Witnessing in a Hostile Environment

Jill Sanders faces a real predicament. As a faculty member in the engineering college of a major East Coast public university, she has achieved considerable prestige. Her research has been extensive and her teaching has been well received by her students. The university has rewarded her with an endowed professorship in response to her high level of success.

Despite these accomplishments, Jill feels that she has one major failure. That failure is her inability or perhaps unwillingness to become active on campus in sharing the good news of her Christian faith. Having become a believer many years ago, she regularly attends the local evangelical Ascension Church and is active in its foreign missions. In the latter context, she recently went to South America with a mission group from church. She was surprised at how much she enjoyed sharing her faith.

Her anxiety came to a peak last week when she ran into a student on campus who also attends Ascension. It was the question he asked that has been bothering her. He asked, “Why aren’t the Christian faculty and staff on campus more visible?”

Jill knew the answer; but gave a lame answer, “A great question. Why did this come up?”

The student answered, “We see faculty members in the church being active in foreign mission work and within the church, but are largely a non-entity on campus.”

As Jill has reflected on that exchange over the past week, she became fully aware of what the response to the student’s question should have been. If her experience is indicative, Christian faculty and staff are actually intimidated. A relatively high proportion of the student body comes from religious homes. There is a religion major at the university. Despite these positives for an environment open to sharing the Christian faith, the dynamics of a modern college campus provide significant roadblocks. A secular university must create an environment that is conducive to many beliefs and is not discriminatory. Specifically, the university catalog states that “it recognizes the importance of spiritual life and cooperates with many off-campus groups that fulfill the religious needs of the community.”

However, within such an environment, there have been events that could be considered to be openly critical of Christian believers. Jill recalls two recent examples. More than 120 faculty and staff of the university signed a letter a few months ago, which was disapproving of anyone who advocates a scientific approach to asking whether an intelligent designer created the universe. The letter states that all faculty members should “convey to students and the general public [that they] should reject efforts to portray Intelligent Design as science.” Second, a professor in
the education college of the university recently published a paper that argues Christianity exhibits an unfair status in American life. He says that the university should become more aware of this “bias” on campus. The professor further argues that the university should actively recruit faculty and staff from different religious backgrounds and even non-believers “to serve as supportive role models for all youth.”

While Jill feels that these examples may not reflect the attitude of a majority on campus, these types of public statements on campus have received the considerable attention by students. Any believer who would attempt to evangelize on campus would likely be immediately confronted by those who would demand that these questions be addressed as well as an institutional opposition to faculty taking advantage of their position when interacting with students.

There are several large student-oriented Christian groups on campus. The Christian faculty and staff groups are present on campus but quite small. While she could merely expand her participation in these groups, Jill feels she must do something more even though she knows that her status on campus would cause this act to be highly publicized. As a first step, she has decided to become more identified with her faith on campus by engaging other faculty and students in discussions/debates on the applicability of the Christian message.

Jill has asked you as her friend in Christ how she should approach this new venture. You tell her you will take the evening to search Scripture for suggestions and will get back to her tomorrow. The advice must be scriptural and also provide Jill with the necessary framework to highlight her faith in an often hostile environment.

**ASSIGNMENT**

University campuses are known for a source of debate. How should Jill use scripture as a means of witnessing in this relatively unreceptive environment?
My Scriptural Research:

Group Scriptural Research:

Decisions / Recommendations:

Primary Scriptural References: