

Students Stretch the Circle of Community

by Wanda Kidd | CBFNC Collegiate Engagement Coordinator



Collegiate Ministry is incredibly important to the spiritual development of young adults. I am always impressed with the ability of young adults to impact their world with the Christian Gospel and with their understanding and appreciation of community.

The week before Thanksgiving last year, I had the privilege of being at the Thanksgiving Gathering for the UNC-A United Campus Ministries. That type of event is something I have been part of for 40 years, but that night there was an added dimension to their gathering that I found exciting and very hopeful.

The tables were set with fall and Thanksgiving décor. The students and the intern had set the stage for a festive gathering. All day, the people from several campus ministries had prepared the traditional turkey, dressing, and “all the fixins” meal. Around 6 PM, the crowd began to gather and before we shared a prayer and started the meal, we went around the room and introduced ourselves. There were students from a variety of campus ministries, but some of the people, after introducing themselves,

simply said “I am from the community.” At first, I was puzzled. Why were they at a campus student ministry event? Then, it became clear that someone had invited the neighbors from the surrounding community. I wondered who thought to invite them. As it turned out, it was the students themselves.

While many campus ministry houses are on the campus, the UNC-A Baptist House is at the end of a residential street that backs up

to the campus. That reality has encouraged the campus ministers and some students to believe that developing a relationship with people on their street is important. They have done that by offering tools and helping with yard work and also working at the

community’s farmers’ market.

So, it only seemed natural to these students that they should invite their neighbors to their Thanksgiving Dinner. I thought it was interesting that the people who were invited were told that they could bring food to share. Seven people from the community came and brought salad, hummus, and other side dishes. They sat around the tables with the students and shared stories and gratitude.

How insightful it was to offer the community people the opportunity to participate. So often when working with students, we ask groups to bring the whole meal, or if we are inviting people we tell them they do not have to bring anything but themselves. Both of those approaches have a tendency to hamper community. The groups who feed students often bring the food and then leave without interacting with the students. When they are asked to come without contributing, they do not feel like a participating member of the group. Inviting the community to join them as full contributors made the meal a time of shared experience. It broke down many walls.

What a wonderful model of being the presence of Christ where we are and broadening our image of a faith community. I am so hopeful for the future of the church as I witnessed students willing to look beyond their walls and see those around them as Beloved Children of God who, when invited, will come and will bring with them their gifts and their stories.

