University of Notre Dame
Campus Ministry – 2007 Symposium
June 4-8, 2007

Coming to Know and Love Christ:
From Evangelization to Discipleship

Presentation:

Evangelization To and Through Diverse Cultures

Coalhouse, Conklin and the Risen Christ:
Spreading the Good News of Diversity on the Road to Emmaus

Chandra J. Johnson
Associate Director, Campus Ministry
Director, Cross Cultural Ministry
University of Notre Dame
Coalhouse, Conklin and the Risen Christ:  
Spreading the Good News of Diversity on the Road to Emmaus

by

Chandra J. Johnson  
Campus Ministry, University of Notre Dame  
June 4, 2007

For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new. But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change... (Evangelii Nuntiandi 47,48)

This paper is a summary of over a decade of observation and ministry as a non-traditional student and campus minister at the University of Notre Dame. From this perspective, I have re- visioned completely my role as a campus minister and re-examined evangelization to and through a diverse student body in 21st century America.

To explain the radical shift in my ministerial ideology and methodology, I cite a recent campus controversy which, I believe, exposes an emerging shift in the social conscience of Christian young adults, most particularly those who attend predominately white, American colleges. What I see as a shift in cultural acceptance and social interaction among college students, most particularly the dominant Caucasian population, appears not only in what I have observed at Notre Dame, but is evident in surveys and research published recently on the spirituality and religiosity of 21st century Christian teenagers and young adults.

In my estimation, there is a direct correlation between how many young adults relate socially to their peers and how they relate institutionally to the Church. Students today seem to be more accepting of the varied opinions of their peers than they are to the traditional dogma of the Catholic Church. As a campus minister, this is not as troubling to me as one would expect. What I have come to realize is that 21st century Catholic young adults are discovering Christ the same way 1st century Jews discovered Christ: through their collective and renewed belief in God and interpretation of current events.

I contend that the students who enroll in our campus communities, regardless of their assigned racial category, intuit the need to espouse an authentically catholic (universal) religiosity and worldview. They realize that in addition to people who look like them, they need access to the experiences of those who don’t look like them to succeed in life. Collectively, they are different from any generation before them. They, like the diverse Pentecost community of 1st century Palestine, are constructing a renewed catechetical approach to Catholicism that evolves

largely from a global, organic approach to Christianity. Because the society which defines their self identity is rife with unexpected tragedy and uncertainty, safety, success, and personal anonymity are no longer guaranteed. Students who populate college campuses, I believe, are in search of spiritual and psychological stability, in any form. And they are looking for this stability amongst their peers, in any form. Unbeknownst to them, they are evangelizing the world and the American Catholic Church through their renewed American and catholic social conscience. And they are doing this by dismantling the social categorizations instituted by previous generations. They are the 21st century Pentecost Generation.

Conklin and Coalhouse

She stood patiently in line behind several of her peers, waiting for her turn to the microphone. After an hour of heated testimony from students responding to comments made by a panel of white and black faculty and administrators on why race in America and at Notre Dame is still a hot-button issue, Mary, a white female, finally got her chance to ask the proverbial question that would unleash the elephant in the room. Her question went something like this:

_If we are a Catholic university with a common mission, a common goal; if we are indeed a “family” with a common faith tradition, then why doesn’t our faith-alone—override these obvious divisions and unite us together as one?_

Mary’s question sent a chill down my spine. The room got very quiet. Then, a member of the panel spotted me sitting in the back of the hall and directed the question toward me, the only campus minister in the room. The students began to applaud and with much hesitation, I was forced out of my seat by some unknown force and slowly made my way to the nearest microphone. As I calculated each step in an attempt to bide more time, I thought to myself, “Lord, I’m on the hot seat now. What should I say and how should I say it? Jesus, please don’t leave me now!”

