

Executive Summary
Wesleyan Holiness Campus Project
January 27, 2016

History

The Wesleyan Holiness Campus project began in summer 2014 in response to requests by member institutions of the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium to better understand student faith perspectives and the current relevance of Wesleyan Holiness thought to students, families, campus communities, and other constituents. In fall 2014 an undergraduate student survey was designed and refined based on feedback from students, administrators, and faculty at four WHC member institutions, and IRB approval was obtained from Azusa Pacific University. The survey was shared at the 2015 WHC Presidents meeting and then linked via Qualtrics to participating institutions from February-October 2015. The survey closed in October 2015 and data reporting began in November 2015 with additional presentations and articles planned in 2016.

Goals

Goals included: 1) Exploration of current relevance of Wesleyan Holiness thought to consortium-affiliated institutions with attention to student experience and spiritual growth and, 2) Assessment of student agreement and resonance with key aspects of Wesleyan Holiness thought to launch possible WH Consortium projects and conversations.

Survey

The survey included 20 items emphasizing contemporary social and personal faith issues linked to Wesleyan thought. Items reflected themes of marriage/family, service, community/social justice, scriptural/Holy living, gender equality, and environmental stewardship. Students indicated agreement with and perceived personal relevance of each item using a 5-point Likert scale.

Respondents

A total of 1440 students participated in the survey representing 11 institutions; 82% of respondents came from 5 institutions: Greenville College (24%), Point Loma Nazarene University (19%), Mt. Vernon Nazarene University (16%), Anderson University (15%), and Southern Nazarene University (8%). Other schools represented 4% or fewer respondents. Gender and racial/ethnic representation based on self-identification included the following: 68% female, 32% male, 86% white, 9% Latino/Hispanic, 5% Asian, 4% Black or African American, 2% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 4% no response. Regional identification included 57% Midwest, 21% West Coast, 9% Northeast, 5% Northwest, 4% Southwest, 3% South, 1% East Coast, and 1% Southeast.

Findings

Regarding extent of agreement, the item receiving strongest support was “God is engaged with and interested in all dimensions of creation” and the one with greatest personal relevance was, “God calls everyone to use their gifts and abilities in becoming fulfilled”. Most other items consistently received scores indicating 80-90% strong

agreement/agreement and somewhat/extreme relevance to student personal experiences. Scores indicating strong disagreement, disagreement, somewhat not relevant and totally not relevant were rare. Combined totals of disagreement rarely exceeded 10% and focused mostly on issues of sexuality, contemporary social issues, and family. Consistent with what could be expected from student church and geographic backgrounds, most expressed traditional values and desires for authentic faith and opportunities to express their unique gifts and callings.

Implications

Student agreement and resonance with key aspects of Wesleyan Holiness thought was clearly demonstrated by survey findings, though student awareness of theological origins of survey items was difficult to ascertain. Students expressed an active, vibrant faith characterized by God's engagement with and interest in all dimensions of creation and call for everyone to use their gifts and abilities in becoming fulfilled. Students similarly expressed desires for their own lives to be congruent with scriptural teachings on calling, service, relationships, purity of heart, mind and body, and full reliance on the Holy Spirit. Such responses reflect unique dimensions of Wesleyan Holiness thought and education focused on developing individual potential, relationships with Christ and others, and concern for the Common Good. This approach may be especially relevant to prospective students and families seeking evidence of what Christian higher education can be for rather than against. Although approximately 25% of respondents expressed some ambivalence regarding "fearless engagement with social issues compromising God's holistic vision for the world", most expressed strong agreement and personal relevance regarding holy, healthy, just communities, and aspects of holiness emphasizing love, grace, reconciliation, and redemption. Such findings suggest the need for issues to be framed by Scripture and values of love, service, and respect. On items regarding human sexuality and same sex attraction, 50% of respondents "strongly agreed" that human sexuality finds ideal expression in monogamous marriage between a man and woman (25% agreed, 13% indifferent, 5% disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed), with 49% strongly agreeing that issues of same sex attraction should be approached from a posture of grace and reconciliation (33% agreed, 14% indifferent, 3% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed). Such findings imply that current students are mostly traditional in their values but will likely reject legalistic aspects of the Wesleyan Holiness tradition in favor of those emphasizing relationship. Wesleyan-Holiness Consortium institutions are well positioned to provide positive, richly theologically based learning environments reflecting Christ-centered living and hope.

Next steps

Next steps may include exploration of ways WH Consortium institutions communicate their denominational/theological identities, regional and denominational differences, and influences of existing student faith on educational priorities and commitments to social issues. Future research may focus on institutional efforts to enhance student self-awareness of gifts/abilities and Wesleyan Holiness influences on curriculum, admissions, student life, and programs focused on spiritual development and calling. A study of ways students with traditional values engage diversity-related issues could also be helpful, especially in light of challenges currently facing Christian higher education.