

# **GROWING A STUDENT MOVEMENT**

**The Development of  
Chi Alpha  
Campus Ministries  
1940-2020**

Dennis Gaylor

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Growing a Student Movement:  
The Development of Chi Alpha Campus Ministries, 1940-2020

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ISBN-13: 9798676277963

Printed in USA

# Dedication

This book is first dedicated to my wife, Barbara. She and I celebrated fifty years of marriage in 2019 and our parallel life in ministry has represented forty-eight years. Our marriage and ministry have been a lifetime of commitment to one another and to ministry. Barbara has been incredibly supportive and I wanted to acknowledge her special contribution to this book. She has been an integral part of XA ministry, though often behind the scenes. This book would not have been completed without her sacrifice of service and time. From the start of this book, she became the primary reader and spent large blocks of time with me reviewing, organizing, and editing the manuscript. Her vital feedback improved the writing and story. I am grateful for our partnership in life.

I also wish to dedicate this book to our son and daughter-in-law, Jason and Lindsey, and our granddaughter, Evie, who calls me Grandman. Their presence in our lives is priceless.

Finally, this book is dedicated to the memory of our daughter, Jennifer who left for Heaven when she was eighteen.



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**Since 1953**

Chi Alpha (XA) is the umbrella name for the Assemblies of God college campus ministry. The name “Chi Alpha” or Greek letters “XA” comes from two letters of the Greek alphabet:

X (Chi) pronounced ki, as in kite  
and A (Alpha) pronounced al, with “a” as in fast,  
and fah with “a” as in final.

Chi Alpha (XA) are the first two letters of Greek words written in English as “Christou Apostoloi,” translated “Christ’s Sent Ones—a delegate, an ambassador, or a missionary.

II Corinthians 5:19-20 says:

<sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Reconciling students to Christ, Transforming the University,  
the Marketplace, and the World

# Abbreviations

- AD— Area Director (full-time)
- AG— Assemblies of God
- AGNEWS— AG News Online
- AGUSM— Assemblies of God US Missions (formerly Home Missions)
- AGTS— Assemblies of God Theological Seminary(now Evangel University)
- AGWM— Assemblies of God World Missions (formerly Division of Foreign Missions)
- AR— Area Rep (part-time)
- AU— Action Universitaire – Belgium (University Action)
- BGMC— Boys and Girls Missionary Challenge
- C.A./CA— Christ’s Ambassadors (C.A.) when quoted material, otherwise CA
- CA— Career Associate with Chi Alpha
- CAM— Campus Ambassador Magazine*
- CMIT— Campus Missionary-in-Training (nationally approved XA internship programs)
- CMC— Campus Ministers Seminar, then Campus Ministers Conference, now Campus Missions Conference
- CMN— Church Multiplication Network
- CMPD—Church Missionary Planters and Developers
- CRU— Formerly Campus Crusade for Christ
- CYR— (national) College Youth Representative
- D-CAP— District Christ’s Ambassadors President
- DDC— District Directors Conference for district Chi Alpha leadership, formerly D-XAR Seminar, D-XAD Conference, DRC-District Resource Conference
- DHMD— District Home Missions Director or District US Missions Director
- DMD— District Missions Director (AG World Missions), may combine with US Missions
- DO— District Office— some districts use Network
- DYD— District Youth Director, since 1971 (formerly District CA President)
- D-XAD— District Chi Alpha Director (full-time)
- D-XAR— District Chi Alpha Representative (part-time)

EC/EU— Evangel College/University

ELT— Executive Leadership Team (Six AG executives: general superintendent, assistant general superintendent, general treasury, general secretary, executive directors for AGWM and AGUSM)

EP— Executive Presbyter (individual)/ Executive Presbytery (group)

EMT— Chi Alpha’s Executive Ministry Team

GC/GCAG— General Council or General Council Assemblies of God

GP— General Presbyter (individual)/General Presbytery (group)

HBCU— Historically Black Colleges and Universities

ISM— International Student Ministry (general)

ISFM— International Student Friendship Ministries (replaced by XAi in 2010)

IVCF— InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

LFTL— Light for the Lost (AG Men’s Ministries)

MA— Missionary Associate (Campus Missionary Associate)

MA— Master’s Degree

MAPS— Mission America Placement Service (AG USM)

MAPS— Mobilization Abroad Placement Service (AG WM)

MCP&D—Missionary Church Planters and Developers (AG USM)

NAVS— The Navigators

NCAD— National Christ’s Ambassadors Department

Network— AG Districts have adopted the name Networks

NMC— National Ministry Center (Chi Alpha Campus Ministries, USA)

NLRC— National Leadership and Resource Center for Assemblies of God (formerly GCAG national offices and referred to as AG headquarters)

NLT— National Leadership Team for Chi Alpha, (formerly XA ELT—executive leadership team), today XA Executive Ministry Team (EMT).

NYD— National Youth Department (formerly National Christ’s Ambassadors Department)

PAOC— Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

*PE— Pentecostal Evangel*

Red U— Latin America Caribbean University Ministry

RUI— Reach the University Institute (pre-2000, Institute of Campus Ministry (ICM)

RUF— Reformed University Fellowship

S.A.L.T./SALT— Student Activist Leadership Training (1970s-1980s). By the 1980s, SALT was an acronym for regional, national and world student conferences. Currently, some regional SALTs are using Student Awakening Leadership Training, and other names.

STL— Speed the Light

SFC— Students for Christ

UA—University Action (Action Universitaire-Belgium)

US— United States

WM— AG Women's Ministries

WMS— World Missions Summit

XA— Chi Alpha

XAi— Chi Alpha International

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# Foreword

The secular university is the most strategic mission field in the world. I don't suggest it is the most important mission field, but it certainly is the most strategic. The university is the fulcrum of all societal and cultural evolution. It drives new discoveries in health care, medicine, agriculture, architecture, engineering, and the arts. Everything germane to society is affected by what takes place on the secular university.