During Black History Month this past February, the students of the Pasquerilla East Musical Company (PEMCo), a predominately white student organization, and Wabruda and Shades of Ebony, predominately African American student organizations, co-sponsored a campus wide academic forum to discuss a swelling controversy that grew over the use of the “N Word” in the 2007 PEMCo production of _Ragtime_, the musical version of E.L. Doctorow’s 1975 novel of the same name. _Ragtime_ is a tale of race, prosperity, and social tension in early 20th century America. Some of the words in the script used to tell the story, although reflective of the time, are now considered politically incorrect at best. The forum was held because members of the African American community were outraged when, while auditioning for various parts, they realized the dialogue between Conklin, the young, white, male Irish immigrant, and Coalhouse, the young, black male musician and lead character, included the use of the “N Word” several times.

Auditions for _Ragtime_ were held prior to the Christmas break and students from the black and white communities tried out for respective parts. Half way through auditions it became obvious to the PEMCo director and student officers that the use of the “N Word” between Conklin and Coalhouse was becoming a point of contention for some African American students. The news of the tension spread quickly around campus and PEMCo producers and members of Wabruda and Shades of Ebony took the controversy to the next level. They felt a need to
address it publicly. The last thing either group wanted was a racial incident at Notre Dame spawned by a play PEMCo thought would be educative for the entire student body.

After several conversations with the black and white members of the cast and crew, the production staff decided to preserve the dialogue's integrity and retain the use of the "N Word" in the dialogue between Conklin and Coalhouse. As the decision to preserve the "N Word" filtered out into the student body, many African American students were offended and a meeting was called among the African American community to vent their anger. After several hours of intense, moderated discussion, it became clear that there was no general consensus among the African American students as to whether or not the "N Word" was appropriate language on a modern, Catholic, mixed-race college campus, even in the context of a play. Reportedly, half of those present believed that because use of the "N Word" was a part of the original script, it should not be omitted in order to preserve the play's artistic integrity, while the other half believed the "N Word" was offensive and should not be used under any circumstances. As it got closer to opening night, the controversy intensified, and the PEMCo production staff, Wabruda and Shades of Ebony decided to co-sponsor an open forum to bring the issue to the entire student body. They called the forum "Ragtime 100 Years Later: Defining Our Generation's American Dream."

When I finally arrived at the microphone to answer Mary's question, I began my comments by saying something like this:

I believe race is still an issue of tension for both America and Notre Dame because perhaps we have lost sight of Jesus—who He was in first century Palestine and who He is today. Perhaps we need to reintroduce the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way in which we can answer questions like the one you are raising, Mary. Do we truly understand His message? I believe we have lost sight of His message and therefore have used the Christian religion for purposes other than tearing down domestic, global and ecclesial divisions that have separated us for centuries.

I went on to say:

I applaud PEMCo because you are the power base in this country. Many of you are white males. It took courage to bring Ragtime to campus because until now, PEMCo had never done anything like this before. It took guts to expose race on a campus which has struggled with race and difference for generations. It took faith to trust that what you were doing would make us a better community, and therefore better Christians, better Catholics. Your ancestors laid the foundation for this country on terms that excluded and exterminated entire races. As you prepare to graduate and enter into a global society, you are making a bold statement about your hopes and dreams for this country and your Church. You're saying to those in my generation, "We want to do things differently. We want to broaden and live faithfully the meaning of 'Christian,' of 'American.' We may not understand fully the emotion attached to race that belies our history and inability to live as one, but we certainly feel the tension and refuse to pass it on to our children."
By this time I was sweating bullets. I took a deep breath and concluded my thoughts by saying,

"So this is why "faith," at least for now, can't unite us. What do we believe and in whom do we place our trust? We have to understand what faith in Jesus Christ is—in real time. From there, we can live it and begin to build the community you all desire for yourselves and your children. You, PEMCo producers, directors, and production staff, are laying the foundation at Notre Dame unlike any generation before you. What you have done by bringing Ragtime to campus is spreading the good news of "change." You are spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. You are Christ to us all and I applaud you."

