

Why Reach the Students With the Gospel of Jesus? Is this Even Possible Especially in this Generation?

Jonathan Bacobo

FUTURE LEADERS

I agree with the words of our national hero, Dr Jose Rizal, that “the youth are the hope of our nation.” But I will add and continue to say not just any youth, or any young people, but the youth who are transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe that when he said “hope of the nation” he meant that they will be the future leaders who can bring positive change to our nation. And you will find these future leaders in the campuses today. But then again, we cannot expect that the education that they are receiving in the schools are already enough for them to make a positive impact. Every time I see a young person, that person can be the future president, senator, judge, school principal, bank manager, a tycoon, or even a famous celebrity or athlete. When we invest our time with the young people, sharing the gospel with them, discipling them, training them and mentoring them, it is never a waste of time. When I looked at the definition of education for the first time, it’s not just the impartation of knowledge. I learned that according to Noah Webster, “education is a series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits of the youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations.” It is definitely preparing them for what God has called them coupled with character development. Each one has a calling from God. He has a divine purpose or destiny for each one. And a person can only know and understand this as they develop a personal relationship with God. And it is always an honor for me to be able to help and prepare these young person in fulfilling these.

DISCIPLESHIP

Personal discipleship plays a very important role in making this happen.

For almost 37 years, this is what I have proven to work in raising up future leaders who can be the hope of our nation. We start by going to different campuses befriending them and engaging with them using topics that are interesting to them. We also invite them to weekly small group gathering called “small groups,” where we have an hour of ice breaker, sharing of topics relevant to them and to their generation, study a portion of the Bible in connection with that topic, then take some time on how to apply them in their everyday life. The meeting will end in a time of praying for one another, then possibly share a snack or a meal together.

FIRST MISSION

My first assignment was in Tuguegarao when I was sent to start a ministry with the young people and specifically reach out to the students of St Louis University, St Paul’s University, Cagayan State University and Cagayan National High School. I was only 23 years old and full of excitement because I live in the city all my life. I never lived in a province or even just outside of Metro Manila. It was exciting but challenging too because the people in this town are very religious. I heard that the people are so much against what we are about to do. From the very start there was so much revival among the students because we were sharing something very strange to them, “being born again.”

Even the daughter of a Catholic chaplain in one of the universities attended our gatherings. So in one of these universities, the chaplain went from room to room confiscating the Bibles of the students. There was even a time when my name was announced after the school’s flag ceremony as one of the people the students should avoid. In another university I was accused of being a KGB, when they found out that I have a map of their whole campus which I drew so I will know where the different colleges and departments are, plus the cafeteria, comfort rooms, etc. But in the midst of all these, I honestly feel that I was privileged because God called me and it was His will for me to be there, reaching out to the students of that town. A church was established in Tuguegarao. I served there from the very start until about a year and a half. All these to conclude that I am grateful to God for the opportunity to minister to those students. It was all worth it, my time, my energy, my sacrifices, and all the spiritual investments. I could say it was the best first year and a half of my life as a full-time minister.

THE MISSION CONTINUES

When I went back to our mother church in Manila, I continued on in this ministry with the students. Aside from the university and high schools at the university belt in Recto Avenue, we also had some open doors among varsity teams. For a start, we have a former basketball player from FEU Tamaraws who got saved and became my friend. We prayed for an opportunity to conduct a Bible study among the varsity players of FEU at the time. The coach allowed us to do it right after the team’s practice. It was a joy to see some of them attend church on weekends as long as there’s no scheduled basketball competition. We also adopted a

ministry called “Champions for Christ.” Through this, the varsity team of University of the East opened up too, as well as other field of sports. Another ministry was able to start is a medical mission and relief operations ministry. I got the idea of this ministry when a pharmaceutical student from the University of Sto Thomas informed me that they are doing something like this as part of their community service curriculum. So when I announced that we are starting this ministry I was surprised that many students taking up medicine, nursing, nutrition, ophthalmology, dentistry, showed up and volunteered for future mission. As soon as I formed this ministry, different natural calamities stormed the Philippines that gave our medical mission team a great opportunity. This even became an opportunity to invite qualified student to volunteer to this ministry which eventually exposed them to Christian work that lead them to knowing Christ.

CHANGE THE CAMPUS, CHANGE THE WORLD

And for many years, and in different nations, it is all the same, the young people and specifically the students, are the best investment of our ministry. We can never go wrong when we disciple them, train them and cheer for them. It may take time to see the results or the fruits of your labor, but it will come at the right time. Nothing is wasted. God rewarded our efforts to reach students. We know that they only have four to five years in college, so we have a little window to disciple them and train them. But that is where you have to be fully convinced that God will continue to do His work in their lives after college. I was so blessed to read and followed a book from cover to cover. This has been my guide in starting a ministry with the students. The title of this book is “Change the Campus, Change the World.” I read and followed this book from cover to cover. The author of this book is Dr. Rice Brooks. He is one of the founders of Every Nation. Since I became part of Victory Church in 1986, I’ve been holding on to what he penned in this book called “Campus Manifesto.” And these seven are the following;

- The future leaders of society are on our campuses.
- Major movements, bad or good, start on the campus.
- The majority of those who become Christians do so as students.
- International students impact their nations.
- The values on campus become the values in society.
- The most available and trainable groups of people are on our campuses.
- When we reach a student, we reach a family.

EVERY STUDENT IN EVERY CAMPUS

In summer of 1996, I went around the university and high school campuses along Taft , Manila, Philippines

to “scout the land”, look for areas for possible ministry and for prayer walk. I was able to explore some possible areas inside the campuses where most students gather, talk and hangout. Some called it “tambayan” and others have UTMT, which means “under the mango tree.” At this UTMT I was able to meet and start a small group of students inside PNU, Philippine Normal University.

