Recently Sonya and I built an addition to our house. For months we wrestled with decisions such as “one bathroom or two?” and “laundry room, office, or both?” Eventually we formalized the plan that held the greatest promise going forward (and that we could afford!). The architectural drawings became our North Star, guiding the project forward.

A decade ago I built a thriving, Christ-centered graduate student and faculty ministry. We know that our North Star must encourage and resource us both locally and nationally.

Traditionally, Faculty Commons’ strength has been local. We have faculty groups on over 200 universities. Though most of our local expressions are smaller, there are over 150 involved professors at the University of Georgia and the University of Florida. Every campus needs a local movement to be salt and light in their community, to encourage and mentor younger Christian professors, and to do the work of God’s people in that space.

But the sociologist at the University of Arkansas, for example, also has close connections with sociologists at the Universities of Memphis, Notre Dame, and Texas. These connections can lead to strengthening the Christian influence in an academic discipline nationally. Professors travel to consult or teach, gather at conferences, and collaborate. Professors change institutions with some regularity. The design for our future must not only succeed locally, but it must foster a national movement as well.

The unexpected COVID-19 detour taught us some important lessons about building nationally. With Zoom technology it is relatively easy to convene professors from one coast to another. I watched in amazement the other day as a psychology professor in California encouraged a jazz professor in New England. Our local/regional A Common Call conferences for Christian faculty are now online, and to our surprise professors are joining these events from other states and countries!

We have discovered we can gather affinity groups around the country such as women faculty, accounting professors, or graduate student in online meetings for the sharing of ideas, book studies, and prayer.

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Physically Distant, Relationally Close

Adley Hollowman, National Director, Cru's Grad Student Ministry

One year ago, the pandemic tore through our routines, unforgetting ways of doing ministry. Now, a year later we are continuing to answer the question that COVID-19 created for grad ministry: How do we help grad students continue reaching their peers in the midst of a pandemic?

One answer the Lord has given us the Care-Share strategy. Created to repair and care for lost students in remote communities, it gives grad students the ability to naturally share the relevance and scriptural truth and the beauty of the gospel message with people. And it trains grad students to engage five people with the hope of Christ.

The primary goal of the strategy? We take grad students through a process where they identify five people they know well and begin cultivating relationships with them. Then they take those five people and use the Care-Share strategy to find five more. Graduates in the pilot program share that the strategy has given them a new perspective and helped them connect with their peers in a relational way.

One of those graduates is Reed Smith, Professor of Communications Arts at the University of Florida. Reed is a veteran grad student in the strategy, sharing his story with us today.

“Dad, I’m all about the relationship thing.”

Dr. Smith and his wife, Ashley, are both Cru graduates. Ashley is the National Director of Cru’s Grad Student Ministry. Reed is a Cru grad from the University of Florida. He is also a Cru grad who took the Care-Share strategy.

He was shy, my grades were poor, and I failed my first year of college at a state university. I didn’t apply to other schools. I didn’t even take the ACT, SAT, or GRE. When I was accepted, I walked through the doors rather than shut them.

But, the Lord was working in my life. He began to open my heart to him, and I began to want to know more about him. I began to have conversations with peers and colleagues about my faith. I became a Christian, and I see that you are, too.

Now I am a professor at the University of Florida, and I’m making an impact in the lives of students like you. I see the difference that the Care-Share strategy can make in the lives of students.

The Life and Legacy of Walter Bradley

The Life and Legacy of Walter Bradley: The book traces my admittedly humble beginnings in Corpus Christi, to my life-changing coming to faith at a church camp at age twelve, and through the next six decades. My father’s death when I was 14 both tested my faith and made me assume the role of “man of our household,” a role I took seriously for the sake of my mother and sister. I entered the University of Texas at the age of 17 and left almost seven years later with a wife, a baby boy, a PhD in Materials Science and Engineering. Then I accepted a tenure-track position at the Colorado School of Mines, the #2 ranked Metallurgical Engineering program in the country.

I am pleased that For a Greater Purpose accurately portrays my faith journey with Ann as a struggling Christian couple—disciples who were mustard seed Christians in the beginning, afraid to be open about our Christian faith for fear of what it might cost in social acceptance. Even after that daunting was the fear of what it might cost in my job as an untenured professor.

My journey to freedom, to grow from a mustard seed to a tree in the garden, to become a light in the dark as a university professor, and to heed Jesus’ call to walk on the water. That was myprivilege.

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Six professors at UMN LOWELL are working with a design team to examine images of the earth in the Bible. They will be sharing their findings in an exhibit at the University of Minnesota this spring.

The purpose of their project is to help people see the connection between the Bible and the natural world, and to encourage them to think about how they can integrate faith and Scripture into their daily lives.

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