

WATERLOO CAMPUS MINISTRY

Waterloo Campus Ministry May 2024 Report

Since coming on as the Interim Campus Pastor in July of 2023, it has been a journey of getting to know the campuses, of setting up routines and perpetual work of fostering student connections and engagement. Brian gave me a tour of the universities in the summer before heading out of town and share whatever wisdom he could. Nothing came easy, but God was there with faithfulness to build a good base of students for undergrad ministry work. As you read on, the programs that have arisen this year are about laying foundations. Primary goals have been to build relationship, stimulate conversation and support faith questions as they arise. The span of care of this ministry has had a range of 24-30 students from Fall of 2023 to end of Winter 2024 and 8 Faculty & Staff participants.



Leadership Development & Social Programming



with me in September.

Coming into this position, it was a priority to establish an executive team to have students guiding the work of the ministry. Not only were they on board to help with social functions, but to provide feedback as the term was in progress. The Executive Team in the fall consisted of three students who also took part in the Leadership Studio retreat weekend with other campus ministry leaders from across Ontario. This team was predominantly engaged in running four Weekend Escape Events including hiking, rock climbing, potlucks. The picture here is the Fall Exec Team that went to the Leadership Studio

Engagement with Students

Ferment Faith Tuesdays @ Laurier – Developing a consistent presence on campus thus far has been in the form of establishing a consistent weekly event on each campus. At Laurier, I continued with Brian's Tuesday Event called Fermented Faith. This is an ecumenical project as it is co-hosted with the Antiochian Orthodox Chaplain. The topics of this past year have ranged in greatly but always had immense depth. We have talked about dating, marriage, having children, suffering, mental health, war and peace, charity, property ownership, art, fiction, finding community. A wonderful thing with this event on this



campus has been that the appetizers were covered by the university chaplain budget. These events ran weekly on Tuesdays and ranged with attendance of 4 to 10 students at most.

Table Talk Thursdays @ Waterloo



Table Talk Thursdays – Mimicking the Tuesday event, a Table Talk Thursday was established at Waterloo. This event was set to run from 4:30 to 6:30 pm with a light supper provided by the Campus Ministry. Similarly, topics related to relationships, marriage, family, consumerism, conflict, peace, belonging, divinity of Jesus and

Fall Table Talk hospitality. With the culture diversity in our group, it was important to give time to hear about the particular topics from the different cultures present. We have learned a lot from each other though talk about the ordinary and pertinent things of life and connecting back to Christ. Towards the end of discussion, sharing part of a Christian worldview on the topic would be pursued. These events ran from the second/third Thursday to the end of the semester and ranged from 4 – 9 students per week.

One powerful conversation over the semester, demonstrated the relational build that had developed in our group. Talk in the conversation revolved around the modern ideas of marriage in contrast to biblical covenant relationships. In the midst of the conversation, Christian students witnessed to the power of covenant relationship in marriage. With permission, I report that one student shared about how the faithfulness and kindness of one parent transformed the other from an angry spouse to a much less angry spouse. Another student felt that he was discouraged by some aspects of his parent’s example. One parent was domineering and the student was concerned how the dysfunction his parent's relationship would impact him as a future spouse. These were moments of vulnerability in conversation that were gifts to our conversation and demonstrated how these students were leaning in for growth, valuing faithfulness in marriage and resisting the cultural trends of limited faithfulness.



Winter Table Talk

Grad Fellowship Group – This group continued on with a leader that had started under Brian last year. Sustaining some consistency of leadership with an already established cluster of students with Helen Kroeker, enabled me to dedicate focus to an undergraduate group. These students have met for a sweet treat once a week and a small chat about



Grad Fellowship Group

challenges they are facing and support for navigating graduate work. There have been 7 to 9 participants in this program throughout the year.

Through each of the regular weekly events, the focus has been on relationship first and topics second. With the individuals in these groups being new to each other, developing relationship with them and with each other has been the first priority to establish bonds and belonging. Students are not just coming back for free food, but for good friendship. This is a stage of laying foundations for community from which pastoral conversations, discipleship and mentoring can flourish in the coming year.

End of Year Parties

Each term we have wrapped up with an end of term party. The Fall term we had an advent lighting and cookie decorating party which was attended by fifteen students. The spring term was a potluck and games night attended by ten students. What has been a delight is to see the relationships developing amongst the students and fairly steady numbers of students engaged.

