somewhat stormy waters of church/parachurch relations. In the past, the relationship between the church and parachurch has often been marked with a bit of tension which has, at times, been “resolved” simply by an unspoken territorialism that has often resulted in competition for students. As a result, resources, both financial and human, have often gone into duplicating ministries rather than being pooled together and used strategically to achieve a united ministerial goal. What is more, we have also often seen college students drop off in church commitment at alarming rates after graduation because of inadequate preparation in dealing with that transition. The challenge that faces us today in college ministry is the challenge of building bridges and closer ties between the church and the parachurch in a spirit that fosters cooperation rather than competition.

In recent years many groups, both church and parachurch, have begun to do precisely that. In many regions different models have been developed to forge official partnerships between the two groups for dialogue, pooled resources and an increased sense of unity. In this same spirit, we at Citylife Church propose a new model for doing college ministry in Boston. Through this new approach we hope to establish partnerships and organic links with gospel-preaching parachurch groups in an effort to better reach the 50+ college campuses in metropolitan Boston with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## **A NEW APPROACH TO COLLEGE MINISTRY**

The approach to college ministry that will be taken at Citylife Church will have two separate, yet complementary, components.

1. *College Ministry within Citylife “Proper”*. Students coming from Reformed/Presbyterian backgrounds may come to Boston with theological convictions that lead them to place a priority on the local church. In order to affirm that conviction, Citylife will offer large group meetings, bible studies, and other events *for these students*. Citylife does not intend to use these events to compete with or recruit from parachurch activities. Rather, these events will ensure that students who come in with these convictions receive proper pastoral care. The main week to week ministries will include:
  - a. The Crossroads large group meetings. Meets biweekly and is intended to minister to those students who have committed to the local church over the parachurch. It is not intended to be used to draw in students who are already committed to parachurch ministries. It will meet at the Radisson on Stuart Street, not on college campuses.
  - b. Bible Studies. Citylife currently has bible studies at Wellesley, Brandeis and Gordon as well as two City Studies in Center City Boston and Newton. The City Studies are intended to draw students who, once again, place a priority on involvement in the local church. As such, these studies are not designed to target certain campuses, but are placed for geographical convenience for these students. The studies at Wellesley, Brandeis and Gordon were started to meet the needs of our students who were already committed to the church but could not attend the City Studies. Citylife intentionally chooses not to start bible studies on campuses where there is a strong parachurch presence. Nor do we seek to recruit students who are actively involved in their parachurch ministries. With our “in-church” events we seek primarily to minister to those students who have already chosen to place a priority on the local church.
2. *Parachurch Partnership*. And yet, we recognize the commission to reach the entire city of Boston with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We recognize that we are called, not only to care for students who come in with certain theological convictions, but to reach the hundreds of thousands of students who

will never step inside of a church. It is in view of these convictions that Citylife desires to partner with parachurch ministries to pool resources in order to provide a more united Christian witness.

To this end, Citylife, in close conjunction with regional parachurch leaders, seeks to recruit and train seminarians, and capable lay leaders, from within the body of the church to be sent out to parachurch ministries to serve as volunteer staff. These individuals will seek to fit in seamlessly with the vision and structure of the particular parachurch ministry that is already present on that campus. It is hoped that by doing so, clear and visible bridges will be built between the church and the parachurch. As such, these volunteer staff would maintain their identity as Citylife staff. The main responsibilities of the Citylife staff volunteer will be to:

- a. To be a resource for the parachurch group in *whatever* capacity is needed. Whether that be teaching, discipling, preaching, setting up chairs, etc. Citylife staff volunteers are there to help. As such, many of the responsibilities of the Citylife staff volunteer will be determined by the needs of the local parachurch. They are not there to recruit students for Citylife, though we do recognize that a certain level of comfort and rapport will be established with the Citylife staff volunteer that may naturally draw students to the church. Such would naturally be the case, however, for any staff person.
- b. To provide pastoral care for students who attend Citylife. We will work to meet up, though certainly not exclusively, with college students who are a part of Citylife to provide pastoral care, discipleship, etc. This is not to be done in a way that is exclusive or gives preferential treatment to students who attend Citylife. But, by virtue of natural relationships and familiarity, it is anticipated that, at least early on, connections will be made most easily with students who attend Citylife on Sundays. We want to communicate to students who are committed to serving in parachurch ministries on their campuses and yet attend Citylife for Sunday service that we care for them and want to help nurture their spiritual growth and health for the sake of their service on their campuses. The goal is to provide pastoral care for our students in cooperation with parachurch groups rather than in isolation from them. As such, we seek to create a tighter connection between Citylife and various parachurch groups.

