

RUF REPORT

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Summer Conference

After a nine year absence, this spring I returned to Panama City Beach, Florida for the national RUF summer conference. I got my first taste of this event in 2000, but since then I have been providing a local conference for the Lehigh University RUF. The Lehigh conference is fun and intimate and profitable – and close and inexpensive. The national conference is fun and big and profitable – and in Florida. We run two consecutive weeks so that more students can come. Ruth, Benjamin, and I went for both weeks because staff and students in my area were there during both.



Reverend Rich Lambert preaching at the smaller week.

The teaching was superb, the fellowship was wonderful, and the beach was lovely. There were seminars in the morning, worship and preaching at night, and free time in the afternoon. The first week 716 students packed the auditorium, and 271 came the second week. Most of the staff in my area came, so it was a good time to connect with them. The second week one of the seminar leaders had to leave half-way through for a funeral, so I took over that seminar when he left.



J.R. Foster from Virginia Tech teaching a seminar on world and life view

An impressive display of talent occurred on Friday when the students held a sand sculpture competition. Each school tried to create the most impressive sand sculpture. One sculpture featured a shark eating a live merman!



Sand Castle

Meanwhile, Scott Mitchell was leading the Lehigh conference for the first time. I frankly had some reservations about how well it would go – not because of Scott, but because of the enormous challenge these conferences present. But the unanimous report from students and staff was enthusiastic. Jim Powell, who is planting a new church in the Lehigh Valley, spoke from Jonah.



Boating in the Gulf

Year-end Evaluation

A year ago I was just beginning to adapt to being an area coordinator. It is very similar to the work I did as area director for InterVarsity from 1986-92, but with some significant differences. One difference is the big change in technology. Personal computers were just becoming widespread in 1986, and email and the Internet did not exist. Another difference is the geographic spread of my area. I began the year with the Northeast, and ended with the Midwest, Mexico City, and Alberta, Canada, as well. I am glad to have these new campuses, and I like the travel. It just took some adjustment to planning the trips.

Since I had never visited many of the campuses in my area, one of my priorities was to walk through each campus. I also wanted to see a large group meeting or Bible study at each school. Then I wanted to meet the chairman of each committee overseeing these ministries. My hope for each of the five new ministers was that they get moved, settled, ordained, and funded – and keep the RUF groups moving along. Finally, I wanted to establish some easy and meaningful reporting mechanisms.

By God's grace I think these goals were accomplished or are progressing. (I never got to Mexico because of the swine flu, so that will be my first trip this fall.) I am especially impressed with the performance of the new staff. I expected them to do well, but they exceeded my expectations. Praise God for His wonderful mercy!

Thanks and Funds

I am so thankful for you, our loyal supporters. I am the visible member of this ministry team, but you are a vital part. Thanks for your prayers and contributions.

This summer while things are slower on campus, we need to evaluate our financial situation and raise some additional funds. I will be working with the other ministers in raising the funds needed to meet their budgets. I am very encouraged, but there is much to do. Pray for God to give us success in seeking the funds we need.

Focus on Alex Watlington



One year after Alex received his M.Div from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, the Watlingtons have also reached the end of their first year ministering with RUF at Penn State University. Though Alex experi-

enced RUF as a student as well as a two-year campus intern, it wasn't until his last year of seminary that he moved toward full-time campus ministry. While applying to various graduate degree programs, he received a call about an associate pastor position. The particular position didn't materialize, but it got Alex to consider pastoral ministry instead of further education. Finally, a conversation with Rod Mays and, as he puts it, "the overwhelming counsel of RUF" convinced him to pursue campus ministry.

Alex describes a smooth transition to the already established RUF ministry at Penn State. "Students were very much involved and running things. I just had to show up and teach," he claims. During an average week, in addition to teaching at large group meetings, Alex prepares Bibles studies and meets with 15-20 students for one-one discussion, counseling, and hanging out. A self-described Starbucks addict, Alex reveals, "Every one-on-one I do is at Starbucks, so my tab there is getting pretty big."

In terms of the general make-up of Penn State's RUF, Alex describes, "There is a large diversity of where students are in the 'gospel process.' We have covenant children who are maturing in their faith, seeking to apply the gospel to all aspects of life. We have students who call themselves Christians, but have no concept of what that looks like and how that works in their practical life. We have students who are professing unbelievers, but they are asking questions, dialoguing. We are trying to minister to all these at the same time."

