Campus Church Planting

Jessie was a senior at Christopher Newport University in Newport News when she first heard about Catalyst Church, an SBC of Virginia church plant. It wasn’t the on-campus Bible study that caught her attention or the deep-fried Oreos that Catalyst offered at the football games. It was her sister, a student at neighboring Old Dominion University, who had gotten plugged in at Aletheia Norfolk (another SBC of Virginia church plant) years earlier and had heard about Catalyst Church from her pastor, Jamie Limato. Some two years later, Jessie joined a group of volunteers to provide childcare for a night of worship at Missio Dei, a soon-to-be-launched SBCV church plant targeting Norfolk State University.

Aletheia Norfolk at ODU connected a student to Catalyst Church at CNU in Newport News who, in turn, became a regular volunteer for the preview services of Missio Dei at NSU. Networks matter. Generational church planting matters. And in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia, God has developed generations of collegiate church plants.

Of the 8.3 million people in the Commonwealth of Virginia, well over 500,000 are college students. Students coming from various backgrounds and upbringings. Students coming with various dreams and baggage. Students coming to various spiritual environments and making major life decisions. As they wrestle with and come to conclusions about these life decisions, many are doing so with no input from the local church. They’re seeking advice and counsel from people with no more life experience than their own and who often lack a biblical worldview. In many cases, the church has vacated the campus.

The Apostle Paul had a deep desire to take the Gospel to the populated cities and thereby reach the culture. If Paul were alive today, it wouldn’t be a stretch to think he would strategically set his sights on college campuses. Where is the next round of politicians and policymakers? Where is the next round of educators who will spend 30 to 40 years of their lives investing in and educating young people? Where is the next round of entertainers and movie makers who will seize the imagination of a cultural audience? Where is the next round of business men and women who will go to cities all over the world and impact culture? They’re on college campuses—in the classroom, heading to the dining hall, playing ping-pong in the student lounge, or gathering for Frisbee on the great lawn. The question facing the Church is clear—how will we get the Gospel to them?
Aletheia Norfolk’s Story  
Campus: Old Dominion University

Jamie Limato and his family moved to Norfolk in 2008 after being trained and sent out by both the Pillar Church Network and the Aletheia Church Network. With the support of these networks and the SBC of Virginia, Aletheia Norfolk outgrew the Limatos’ living room and launched Sunday gatherings in 2010 on the campus of Old Dominion University. In 2011, the SBCV connected Jamie with Jeff Mingee, who was serving as the youth pastor at Bethel Baptist Church in Yorktown and felt called to plant a church. Jamie met with Jeff and his team; provided guidance and counsel; shared the successes and mistakes of Aletheia Norfolk; and even donated pipe-and-drape curtains to help the new plant get started.

Catalyst Church’s Story  
Campus: Christopher Newport University

Jeff Mingee and a team were sent out in 2012 by Bethel Baptist Church to plant Catalyst Church on the campus of Christopher Newport University. Catalyst began holding public services in August of 2012. Just months later, they sent to Southeast Asia their first mission team, which included two college students. A favorite outreach event of the Catalyst family is serving deep-fried Oreos at the CNU home football games. They’ve been able to disciple, baptize, and mobilize college students from CNU, the local campus of Thomas Nelson Community College, Hampton University, and even the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg.

Missio Dei Church’s Story  
Campus: Norfolk State University

In late 2013, Charles Shannon began serving as a church planter apprentice at Hampton Roads Fellowship. In early 2015, he transitioned to Aletheia Norfolk to continue his apprenticeship and further develop his plan to start a Gospel-centered church near the campus of Norfolk State University. Aletheia Norfolk and Catalyst Church are partnering to assist Charles and Missio Dei as a third-generation collegiate church plant. Charles and his core group are currently gathering on Fridays to sing, pray, and learn from God’s Word as they prepare to start a collegiate church plant in the city of Norfolk.

God is moving on college campuses around Virginia. He’s actively seeking students who have been pursuing joy without Him. He’s opening the eyes of those who’ve been deceived by the enemy’s lies. He’s captivating the hearts of students who are realizing the depth of God’s love. Students just like Jessie are being won, baptized, discipled, and sent out. Jessie is now a community group leader at Catalyst Church and is currently helping disciple others who are wrestling with who Jesus is and whether He should impact their lives.

On Sunday, August 30, a college student sat in the pew of Catalyst Church and wept. She hadn’t been to a church in 10 years and longed to know the Good News that provided the people there with hope and purpose. College campuses are filled with young people just like her. If Gospel-loving Christians don’t pursue her, someone else will. If SBC of Virginia churches don’t do the difficult work of planting collegiate-minded churches, we’ll forfeit this generation. While every square inch of Virginia is our mission field, there is a particular opportunity on and around college campuses for us to be Strong Churches with a Bold Commitment to the Great Commission.