As I returned to my seat, out of the corner of my eye I saw Mary begin to applaud, at which point her peers joined in. After the forum, black and white students thanked me for what they heard as honesty and direction. The following week several white males came to my office to share their experience of the forum and how they had made a vow long ago not to pass on the racist ideology of some of their family members. When rehearsals were completed and production began, at the beginning of each show the producer and the presidents of Wabruda and Shades of Ebony spoke to the audience about the tenuous yet creative tension that preceded opening night. The producer admitted publically that when he selected Ragtime for the PEMCo 2007 production, he knew he was taking a chance. But he also knew it was a chance worth taking. He and the production company were interested in examining, through Ragtime, if race relations had changed in America and at Notre Dame in the past 100 years.

What makes this story so intriguing and why I have chosen it as the basis for this paper is because it speaks to the very heart of evangelization and why we must begin to think differently about our students and Catholic campus ministry in the 21st century. Although the PEMCo story is a recent Notre Dame story, the tension that girds black and white race relations—or race relations in general—on predominately white college campuses in America is not exclusive to the Notre Dame campus. Duke University and the Lacrosse team, Don Imus and the Rutgers Women's Basketball team, Virginia Tech University and the Korean-American English majors—for the past several months race relations in America has driven the national and international conversation. Young adults studying on college campuses have had to find ways to cope with the psychological and emotional effects of a historically-rooted social ill they did not create nor desire to perpetuate. Over the past six months, race in America has been exposed within institutions responsible for training the next generation of leaders who are charged with leading an increasingly global society. The PEMCo story may not have made national headlines but the tension, whether exposed or hidden, will forever serve as a lens from which the next generation of young adults will live, lead and worship unless we actively evangelize and revive authentic gospel dialogue and values on our college campuses.

After over a decade of ministry at Notre Dame, I have come to realize that, as undercated as our Catholic students are reported to be, they are living out a first century, apostolic, Christian ideology. They are transforming the term "diversity" into a term that no longer defines skin color or ancestry. For them, "diversity" means "diversity of thought." For students from all regions and walks of life, broadening the American landscape to include
differences of opinion and worldview prepare them for ministry and jobs in a globally-oriented society.

Evangelization to and through diverse cultures requires a different ministerial blueprint. As campus ministers and stewards of the campus Church, we must recognize that

the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs (Evangelii Nuntiandi 18).

As campus ministers working at a variety of campuses among a variety of student populations, perhaps we need to change our perception and praxis for effective evangelization. Returning to our post-Resurrection roots may help.

**The Emmaus Model**

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” (Luke 24:13-17)

By implementing what I call “The Emmaus Model,” we will find that evangelization to and through diverse cultures not only brings students together, face-to-face, but also brings to life the challenges as well as the integrity of the world in which they live and are asked to navigate. Like Cleopas and his friend on their way to Emmaus after the Crucifixion, by discussing the issues of the day that drive their religious, intellectual, and socio-political curiosities, students will discover the peace and hope in the ministry, death and resurrection of Christ in the midst of their conversations with each other.

There are three steps to implementing The Emmaus Model in campus ministry programming: Know Your Campus, Know Your Students, Know Yourself.

**Step 1 - Know your campus!**

“Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” (Luke 24: 18-19)

I have found that having a working knowledge of the racial demographic of the student body is beneficial to knowing how to minister to a diverse student population. If the following information is readily available and if it applies to your respective campus, researching these facts may prove helpful:

1.) What is the racial demographic of my campus?
2.) Of these groups, how many students of color are Catholic?
3.) What is the largest minority group?
4.) Of that number, how many are Catholic?
5.) What is the racial demographic for the freshman class?
6.) Of that number, how many students of color are Catholic?
7.) What percentage of the entire student body is Catholic?

Now that you have these numbers, tuck them away for regular review throughout the year. Knowing this information enhances your ability to minister to a mixed-race student body because if asked by anyone, you will know the ethnic composition of the campus you serve. As a campus minister, knowing the answers to questions about the campus ethnic demographic not only broadens your worldview, but it also makes it easier to evangelize. When students—regardless of their ethnicity, class or faith tradition—sense you are open and aware of the diverse student body you serve, they will see within you a concerted effort and intentionality in building a genuine and authentic Catholic faith community.

Step 2 - Know your students!

