

Revival, Carleton style

Loving students to Jesus in the '70s



Weekly worship included members of the Northfield community.

Cynthia (Hancock) Nicholson '75

When I graduated from Carleton in 1975, there were close to 200 faithful, determined believing students in our little corner of the Christian community alone. Beyond us, there was a fairly robust Newman Club (the Catholic organization), a fledgling group run by African-American believers and others besides.

The year before I arrived, our group had numbered about a dozen. It had the feeling of survivors in a leaky lifeboat, mostly just bailing and trying to stay afloat. What happened between that inauspicious beginning, and graduation, was all about Jesus. We never could have made it up!

The first thing that happened in the fall of 1971 was that a wave of first-years came in, myself included, who had come to Jesus as part of a wider revival called the Jesus Movement, which was spreading through the country. There was an eagerness and a certain willingness to plug into fellow-

ship, put hands to the plow, jump into conversations about spiritual things, tell our stories and cultivate a passion for worship.

That same year, the New American Standard Bible was published, and somehow one of the guys in the fellowship got hold of a carton of them. Up until then, the only commonly used Bible was the King James Version with its beautiful but antique Shakespearean language. It is hard to overstate what a big deal that was. Scripture in our own language! Bible studies became a hot commodity, because it was so amazing to study Bible passages and actually understand the words and the concepts.

How did it feel to be on campus in that era? It felt as though we had front-row seats as God himself was building a passionate-about-Jesus, outward-focused community of believers. By His grace, we had shifted from inward to outward. We talked and thought together about loving our campus to

faith, about showing people “Jesus with skin on” in as many creative ways as there were people. There was such a sense of God being on us to do this thing; it was like being long-term cross-cultural workers. We felt called and commissioned. Being students at Carleton was our tent-making skill. We made friends and saw those friends come to Jesus from places of skepticism, pain, drug addiction and doubt. Others renewed their childhood commitments to follow Christ.

We explored the Bible together, we prayed together and we worshipped together—oh, how we worshipped! It was one of those decades when God pours out new songs, one after another. They were easy songs, often straight out of Scripture—easy to play if we knew six chords on the guitar, easy to remember, easy to close our eyes and sing as we gave ourselves to worship. We threw in some hymns and spirituals too, out of deference to our diversity. We could and did sing

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together for almost an hour once a week before finally getting on to the other bits. And we prayed for each other, asking God for more and learning to watch and see what the Holy Spirit would do next.

Did we disagree about the focus sometimes? This was Carleton: all leaders, no followers. Of course we disagreed. Those years were when most of us who lead now in churches learned the difference between fighting well and fighting badly! Yet somehow we all understood that if we slid back into “circle the wagons” mode, it was not going to go well for us. Despite pushback, we managed to stay oriented outward toward the campus, and God blessed that by adding to our numbers regularly, if not daily, those who were being saved. ♦

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Bible study meeting, classes '74-'76.

At the Hill of Three Oaks, spring 1972.



Students in front of Myers dormitory.