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I was able to start other group meetings from the school year 1996-1997. Inside the DLSU, De La Salle University, we gathered inside the campus at a place the students called “gazebo” and that’s where I met a group of students for the first time. We also had one more small group at McDonalds outside of the school premises beside DLSU. Every other day, I also hang out inside University of the Philippines Manila campus to meet some students, talk to them and eat with them. I always introduce myself to them, informing them about our plans for upcoming gathering inside the UP Little Theater. One of the keys to success of these meetings were the leaders of our local church who happen to be the instructors and professors also from these campuses. They were the reason why I was able to enter the campuses. I can go inside and freely meet students because of the access they have given me. They were a great help in inviting students to our gatherings after their classes.

For UP Manila, our student organization was registered as Youth on Fire, that’s what we call the campus ministry arm of Victory Church during that time. Because of this we can freely move inside the campuses and invite the students from different colleges. And since we are registered, we were able to use the Little Theater inside the College of Arts and Sciences with a very minimal fee. We use this venue for our Thursday afternoon fellowship after their classes and with free snacks as well. We have this meeting every Thursday and we have different themes or titles to promote it. And we made sure that the topics are relevant to them. Some of the topics we had are the following: “How to Have Better Grades and Have Fun,” “Living a Purposeful Life,” “Managing Your Time,” “Relationships and Datings,” “Rock & Roll - A Search for God,” “The

Perils of Love, Sex, Dating in the 90's," "Date Talk," "Career Path," "Family Matters," "No to Smoking, Drugs, and Sex." And of course, we consider some celebrations on Valentine's Day, Christmas Season, the School's Foundation Day, Intramurals and Sportsfest, Freshmen gatherings, and even Graduation.

One of the outreaches we had, we called them "Conspiracy of Kindness," where we offer Free Gift Wrapping during Christmas Season. We also had opportunities to pray for the students during their exam weeks. We also conducted Bible studies inside the student dormitories which were outside of the school premises. Some of the students attending our meetings wanted to reach out to their dorm-mates who are from other universities. Because of this open doors in UP, DLSU and PNU, the other professors also invited us to conduct small groups inside their campuses like Adamson University, Philippine Christian University, Philippine Women's University, St Scholastica's College, Technological University of the Philippines, as well as Manila Science High School and Araullo High School.

God has been blessing all our engaging and evangelistic efforts. We have students from these campuses, but for a time they were not allowed to enter UP Manila for Thursday meetings during campus-wide fellowship. We just continued the small groups inside their campuses until finally after 5 months, we decided to meet during weekends. And it's the Sunday worship service at the UP Little Theater. This time, the students from the different campuses along Taft Avenue can enter the UP Campus and join us. It was indeed a blessing and a favor from God. Through our Youth on Fire ministry we were able to add more small groups and invite more students to our engaging events. This is one of the first campus church of Victory in Metro Manila.

I am privileged to reach out and disciple young people from the campuses. We continually believe God to reach every student in every campus. I love hanging out with young people because it makes me feel young. I got to know their interests, music, fashion, as well as their sentiments in the church, politics and their schools. In fact now that I am 60 years old, I am still doing this ministry. This is our ministry's calling and this is also my calling. And I can honestly say that we never departed from this initial calling. Even as we go and start a ministry in other nations, we always start with the students. We make sure that we know the facts about student population and the major campuses in the city of that nation where we are planning to plant a church.

This is now my responsibility in my "re-tire" or "change my tires" status. Now, I focus more on raising up young missionaries and mobilize them to go to the nations to reach the students. We can also see the hand of God who opens doors of the campuses and showering us with favors. He provided strategic contacts and connections to open wide the doors for the gospel to enter. We even had favor to teach Values

Formations and Character Development as part of the school's curriculum. One of the very effective tool is Teaching English and we call it "Free English Classes" or "English Corner" free for everyone but sometimes they pay a very minimal fee for their snacks. And most of the time, the Bible is introduced as a textbook where they can learn as they read. What I have learned when I was starting a campus ministry in UP Manila, now I can bring to other nations.

EVERY NATION CAMPUS

We now called this campus ministry arm of Every Nation Worldwide as "Every Nation Campus. Here in the Philippines it is recognized in many schools and universities. God has been opening the doors of these campuses and they are in collaboration with the principals, school administrators and faculties. For many years, and in different nations, it is all the same, the young people and specifically the students, are the best investment of our ministry. We can never go wrong when we disciple them, train them and encourage them. And we are not yet done. There are still a lot of work to do. We will not stop until we reach "every student in every campus of every nation."

God promised to pour out his Spirit on sons and daughters. (Acts 2:17)



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Pastor Jonathan is a licensed civil engineer graduated from Mapúa Institute of Technology. He became part of Victory Church since 1986. He helped started Victory Church, Tuguegarao and became its senior pastor in 1988. He became one of the pastors at Victory Ubelt, and started Victory Taft and served as the Senior Pastor for 12 years. His passion is for the nations and for the mobilization of men and women to reach the nations for Jesus Christ. He has led a number of local and international short-term mission trips in the past. In 2008, he transitioned to be part of the Missions Department to head the School of World Missions and Ten Days. In 2017, he led the Cross-Cultural Church Planting office in the Missions Department. In 2019 up to the present, he is part of the Missions Leadership Team. He was married to Riza Bocobo(+), and they have two kids, Gianna Reese and Johann Emmanuel.