A Twelve Month Guide for Congregations That Care for Students

To all who care for students,

Thank you for your interest in connecting with college & university students! This guide is designed to help you started on an intentional ministry of keeping in touch with the students in your congregation. If you are located near an academic community and want even more ideas and resources for reaching out to those in higher education, talk to a Lutheran Campus Minister near you or visit the ELCA campus ministry website.

Connecting with college and university students is a challenging ministry. You won’t always see the fruits of your labors immediately. You might even be tempted to give up. Keep going! As you get to know your students and watch their lives unfold, you’ll find many good reasons to remind yourself, “well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

Use the ideas in this guide or develop your own plan for ministry. God, the church, your students, and the world will benefit from your time, care, and attention.

May God’s Spirit bless your efforts!

“...thank you and everyone at Lutheran Campus Ministry for keeping in touch with me. Hearing from you helps me to remember who I am and what I believe....”

The “12 Month Guide” was created by Deaconess Donna King & the Rev. James Norlie, Lutheran Campus Ministry, Oregon State University.
This Will Get You Started!

1. Organize a small team to be responsible for student ministry.

2. Prepare your list of students: Include those 'away' at residential schools and those studying near home or via web-based classes.

3. Let campus ministries and partner congregations know about your students away from home by using the ELCA's campus ministry web site (www.elca.org/campusministry). Be sure to include as much information as is humanly possible: student name, campus, home phone, and congregation are essential. Encourage students to visit the campus ministry or congregation where they’ll be a student and check it out!

4. Get to know your students. Be sensitive to student life. Student years can be full of stress, change, and exciting discoveries. Major life decisions are often made during the college years. Be supportive. Good education expands a person’s world view along with their base of knowledge and reasoning. With nurture, a stronger, more encompassing faith can emerge.

5. Be amazed! Students may not always be in touch with programs or express appreciation. “Success” may be hard to measure. But watch & see. Over the years God will work wonders through your ministry of care!

Twelve Months of Ideas...

Start anywhere...the secret is to keep going. Over time you will be amazed at the difference this makes!

7 July

+ BEGIN COLLECTING STUDENTS’ NAMES & SCHOOLS.

Ask the campus ministries or partner congregations near these schools to send you newsletters, bulletins or other PR so that you can personally encourage your students to get involved when they move.

+ PLAN A GATHERING JUST FOR STUDENTS.

It could be a pizza night or a picnic, or a weekend retreat. Be sure to include those who will be new to college life in the fall. Find out what the year has been like for those in school and what words of wisdom they have to pass on to those who will be attending in the fall.

8 August

+ BE ESPECIALLY SENSITIVE TO THE HOPES & FEARS OF THOSE LEAVING HOME FOR THE FIRST TIME.

Classes begin anywhere from mid August to late September. Send those who leave away with your blessing & pray for all ministries in higher education.

+ CONTINUE GATHERING AND Sending NAMES.

9 September

+ ASK YOUR PASTOR TO INCLUDE PRAYERS DURING WORSHIP FOR ALL WHO STUDY AND ALL WHO TEACH.

+ ADD STUDENTS TO YOUR CONGREGATION’S MAILING LIST so they’ll continue to receive newsletters. List all the students & their campuses in the newsletter and invite the congregation to pray for them.

+ SEND ANY ADDITIONAL NAMES OR ADDRESS UPDATES TO THE MINISTRIES AT THE VARIOUS CAMPUS.

+ BEGIN A GROUP E-MAIL LIST and your team can keep in touch with each other. Send a note every now and then (perhaps once a month?).

10 October

+ WRITE SHORT NOTES TO EACH OF THE STUDENTS. Personal mail, even a postcard, can be the highlight of a week. Ask them how they are doing. Inquire what they’re thinking about these days & invite a response. (Listen for questions and connections with faith...some of the themes might give you ideas or an opportunity for further conversation.)

11 November

+ SEND SOMETHING FUN, ENCOURAGING OR NUTRITIOUS! Most students are deep into mid-term exams in November (imagine: late nights, not enough sleep, too much to do, everyone on edge...). If your surprise is something to share, it just might result in a break with friends, which always helps. Just imagine the smiles on the faces of the recipients and the wonder in the eyes of the friends when your students say, “Hey, come see what my church sent me!”

+ BEGIN PLANS FOR YOUR COLLEGE RECOGNITION SUNDAY. + CHECK IN WITH THE FAMILIES OF YOUR STUDENTS. Sometimes transitions are tough!

12 December

+ SEND AN ADVENT CALENDAR OR A DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET AND AN ENCOURAGING NOTE. Pray for peace and sleep and sanity and wisdom...and safe travels when it’s time to come home.

+ HOLD COLLEGE RECOGNITION SUNDAY. Challenge the students to link their unfolding lives with God’s creative & redemptive activity for the world. Follow the service with a reception. Take the students’ pictures and prepare a display for your bulletin board. Ask how life is going. Listen well for themes of faith, spirit, unfolding self...

1 January

+ ASK THE CONGREGATION TO NOTICE the pictures of their students! Invite ongoing prayers for students. Thank the teachers in your midst.

+ SEND A THANK-YOU NOTE to each of the students who participated in College Recognition Sunday.

2 February

+ BE SURE YOUR ADDRESS LIST IS UPDATED. It’s not uncommon for students to change addresses and sometimes even colleges during the school year.

+ ENCOURAGE A CHURCH GROUP OR A SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS TO SEND “CARE PACKAGES” TO STUDENTS. These are welcome anytime! You might include cookies, candy, gum, a Lenten devotional booklet, a personal note.

Visit Us At:

WWW.ELCA.ORG/CAMPUSMINISTRY

The ELCA’s web page features an electronic student referral system as well as resources, ideas, celebrations, and links. You’ll also find opportunities to support campus ministry and to apply for jobs within the system.