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The Great Commission Next Door

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THE GREAT COMMISSION NEXT DOOR

BY CLEM BOYD AND ANDREW J. GRAFF



LAST YEAR, 451 STUDENTS THROUGH 38 LOCAL MINISTRIES REACHED BEYOND CAMPUS TO MAKE A GOSPEL IMPACT ON CEDARVILLE, SPRINGFIELD, DAYTON, AND OTHER LOCAL COMMUNITIES. THESE STUDENT-SERVANTS IMPACTED THE LIVES OF AFRICAN REFUGEE CHILDREN, FELLOW COLLEGE STUDENTS ON NEIGHBORING CAMPUSES, INMATES IN LOCAL JAILS, AND COUNTLESS OTHERS.

Their wholehearted commitment and unwavering faith led them to engage our neighbors with a biblical worldview; answer questions about life, death, and eternity; and share the hope of salvation uniquely found in Jesus Christ, resulting in salvations and discipleship. Our Cedarville students serving in local ministries are carrying out the Great Commission next door, across the street, and down the road.

JAIL MINISTRY

The Greene County Jail Ministry has been an official part of Cedarville's outreach programs since 1996 and has sent 248 students to share the Gospel and study the Bible with inmates. The Clark County Jail Ministry began in 2011, and 110 students have traveled there to show the love of Christ, bring the Gospel, and provide one-on-one discipleship. Every year, there are salvations as part of the jail ministries and many opportunities to disciple inmates.

The Clark County team visits the jail, located in Springfield, Ohio, three times a week, on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. They come during what's known as "chaplain hours," from 7–9 p.m. and get to know the inmates and share the Gospel with them.

Tyler Dellaperute '20, a piano performance major, leads the Tuesday night team that visits the Clark County Jail. Dellaperute has seen the Lord work in amazing ways, especially in those moments when he's felt the most inadequate — talking through a glass wall via telephone to an inmate he may never have met before.

"There was this one time last year I hardly said anything at all," Dellaperute shared. "I just met with this guy, and all I did was listen and ask a few questions. But it was just so clear that God had worked beforehand." They ended up having an incredibly natural conversation about the Gospel and Jesus, and over the course of several meetings, the inmate put his faith in Christ.

Joe Petroff '20, a chemistry major, is in his second year with Clark County Jail Ministry. The first time he visited, he was extremely nervous. "I was afraid I'd mess up and say something wrong, that I'd somehow mess up Jesus for whoever I spoke to," he admitted. "I asked everyone I lived with, all the guys, to pray for me."

There have been surprises in the jail ministry, too. One night, when Petroff was feeling particularly discouraged and almost didn't go, he was paired up at the booth phone with an inmate who was already "on fire" for God.

"The guy showed up with his Bible," Petroff said. "He was so in love with Jesus, so excited about the power God used to break him of addictions, so excited to share that Good News with others inside the jail. The guy is getting out soon, and I plan to follow up."

Halie Hardwick '20, an allied health major, has served with the Greene County Jail Ministry three years and is a leader for 2018–19. Her eyes have been opened to the great need inmates have for the Gospel. "The people in jail are pretty broken," she shared. "The women I've talked to are in deep need of someone to care. They are real people, and we get to share the glory of who Jesus is with them."

Hardwick stays in contact with inmates after they're released. One woman lost custody of her kids and her husband left her. "She was so receptive to the Gospel," she said. "When she left jail, I followed up, and I saw how she worked to better herself. She connected with a local church, got her kids back, and she found a job."

For those lacking confidence in their ability to share the Gospel, Dellaperute offered himself as an example. “I’m not that good at keeping conversations going or even that great at giving explanations,” he said. “But through my experience, I’ve seen God work.”

Being available is the key. “God prepares the people and puts us in the right place at the right time,” he said. “It will force you to develop really good listening skills and see things from their perspective. It will also develop your ability to explain your faith to someone who comes from a very different background than you.”

CAMPUS OUTREACH

Chloie Benton ’20, an adolescent and young adult language arts major, has been part of Campus Outreach since her sophomore year. Benton serves on a team that attends the Secular Student Alliance (SSA) on the campus of The Ohio State University (OSU).

In addition to OSU, Campus Outreach also sends teams to Wright State University in Fairborn, Ohio; Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio; and the University of Cincinnati.

Comprised of atheists and agnostics, the SSA provides a weekly forum for debatable secular topics. “The questions are often very difficult, as the members consider morality, faith, and current events,” Benton said.

Cedarville’s connection with SSA began when Michaela Ruhlmann ’16 struck up a friendship with an SSA member during an OSU campus visit in 2015, and she was invited to attend the group on a regular basis. After Ruhlmann graduated, Kurtis De Pree ’18, took over and began attending the meetings. Benton began attending SSA meetings with De Pree in spring 2018.

During his time at Cedarville, De Pree had multiple Gospel conversations with students at area universities, including Central State and Ohio State. Although he sometimes encountered hostility, he remained undaunted.

“I gave them a proper presentation of what Christians believe by asking questions that forced them to think about their beliefs,” he noted.

Building relationships that provide a safe place for SSA members to ask questions about faith is the goal. “By forming relationships with the SSA group, they feel valued and loved, and they know they can ask me life questions at any time,”

Benton said. “Inevitably, these life questions are often rooted in the Gospel, opening the door for evangelism.”

She finds the experience invigorating and meaningful, even when there may be difficult conversations.

“Although the meetings can be wearying, Galatians 6:9 encourages me: ‘Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up,’” she said.

“We faithfully endeavor to ‘give a defense for the faith which is in us’ and trust the Lord to do the work,” she added. “This is what makes presence and engagement valuable. The Lord will reward faithful obedience in His timing, and in His way.”

Benton has seen the way God has opened doors just because she made herself available to His service. “My primary focus is simply to be present and engaged,” she said. “My teammates and I are present for relationships and conversations, both within the context of SSA and outside. I am continually amazed at the Gospel opportunities we have with college students.”





KING'S KIDS

Every Sunday, Cedarville students visit Christ the King Anglican Church in Dayton to interact with the large African refugee population in an urban neighborhood. Students who are part of Cedarville's King's Kids ministry visit the homes of children (between ages 4–19) and bring the kids to the church for games, fellowship, and discipleship.

The children are divided into groups by age for weekly sessions, which are led by student volunteers. The youngest age groups play games and learn Bible verses, older boys play soccer and take part in open-ended Bible discussions, and older girls are currently studying how the teachings of Jesus and the message of the Gospel are illustrated in the Old Testament.

Susanna Edwards '19 joined King's Kids her sophomore year, after learning about the ministry through a friend. "Prior to joining, I felt no particular call to serve Muslims or a connection to African culture," she shared. "My first visit to King's Kids taught me a very important lesson: It's not about me."

"That is the beauty of this ministry. It is not in any way about us," she continued. "It is about the kids. Kids who were made in the image of the King of the universe."

Edwards shared that she is deeply grateful for this ministry. "The witnessing opportunities I have had through this ministry have been abundant and incredible," she said. "Teaching directly from the Bible, with Arabic and English translations side by side, I get to tell my young friends in Dayton about Jesus every week. They always have questions, and our team is always ready to answer them."

More than 20 Cedarville students regularly participate in King's Kids. The students who attend have a common heart for refugees, Muslims, and inner-city children. Since they are a group of like-minded individuals, they form deep relationships with each other and grow as a team.

"This ministry is about relationships," Edwards stated. "Relationships with the kids and with fellow team members. And here's the best part: No matter who you are, you fit in. You need nothing more than a willingness to devote all the energy you've got to showing our King's Kids that you care because Jesus does."

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