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Sharing in the Spirit: Administrator testifies to Liberty's impact on students — and himself

June 01, 2009 ¦ Mitzi Bible

Reliving memories of 35 years at Liberty University, it is hard for Mark Hine to hold back the tears. It was at Liberty where he felt God's call on his life for the ministry — and it is at Liberty where that early call became his life's work.

Hine, now Liberty's Vice President for Student Affairs, made his first trip to Liberty in spring 1973 for a youth conference. He tears up as he recalls the very moment he made that firm commitment to God.

"In a service in the old Pate Chapel, I came to the realization that there was a call on my life to spend my life in Christian ministry someway, somehow. I had not a clue how," he said. "But at the altar, after a very spirit-filled service, I made a commitment to God, that I would follow his plan for my life, whatever that entailed — never knowing that it would be here at the university."

Training Champions for Christ

"Training Champions for Christ is helping students to understand who Christ is and how He impacts every facet of your life."
— Mark Hine

He went on to attend Liberty, where he graduated in 1978 with a Bachelor of Science in Youth degree. He began working full time in Student Affairs in fall 1979 as a Resident Director while earning his Master of Divinity degree at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary; he graduated in 1983. He stayed on to work with Student Affairs, gradually being promoted to Associate Dean of Men, Dean of Graduate and Commuter Students, Acting Dean of Men, Dean of Students, Associate Vice President for Student Development and finally Vice President for Student Affairs, which he has held for 15 years. He completed his Doctor of Ministry degree in May 2003.

The departments he oversees include the Office of Student Conduct, the Student Care Office, Center for Multicultural Enrichment, Office of Commuter Affairs, Office of Student Housing, Army and Air Force ROTC, Office of Parent and Family Connections and the Student Affairs Spiritual Life Assessment Office.

"I look at myself as a guide to the various departments within the divisions of Student Affairs," he said. "I have a wonderful team of directors. We meet on a weekly basis; we talk about what we can improve on, what we can change, how we can better carry out the mission of Training Champions for Christ."

But he said his job isn't just about meeting with other college administrators in his office in the executive suites in Campus North. He tries to stay as connected with students as possible, meeting weekly with the Student Government Association president and taking phone calls from parents and students when issues arise.

"I try to keep in contact with students so it's not like I'm sitting in an ivory tower … I really do know what's going on."

Especially in the area of student conduct and student care, Hine gets to use his ministry training by serving as a mentor and helping guide students down the right path.

In enforcing the Liberty Way, Liberty's honor code and rules for behavior on campus, Hine said he views the work not as disciplinary action so much as "an opportunity for us to help students see God work in

their lives and take mistakes and make them beautiful," he said. "To me, it's a challenge to help students see,
'OK I've messed up, but there's a way back and it involves God, and He's working in my life.'"

Watching students come to this realization, even if it is through hard lessons learned, is part of the vision of LU founder Dr. Jerry Falwell that Hine holds so dear.

Looking back on his own college journey, he said Liberty taught him how, when he was away from his parents and their strong Christian upbringing (his dad was a pastor), to find his own faith and stand firm.

"Liberty is about building on that [Christian upbringing], with Bible classes, classes in your major, tying that all together to have a worldview that would actually involve Christ in everything, every decision, every job interview … everything that you do is put through the framework of who Christ is in your own life personally.

"That's a building process over four years of undergraduate work, or as I did to a master's or even to doctoral work — it's building a house, as you will, and foundationally it started with that faith becoming, in reality, your own."

Hine said he's grateful for the opportunity to be trained as a champion and later do the training himself. And, as a parent of three, he knows how valuable that training is. Two of his daughters, Rachel and Jessica, have graduated from Liberty and have gone on to get fulfilling jobs in their fields. His daughter Emily, 18, is a rising sophomore.

He said it's been touching to see his daughters be able to share in his own college experience and to see Liberty play such an important role in their spiritual lives as it did for he and his wife, Toy.

"I can sit in a convocation service and my daughter, who's a freshman now, will text me during convo and say, 'Dad this speaker is really good,'" he said. "So now I'm watching the same spirit of Christ work in her life as the spirit worked in my other two daughters and myself. I'm watching that same tug and pull… ."

When people find out Hine's long history with the school, he said many will ask him, "A lot of things have changed; is there anything that has stayed the same?"

"I always tell them, 'Yes. Come to our convocations, come to our church services, and you'll understand that the spirit is still in this place.' God is still all over this place, working every day in people's lives," he said. "I've watched this place, and the same spirit that drew me in the spring of 1973 has been constant over the years.

"A lot of things have changed but God has never changed … that's why I think we can still boldly proclaim at Liberty that we're Training Champions for Christ — because without the Holy Spirit doing

the work in people's lives, it would be an empty claim. God's been a constant — buildings are massive and extensive now, and yes, our dress code is different," he said laughing, "but the mission and the method to the mission — the spirit of Christ doing a work in people's lives — is still here."