

Chaplain's Report

This year was a very productive year for United Campus Ministry. There has been a lot of activity at the Ministry Center and across the street when it comes to serving students and presenting the Gospel to students.

The school year started with a few activities to initiate relationship and community. It actually started prior to the school year, with the Campus Food Shelf opening during the first week of football practice. We then had a table at Welcome Day, and handed out over 100 Bibles within care packages to students.

The partnering with the Willmar Area Food Shelf allowed us to provide for a critical need for students that needed help. Within this arrangement, students from the school volunteered twice a week to serve other students. With nearly 80 students impacted, and over 2,500lb of food distributed, that partnership can be considered a huge success.

We also expanded on our previous year's weekly lunch efforts, doubling the number of meals served. That means we served a little over 3,000 meals this school year. Most weeks saw us serve two lunches, and those lunches routinely saw 40-60 students cross the street for meals and fellowship. Considering this winter's weather, it's an incredible thing to report.

None of the meals would be possible without people providing them. Val Swanson, Deb Larson and Kim Holmgren provided meals for our Tuesdays. For our Wednesday meals, or any additional special events First Covenant of Willmar, First Presbyterian of Willmar, Bunde Christian Reformed, First Reformed of Willmar, Green Lake Bible Camp, Willmar Christian Reformed and Ridgewater's Nursing Program all helped out.

Joppa also provided a Thanksgiving Day meal for young adults and students that had no place to go for a meal. We fed between 15-20 people and had a good time with games after.

These meals have been critical for creating relationships with students from various backgrounds, and it's been awesome to build a reputation as a safe place for students to explore faith and get help.

We also hosted a number of Bible studies this year, highlighted by our ten-week Stepping Up men's study, and our Girls Gone Wise women's study. Our men's study saw more than thirty young men involved in it, and our women's study routinely saw four to eight young women attending each week. I had some awesome help from Jenea Lien the past two years in reaching the young women of Ridgewater.

This spring, we did another care package giveaway where we distributed hygiene items, devotionals and other helpful items in laundry bags. We connected with more than 125 students in Ridgewater's cafeteria for this event, and made some new connections across the street.

All year long, I had a few students ask if they could join me at church. Whenever possible, I had a car full of young men join me on Sunday mornings for services and lunch after. It's my hope to partner with churches next year and develop a consistent caravan system to get more students involved in the faith community, both knowing people and being known by people and developing relationships while they are in Willmar.

Another element of ministry that was huge was providing rides to the airport. A number of students who frequent the Ministry Center are from out of state and lack any form of transportation. The two-hour drive to (or from) the airport allows for great conversation and discussion, often centering around faith and the gospel message.

It also helped to show the students that people in this community care for them unreasonably, and is an immediate conversation starter when they ask why anyone would do that for them. I estimate that I drove more than 2,000 miles this school year on airport trips alone, not to mention trips around town here in Willmar assisting students.

With a large number of students from various backgrounds coming into this community, there was a need for beds. We were able to partner with Community Basics and their Home to Home initiative and distribute more than a dozen beds this year. In addition to that, we handed out 80 blankets and various other necessities. We gained a reputation among the students as the place "that helps people."

Lastly, I spent many Sundays traveling to area churches, sharing about what has been reported in this account. Over thirty times last year, I was blessed by being able to fill pulpits and speak about what God is doing in this community.

Keep myself and this ministry in your prayers. It's been a wonderful first two years, with a lot of work and a lot of progress. We've received a ton of help, and that needs to continue in order for this to grow to where it can be. My main concerns are being covered in prayer, board members to oversee me, and being able to financially cover what we're doing.

This year was busy, but it was a huge blessing. Thank you for allowing me to serve.

God bless,

Jeff Schmitz
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