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. (Luke 24: 28-29)

Students are more alike than they are different
Over the past 10 years I have come to realize that most students, regardless of their background, are very similar. This is particularly true when one considers their catechetical training and overall Catholic faith formation. Recent surveys and research tell us that

on sociological measures of religious strength, American Catholic teenagers appear to be faring particularly poorly, particularly badly. Catholic teenagers stood out in the study...as exceptionally weak in their faith, disengaged from the Church, and largely indifferent to faith and practice matters. By the hopes, standards, expectations, and so on of the Church itself for its young people, U.S. Catholic youth are doing...remarkably badly. 2

Considering these remarks, we must always keep in mind the students with whom we work who do not fit into this mold. Many of our students are engaged, faithful, and dedicated to their Catholic faith expression. However, I believe it is important to consider the majority of students who do not cross our path and to whom we should give equal attention. They are the students who are cited most often in recent studies. In a sense, they are our target group.

---

Studies also indicate that

the Millennial Generation college students (age 20-28) are culturally more
diverse than previous generations of Catholics, are distrustful of “moralistic
judgments” and are inclined to accept cultural relativity as the only universal
truth. “For them, missing Mass is an option, not a sure sign of ‘going to
Hell...the college students take religious tolerance as a moral obligation and
respect diversity of beliefs and behavior.”

I see this at Notre Dame. Students from a cross section of ethnic groups are seemingly more
tolerant and accepting of “difference” than generations before them. Over the past several years,
I have had to change my ministerial posturing and pay attention to the changing tide in student
self-identity and social perception. Attitudes toward race and ethnicity have shifted to be more
unifying and universal.

To respond to this shift, for the first time in 10 years, Campus Ministry will no longer sponsor a
Fall retreat for African American first year students (see attached memorandum). After much
reflection and research, I made the decision to discontinue the retreat because in my attempt this
semester to put together a leadership team for the retreat, I was told by students who attended the
retreat in past years that incoming students don’t need an “initiation retreat” to help them “fit in.”
They arrive on campus already knowing how. Regardless of race, class or religious category, 21st
century college students see themselves as equal partners and companions in an increasingly
shrinking global environment. When we speak of evangelization to diverse cultures, I believe
we must begin to include everyone in the conversation.

Get them talking
What we have found successful in Cross Cultural Ministry at Notre Dame is student participation
in programs that highlight the discussion of contemporary topics. If the topics are framed and
facilitated in the context of campus ministry (prayer, discussion, prayer, social) students find that
a fruitful conversation with peers leaves them with a sense of wholeness and peace. They return
to their dorm rooms or off-campus housing knowing something more about their peers, campus
and the world around them. As stated in the e-mail from a student who attended the DDECC
Retreat in February

...it was a chance for me to see first hand how incredibly intelligent and well
informed my peers are. The beauty of the current format is that you will never
have the same retreat experience. The topics change, the stories shared change,
etc. The DDECC format is one that allows the lives of the participants to
determine the outcome of the retreat. What you have created is a living retreat,
one that evolves though time with every new group that experiences it.

Paradoxically, young adult Catholics find themselves being catechized through their peer
community, first. It is in the midst of the conversation that they recognize Christ in the personal
stories and world views of their peers. They keep coming back because when they’re together
with peers who enjoy sharing their thoughts and perspectives on life, Christ is no longer a virtual

---

3 The ‘bookend’ generations: Two studies show important differences between youngest and oldest Catholics’,
National Catholic Reporter, March 9, 2007
experience. Christ can be seen and felt—in real time—in the midst of the conversation, in the midst of the community. Like the Mass, it is in these moments when students value and enjoy being Catholic.

**Step 3 – Know Yourself!**

*When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. (Luke 24: 30-31)*

Campus ministers are the ears, eyes and heart of Christ on campus. Each year we are expected to immerse ourselves into the campus community we have agreed to serve. Self-knowledge of personality type and professional penchant is essential in assessing ministerial strengths and weaknesses. If one is an introvert, self-reflection may come naturally, and outward evangelization may not come easily. If one is an extrovert, self-reflection may not come naturally, and outward evangelization comes easily. In either case, knowing our particular strengths and weaknesses will help when assessing our comfort level within naturally diverse student communities.