Winter End of Term Party (Undergrads) –
Potluck and Games Night



Fall End of Term Party (Undergrads)
– Advent Lighting and Cookie Decorating

Human Beans Café – Monthly Event

Another program that runs monthly which is supported by WCM is Human Beans Café. This monthly program is an opportunity to get professors, local spiritual leaders or local leaders of social justice initiatives to talk about what it means to be human. Topics for these events this year included: What is Cinema and why does it matter? The End of the Universe, Creation Stories: A Jung Earth Approach; Artificial Intelligence; Jazz & Improvisation & Faith; Tiny Home Takeout – Finding Humanity in the Darkest Places of Society; Cybernetics in Literature. The goal of these meetings has been to engage professors in their area of speciality and ask them to share about what it means related to being human. Conversation prompts are provided on each table for some questions to dialogue on after the presenter has shared. These allow for individuals to share some perspective and though faith is not always necessarily presented in the talk, it usually comes up through the dialogue at tables. This event serves a purpose of drawing people into conversations about interesting topics but also to

spark spiritual interest and link people somehow to God. Human Beans averages around 25-30 per night with one event at Christmas hitting 50.

Faculty and Staff Book Study

Faculty and Staff Book Study has resume and in full force this year. Throughout this past year there was a consistent participation of 8 – 10 professors. We read and discussed the books *You're Only Human* and *Machines Behaving Badly* (Artificial Intelligence). The majority of this group is retired professors; however, I have recruited a current staff person this year.



Human Beans Café takes place at Seven Shores Café in Uptown Waterloo. Cookies are baked by the Grad Group to serve guests.

Adding on to the group slowly is all it will take to revitalize the group as these individuals are not short term like students. How does this represent value? It is a unique opportunity provided by WCM to these professors retired or still work to engage in conversation with professor peers around faith topics. Engaging conversation at the crux of faith and academia happens here and it is a healthy outlet for this group that has meet for a long time. It was a joy at the end of this term to have one professor's wife, who was also a professor and who had a stroke a year prior, join us for the last two sessions.

Discipleship & Student Evangelism

In the Winter term, students engaged in Huddles. Huddles are a small accountability and prayer group. Students choose their own reading plan for devotion times and focus on answer what is God saying and what do I think he is speaking to me. A small group of three guys successfully launched a huddle this semester and ran it successfully all term. It has been a catalyst for their faith and their relationship development.

Students are inviting and bringing their friends to our group. We have Hindu students, atheists and eastern "spiritual" students that have come to our group by invitation of the core members. This is exciting to see students sharing their faith and feeling good about bringing their friends to WCM.

Promoting WCM on campus has led to moments for gospel conversations with students of other faith traditions. Setting up an information table in the Student Life Centre has been a means to invite students to our Table Talk Thursdays and keep drawing students in to try it out. Even getting a student to come out one time is an opportunity to touch their lives with some conversation about



Christianity as it pertains to topics students are conversing about that week. Setting up this table 3-4 times a semester is a preferred goal.

Local Church Support – THANK YOU!

A fantastic support to our students has been both Community and Waterloo CRC. These churches have offered student lunches through fall and winter terms once a month. Combined with our own Weekend Escape Events there was something available to students through CRC ministry nearly every weekend of the month as they did not often land on same weekends. Thank you to both of these churches for hosting and referring students to the Waterloo Campus Ministry program. A thank you to all who have supported this ministry in additional collections during the past year.



Student Lunch at Waterloo CRC, September 2023

Campus Pastor Development

As part of my professional development for ministry and networking, I participated in the Navigator’s Discipleship Forum monthly, took students to Leadership Studio in the Fall, attending a mid-year campus ministers day in December, Beyond Culture Wars – Jesus and John Wayne evening conference event. I have also started the Deeper Journey which is a two-year focus on spiritual disciplines through eight short retreats. This is a powerful program for teaching disciples of the faith, but also develops one’s skills for the self – care necessary for those in ministerial positions. I see future benefit in teaching these spiritual disciplines to students. Finally, I am looking forward to going to the CRCNA Campus Minister’s retreat in May in Calgary. I am positive that I will be inspired by other campus ministries and their strategies of connecting with students for gospel encounters and discipleship.

Waterloo’s Spring Term

Until other campus that shut down for the summer, Waterloo and Conestoga have year-round programming. We are dreaming of hanging out in the parks, going to Elora Gorge and movie nights. We are continuing Table Talk Thursdays and are hopeful to try out a book study night that will be going through either Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis or Simply Christian, NT Wright.

Praising God

God has been incredibly faithful with bringing students together for friendship, faith and conversation. The quality of these students is incredible in every regard – their character, their stories and their passion for community. I am excited to see what fruit we can bear for the kingdom in the year ahead. By the time I share a verbal report with you at Classis, I hope to have student voices and comments to share with you all. They are just focused on exams right now 😊

Blessings In Christ, Melissa Burmaster, Interim Campus Pastor, Waterloo Campus Ministry