

A Ship Righted

Unbalanced cargo or a devastating leak may cause a ship to list to one side, but a ship “righted” is balanced, in full repair and ready for service.

In 2003, when Campus Pastor Jim Musser took his first spiritual retreat to A Valley View Inn in eastern Ohio, he was decidedly unbalanced and leaking lots of water. To be specific, Jim had recently learned that despite his efforts, his marriage was ending. The retreat was part of a three-month sabbatical to “get his ship righted.”

A HEART FOR STUDENTS

Jim has always had a heart for college students. “If they show up to worship, it’s not because their mom or dad made them come. You know you’ve got something to work with,” he says.

It was his own experience with campus ministry that piqued Jim’s interest in the field. During his freshman year at Ball State University in Indiana, Jim accepted Christ after briefly participating in on-campus ministries. As a result, he fully realizes the vital impact college ministries can have on a young man or woman.

College students exhibit “so much growth in such a short period of time,” Jim says. In his experience, students make spiritual leaps in four years that

might take an older adult 20 years to accomplish.

JIM’S S.O.S.

After gaining a bachelor’s degree at Ball State and then a Master of Divinity at Emmanuel School of Religion, Jim moved into student ministry on the campus of the University of Kansas in Lawrence, where he stayed for 21 years.



Jim Musser (left) and his CCF interns. Ed (third from right) will soon serve as the group president

However, in 2003 when he came to A Valley View Inn, Jim was a mess. His marriage was failing and he had doubts about, well, almost everything.

“The five days of peace and solitude and time with God were exactly what I needed,” he says. His concerns that there would be a rigid schedule of “to-dos” were soothed upon arriving at A Valley

View Inn and experiencing a time of “no demands.”

“Most pastors are not coming to the retreats in “crisis mode,” but I was an emotional wreck,” Jim admits.

“I remember walking into the room for the first time and seeing a card from someone I didn’t know, who had already been praying for me, and was continuing to pray for me throughout my time there.

It was touching, because that person had no idea how much I needed it.”

RENEWED, REFRESHED, REVIVED

Without his retreat, Jim most likely would have left ministry altogether. But the retreat showed him he could still make an important contribution to the kingdom—despite all of his past pain and failures.

He returned to KU able to “more keenly hear the Lord’s voice” and ready to serve; but the Lord soon impressed on him that his time at KU “was winding down.” In fact, he was soon officially asked to resign his position.

Jim was emotionally and spiritually prepared for this news—thanks to the time he had spent on his retreat. With a “renewed intimacy with the Lord,” Jim trusted God to take care of him as he “chartered unknown waters.”



Jim Musser and his wife Marianna

And, as is typical for those who are following God's direction, when one door closed, another opened. In 2004, he accepted the call to take over Campus Christian Fellowship (CCF) at Appalachian State University (ASU) in North Carolina.

After one year ministering at Appalachian State as a single campus pastor, Jim met and married Marianna—a young woman who had previously worked for Youth With a Mission (YWAM) in the Ukraine. Today, the couple is a powerful team at Appalachian State. She helps in women's student ministries, while Jim leads weekly large group meetings and works to raise up interns interested in vocational ministry.

Jim's past experiences have taught him the importance of perspective. He has seen that even situations that seem grim can be used by God to create positive change. Today, Jim and Marianna maintain a vision for victory.

"We came to a decision that this is God's ministry," Jim recalls. Since committing to that perspective, Jim and his wife have focused their ministry on students who are serious about seeking God and impacting others for Christ.

FUTURE GENERATIONS SET SAIL

As just one example, Jim mentions his intensive weekly Bible studies with Ed—a passionate believer at Appalachian State in need of a little guidance. After spiritual mentoring from Jim, Ed began leading a Bible study for three freshmen. By the end of the semester, all three recommitted their lives to Christ and began encouraging others (even upperclassmen!) to turn from parties to prayer. Ed has now served two years as a CCF intern and will soon take over as the group's president.

Ed, who once, "had a difficult time seeing himself in vocational ministry," now sees such ministry as a likely step in his future. And, he credits his personal meeting time with Jim as "a major contributor to his spiritual growth."

Courtenay is another great success story. She first encountered CCF as a freshman, but didn't fall in love with it immediately. It wasn't until Jim arrived that she really plugged in to the group.

As Jim saw Courtenay develop spiritually, he invited her to lead a small group. From that position of leadership, she sought out a summer opportunity to work for an inner-city ministry in Nashville. She also joined Marianna's women's discipleship group and eventually met with Marianna for more intensive learning.

The transformation Jim witnessed in Courtenay, from a self-described "shallow Christian" to a tremendous force for Christ, convinced him that she would do well as a CCF intern, where she plans to serve next.

The students' encounters with CCF prepare them to change their own lives and their future. Whether they choose to enter full-time mission work or not, Jim says they "carry that fire."

Without Jim's transformation from brokenness to wholeness, Ed and Courtenay—and many others—might be following a very different and less healthy course. Jim is grateful that the healing he received through Pastors Retreat Network has made it all possible.



Courtenay (front row, second from the left) looks forward to her new role as CCF intern.

TIME WITH GOD MADE THE DIFFERENCE

In 2003, Jim's life and ministry were in tumult. But he was obedient to take time away from his demands—and his troubles—to step into the peace-restoring setting at A Valley View Inn.

Some pastors leave their retreats, basking in new friendships with peers who share the challenges of full-time pastoral care. But for Jim, it was his fellowship with God that made all the difference. God put his life and his ministry back on course. As a result, Ed, Courtenay and countless other students are now impacting others for Christ.

Jim sails on, as well—a ship righted. 🌸