#### WHAT WILL THIS LOOK LIKE?

The upcoming academic year (2005-2006) will serve as a pilot year to work out the details of how such a partnership will function, to address unanticipated issues that arise, and to work out structural and administrative glitches. The following is a brief program to mobilize Citylife staff volunteers into parachurch ministries.

##### *Phase 1: Dialogue*

1. The Director of College Ministries at Citylife will meet up with parachurch leaders to dialogue about this partnership, to get input and to simply develop friendships and trust in ministry.

##### *Phase 2: Recruiting and Training*

1. Citylife will recruit seminarians and other leaders in the church who are interested in doing college ministry and partnering with parachurch organizations.
2. Citylife will assess which campus ministries will be the best fit for the individual as well as for the parachurch ministry.
3. We will contact and dialogue with the regional director of the parachurch ministry as well as the parachurch leader of the specific campus to which we desire to send a Citylife college staff.
4. Potential candidates will go through whatever application process is required by the parachurch.
5. We, in conjunction with parachurch leaders, will train these individuals in a one afternoon session as to their identity, roles and responsibilities.

##### *Phase 3: Implementation and Continuing Dialogue*

1. Early in the Fall semester, the Director of the College Ministries at Citylife Church will visit the large groups of these campus fellowships to present Citylife's approach to college ministry, to introduce the Citylife staff volunteer, and to clarify the partnership that has been established.

2. The Citylife staff volunteer will be present at parachurch activities (e.g. weekly large group, bible studies, etc.) and will be available to serve in whatever capacity as needed.
3. Quarterly meetings between the Director of College Ministries at Citylife and various campus leaders will be held for communication, evaluation and dialogue.

Initially, Citylife will send out two or three seminarians to campuses that already have natural connections to the church. It is hoped that in three years, 20 seminarians and other trained leaders will be assisting the ministries of parachurch organizations at different campuses. Within 10 years, it is hoped that Citylife will be providing these resources to the majority of the campuses within metropolitan Boston.

Furthermore, it is hoped that active steps will be taken by both groups to prepare students for life in the church after college. One means of accomplishing this in the future may be to have the parachurch establish student leadership terms that begin in the second semester of the student's junior year and goes through the first semester of their senior year. In the spring semester of their senior year, students may then be encouraged to get actively involved in their local church and getting acclimated to a Christian life that is church-centered.

#### OTHER OPPORTUNITIES IN PARTNERSHIP

1. **Staff Training.** Citylife is willing to offer free staff training to all interested parachurch leaders. This session will be taught by Rev. Stephen T. Um (Ph.D. in New Testament, St. Andrews), an adjunct Professor in New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. It can be offered as a stand-alone training session, or can fit into a larger, pre-existing training program for parachurch leaders. This service is free of charge.
2. **Pastor Um Guest Speaking.** Pastor Um is happy to give guest sermons, talks and lectures at various campuses especially in light of this partnership. No honorarium is required. All talks will focus on the heart of the gospel (i.e. Christ-centered and grace-driven) rather than on secondary issues on which believers may disagree. His past speaking engagements in parachurch contexts include: RealLife Boston, Tufts IVCF, Tufts ACF, Tufts Joint Thanksgiving Service, BU IVCF, MIT ACF, MIT IVCF, Harvard AACF, Harvard Law and Graduate Fellowship, BC ACF, BC ACF Winter Retreat, BC IVCF, New England Conservatory, Northeastern University, and others.
3. **Recruiting Other Speakers.** In addition to Pastor Um, Citylife can also offer a number of seminarians to be a resource to campus ministries that are looking for more in depth teaching. These speakers can either speak on their own topic or can be asked to give a talk within a series. As above, all talks will focus on the gospel rather than on secondary issues. The Director of the College Ministries at Citylife will recruit seminarians for speaking engagements upon request. No honorarium is required.
4. **Racial Reconciliation.** The racial demographics at Citylife (about 50% Asian, 40% Caucasian, 10% other) reflect much of the ethnic diversity represented in many parachurch groups. As such, we as a church face many of the same issues that many parachurch groups encounter. In working actively for racial reconciliation in the city, Citylife may provide a model in doing gospel ministry across racial barriers. Thus, Citylife can not only be a resource in this area, but can also provide a place where students in parachurch ministries can feel comfortable to worship on Sunday, regardless of ethnicity.