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Commitment to Christ

April 01, 2009 ¦ Dominique McKay

Every Tuesday night, groups of resident students gather in residence hall rooms around campus with the mission of growing closer to God through prayer.

The small groups of four or five are led by fellow students known as Prayer Leaders. They, along with Resident Assistants (RAs) and Spiritual Life Directors (SLDs), make up the student leadership teams assigned to every residence hall on campus.

Paul Meissner, a senior sport management major, has been a Prayer Leader in Dorm 23-2 for the past three and a half years. He spends about 30 minutes ministering to his group each week, after the hall meeting."I always have a lesson and try to make it interactive," he said. "I try to help them grow spiritually throughout the year."Liberty's Office of Student Leadership designed the Prayer Leader position with the goal of having each student ministered to by another. Each leader has four major objectives: to make sure that every student is loved, prayed for daily by name, prayed with weekly and given a chance to be personally discipled.Meissner applied for the position in spring 2006 after the leadership team on his hall expressed a need for more Prayer Leaders. Soon after his first prayer group meeting, he found it was something he really enjoyed.

"My first prayer group I ever had was a lot of fun. We had four guys who were all very different," he said. "For a while I had a hard time trying to find stuff to do to bring them all together, but it was a great experience."

For the next two years, Meissner remained in Dorm 23-2 and began forming friendships through his position on the leadership team.

Ministering to different students each semester, Meissner said he experienced different responses to prayer groups. Although many were eager to come each night, he said there were others who needed a little more encouragement — so he began inviting them to church and leaving reminders on their doors.

“It was hard sometimes, but it was worth it,” he said.

As Meissner approached his last year of college, he considered the possibility of moving off campus.

After much prayer, Meissner said he felt God was calling him to remain on campus his last year, again as a prayer leader in Dorm 23-2.

“I’m glad I decided to stay on campus. My prayer group this semester has been very good,” he said. “They help keep me accountable. I make sure I’m reading my Bible and growing because if I’m not, then I can’t help others.”

Meissner said what he enjoys most about being a Prayer Leader is the helping hand he gets to offer the young men on his hall. Every year, he arrives on campus a few days early for training, and each semester he volunteers to help the incoming freshmen move in.

More than anything, Meissner said Prayer Leaders make a personal sacrifice of their time, especially in the amount of hours they spend in weekly meetings with other members of the student leadership team.

Once a week Prayer Leaders attend a class conducted by Associate Director of Student Leadership and Campus Pastor Chris Deitsch. They also attend weekly residence hall leadership meetings and leadership prayer groups, as well as a weekly accountability meeting with one of their RAs or SLDs.

Despite the heavy responsibilities of prayer leaders, new students continue to apply for the position each year. LU has 925 Prayer Leaders — about one per every five students.

“Our Prayer Leaders give a personal touch of showing love and praying daily for each member of their prayer group,” Campus Pastor and Vice President for Spiritual Development Dwayne Carson said. “This personal touch is so vital to training a student to be a Champion for Christ.”

Brad Mitchell, a sophomore and Prayer Leader on East 23, said what drew him to apply for the position was the desire God gave him to see the young men on his hall grow in Christ.

“I have had so many people pour into me that I have lost count,” Mitchell said. “I wanted to pour what I was given into others and see those guys help others grow in the Lord.”

He said he has not only developed deep friendships in the past year as a Prayer Leader, but also felt encouraged by the personal and spiritual growth of the members in his prayer group.

“The spiritual mentoring and discipleship available by Liberty’s student leadership program is one of the key elements that distinguishes the LU experience from that of secular institutions,” Liberty University Chancellor Jerry Falwell, Jr. said.