Originally from Georgia, Alex especially appreciates ministering on a northern campus. He remarks, "I love it. I don't have to spend three years convincing a bunch of students that they are actually not Christians. Students in the north have a more secular background, and they are honest about it. So they are willing to openly dialogue and wrestle with you." Alex is also learning how to relate with and minister to a Catholic population, a demographic mostly absent in the south.

Throughout his first year as a campus minister, Alex has seen students grow in repenting of sin, seeking to reach their friends, and seeking to serve. One of his favorite memories from this first year with RUF involves a student who covered up failing out of college in the fall. After the student's lie was exposed around the middle of the spring semester, Alex intervened. Alex states, "I asked him to openly confess to our ministry team, and then I sat back and watched them love on him and be a part of redeeming him. Things are going well with him now."

As Alex looks to the future of his ministry at Penn State, he wants students to think of RUF as a place to grow in grace and bring their friends with doubts and frustrations. As for his own growth as a campus minister, Alex explains, "This year taught me a lot about reflecting and relying on a theological approach to ministry, repenting of a lack of patience time and time again."

RUF isn't the only recent addition in the Watlingtons' lives. In April, Alex, Becki, and their almost-three-year-old son Alexander Whitfield ("Whit") welcomed Miles Manning Watlington into the world. Alex admits RUF has been both tough and great for his family. "It's great to have the students around us; my oldest son loves being around the students." The students also enjoy the two boys. Alex writes on the Penn State RUF website, "Miles is challenging Whit for all the female affection in RUF."

To learn more about the Watlingtons and the ongoing RUF ministry at Penn State, please visit the website: www.psu.ruf.org.

— by *Kristen Boe*

The Homefront

The big family event was Christopher's graduation from Swarthmore College. It has been a demanding four years – difficult courses combined with an ambitious extracurricular schedule. He graduated with high honors in Chinese. He is back in China for the summer, but still uncertain about his future plans. The final interview for the Foreign Service is coming in October.



Daniel's work with naval cyber intelligence took him to Estonia last week. He will be best man for one of his roommates this fall. Peter and Megan are working and studying in St. Louis this summer. We were delighted that they were able to join us for Christopher's graduation. Stephen, in spite of his best efforts to keep a low profile, did get a summer job. He is commuting with Kristen Boe to P&R Publishing every day. He is also still working for Ritter's Pharmacy and mowing grass.

I was excited to have Benjamin and Ruth at the RUF summer conference with me. They had a wonderful time!

Upon return they worked on finishing school. Now Benjamin is taking two weeks of classes at the Vo-Tech center. This week was the beginning of the women's summer Bible study that Ruth leads. This year she is planning to coach another woman into this role.

Personal Reflections

When I first encountered RUF in 1992, they were only on 29 campuses. Now, 17 years later, there are 125 RUF groups. When I began RUF at Lehigh University in 1998 we only had four students. Now there are close to 80. Growth like this is easy to produce if growth is your only objective. But RUF has consistently refused to take shortcuts for the sake of growth. This is one of the qualities that attracted me to this ministry.

RUF is here to build the church, and the campus is our arena for doing so. We insist on employing ordained ministers. We direct students to the church. We measure success not by number of conversions on campus, but by the number of students who come to Christ, become solid church members, and raise godly children.

These commitments hold us back. We could reach more students faster by relaxing our qualifications and lowering our standards. But the results may not last, and the church may not benefit. Jesus' passion is not only for lost people. It is also for His bride, the church. More precisely, Jesus' passion is that lost people become part of His church and grow into maturity there.

After two weeks of summer conference, a week of new staff orientation, and a week of General Assembly, I went out to take a look at our garden. We have had a lot of rain, so it was lush – lush with weeds. Ruth's herb garden is also growing nicely, but at a much slower pace. You can fill your garden quickly if you are willing to settle for weeds. But if you want healthy vegetables, it takes more time and effort.

I hope RUF can continue to grow. I hope we can become established on 200 campuses, and then 300 and 400. I hope the Lehigh ministry passes 100. The staff in my area are terrific. They are capable of such growth. More significant, Jesus is capable of such growth! But ultimately it is in His hands. We must labor to remain faithful. We must cry out for God's blessing on our work. And we must rest in knowing that God loves His people, and everything He does is for the good of the church.

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