For *The Emmaus Model* to work well, the students to whom we evangelize and who will eventually evangelize each other should be from multi-ethnic life experiences. Recruiting multi-ethnic Leadership Teams means being comfortable within all types of student groups. Being present, year-round, to students on all grade levels (especially freshman) and who participate in a wide variety of campus groups is paramount to forming a campus ministry community that reflects a wide variety of perspectives and world views.

Also, I have found that an informed campus minister is a relevant campus minister. Campus ministry programming which focus on the discussion of national and world events are quite appealing to students. Having a working knowledge of current events is essential in discerning what will attract students’ attention. Subscriptions to popular web and print media, e.g. *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *U.S.A. Today*, etc., and private publications, e.g. *Crossroads*, *Commonweal*, *National Catholic Register*, *America*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, etc. are necessary to facilitate and initiate discussion groups on contemporary topics. Campus ministry’s knowledge of current events will peak the interest of students to become curious, if they aren’t already, about the society they will be leading one day. From here a campus minister can draw out the Christian response to world events as they unfold in the U.S. and abroad.

Above all, *The Emmaus Model* culminates with the Celebration of the Eucharist. It is in the Breaking of the Bread when we recognize Christ as the community gathered to celebrate a common faith and a common journey. Possessing the appropriate catechetical knowledge and language to tie in the Eucharistic Celebration to the discussion of secular society is the first step toward evangelizing and catechizing Catholic young adults. Helping them to draw the connection between the Eucharistic community and the world community is central to effective evangelization across ethnicity, class and religion.
Summary

These ministerial functions reflect the general mission of the Church on campus and the distinctive situation of higher education today. In Her ministry, the faith community on campus must be faithful to the essential teachings of the Church and at the same time, read the signs of the times and accordingly adapt the message of the gospel to meet the needs of the academic community.

(EmPowered by the Spirit, No. 33)

If the recent studies are correct, and no previous generation has inherited so little of the content and sensibility of the Catholic faith as this generation⁴, as campus ministers, how can we reverse a trend that concedes that

our models of faith, family, and youth are in transition; [that] gone is the America
where people are deeply involved in our neighborhoods, our towns, our cities,
and our churches, gone are family dinners, and gone are Sunday afternoons with
multiple generations, where children and youth felt connected to an extended
family network [through the Church]?.⁵

Evangelization to Catholic young adults by sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ vis à vis the current events that define the world in which they live, provides students with a blueprint for Catholic evangelization through a contemporary, cultural, and socio-political/economic/religious lens. This is precisely the Good News that was shared between two ordinary people and the Risen Christ on an ordinary road on a very extraordinary day. The Emmaus Model and other innovative catechetical programming is our hope for the future. It reconstitutes healthy, Christ-centered communities for Catholic young adults who have been baptized in the faith and desire an applicable, transparent, real-world experience of Jesus Christ.

At the University of Notre Dame, in 21st century America, Conklin, Coalhouse and Mary became brothers and sisters by exchanging ideas and asking the tough questions about race, relationship, faith and the Church. As a national campus ministry community, let us commit to a progressive evangelization that includes extending an invitation for open and honest communication and dialogue—across ethnicity, class and creed. When you return to your campuses, stop at the store, pick up some snacks, dust off the chairs, and invite them in. The students we serve have a lot on their minds. Let them talk. In that moment, through their conversation, they will recognize Christ in each other, in the breaking of the bread.

---

⁴ Comments by Margaret McCarty, Founding Executive Director of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, during the Fordham University Conference, Catholic Teenagers: Faith at Risk?: Do new findings reveal a time of renewal—or massive generational failure? — A Forum, Fordham Center for Religion and Culture, Fordham University, November 2, 2006, Transcript available at www.fordham.edu/ReligCulture or Verbum Transcendend, Inc. (800) 783-3770, pp. 11-15.

⁵ Ibid.