Every religion, race, creed, and culture are represented 365 days a year on US colleges and universities. The nations of the world send their best to these institutions. In 2019, more than 1 million international students from 209 countries studied on US universities.

The history of the Church's engagement to the university is fascinating. As Dennis Gaylor highlights, it began with a few young men and women who had the courage to proclaim truth to their peers. Small prayer groups began to form, sovereign moves of God took place, students and faculty made commitments to Christ, and as these students were reconciled to Christ, they began a transformative process in the university, the marketplace, and the world.

In the mid-1800s, campus ministry began to organize. The understanding of the strategic nature of the secular university was elucidated to the Church. Parachurch campus ministries that focused specifically on the secular university emerged in the 1900s. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru), and the Navigators are a few of those stalwart ministries that brought the good news of the gospel of Jesus to the campus. In 1953, Chi Alpha (XA) came onto the scene of campus ministry. The nascent stages of XA were small, but the vision continued to enlarge. Dennis is a significant part of this history.

XA had been led nationally by men of vision and commitment to Christ, but the tenures in XA leadership had been relatively brief. Dennis assumed national leadership of XA in 1979, and he did so with a vision and work ethic that led XA to new levels of efficacy. He shared leadership and brought effective leaders together to begin to

process the future of XA. Under his leadership, an organizational structure for XA was developed and implemented that would guide the ministry to where it is today.

Dennis created platforms for others to stand on and grow. Scores of church leaders and leaders in global missions today were “discovered” in XA. Dennis provided a way for them to publicly utilize their gifts on a national platform. A primary reason that I and my wife, Crystal, sit in the seats of leadership we are in today is because Dennis opened broader doors for us on larger platforms to be heard, always encouraging and cheering us on. One of his greatest contributions to XA was allowing and facilitating others to achieve their full potential in ministry.

Dennis didn’t keep people tethered tightly. He allowed them to dream and supported their dreams to the best of his ability. He always had time for people and his door was always open, even when shut. In my personal twenty-eight-year history in XA as Dennis served as national director, there was never an instance that he did not carve out time for me, no matter what was on his desk or mind.

For thirty-five years, Dennis adroitly navigated the General Council of the Assemblies of God (AG) headquarters. Leading an entrepreneurial movement of young, idealistic leaders was no easy task. The challenge of high expectations without the reality of being actualized was not due to desire, but rather incompatible systems. In 1986, Dennis presciently realized XA was not in the best position to fulfill its mission. With gratitude for the season XA had under the AG National Youth Department, Dennis boldly made the request for XA to be moved from the Youth Department to AG Home Missions (now AGUSM) and his request was granted. Dennis led the charge for XA affiliates to be recognized missionaries in the AG and for the secular university to be viewed as a true mission field.

After twenty-five years of XA under AGUSM, Dennis realized a new positioning was critical for XA to efficaciously fulfill its mission. Following significant research, Dennis courageously recommended to the AG Executive Presbytery that XA be given permission to become its own mission agency within the AG. Permission was not granted, and XA remained positioned under AGUSM. The point I want to elucidate about Dennis is that he possessed perspicacity to see the best future of XA and the courage to fight for it.

With this esteemed background, Dennis developed a rich compilation of facts, information, and history, recorded in these details and writing. If you need any research on XA, it is in this book! He has given XA, AG, and campus ministry at large

a gift, something we can go back to retrieve facts, honor history, celebrate, and be thankful to the Lord.

I am grateful to Dennis for his years of service and ardent work to develop in a single volume, the historical facts of XA. Dennis's thirty-five years of leadership envelops an undeterred commitment to XA and its missionaries: to reconcile students to Christ, transforming the university, the marketplace, and the world.

May 13, 2020

E. Scott Martin

Senior National Director

Chi Alpha Campus Ministries USA

# Introduction

I (Dennis Gaylor) dedicated my life to Jesus Christ in 1969 following my sophomore year in college. This transforming experience set the trajectory of my life and ministry. The decision I made during one of the most important developmental windows of my young adulthood, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, would have far-reaching influence on my years of ministry ahead. I became intensely aware and committed to a career in ministry to college and university students as the context and fulcrum to change the world. I learned of a young ministry known as Chi Alpha (XA) and never looked back. Chi Alpha led the way and I followed.

My introduction to XA began while attending a college retreat in Texas in 1972. In 1973, I participated in a regional student conference known as SALT (Student Activist Leadership Training). By 1974, I was serving as the full-time director of South Texas District Chi Alpha in Houston.



Dennis, Barbara, Jennifer, Jason  
Gaylor 1978

In 1978, full of youthful idealism, unbounding energy, and creative imagination, my wife, Barbara, and I packed up our two young children, Jennifer and Jason, and all our earthly belongings and headed for Springfield, Missouri, home of the national headquarters of the Assemblies of God (AG). We left Texas that sweltering day in August excited with possibilities. The clarion call in our hearts to serve and help establish the kingdom of God on every college and university campus was

compelling and unstoppable. Throughout my next thirty-five years of service in the national office, I continually sensed the need to stay rooted, to remain faithful and committed, and to build and grow XA nationally. Today, I see the fruits of this faithfulness and dedication to serve.

I have been astonished to see the first seed that was planted for XA grow into a student movement today. The vision for XA began with J. Calvin Holsinger, a

twenty-year-old college instructor in the 1950s who organized a handful of students at Southwest Missouri State College in Springfield, Missouri. His vision grew into a major Spirit-led national campus ministry and student movement globally involving tens of thousands of students in the twenty-first century. Today, there are several hundred established local XA campus ministries on colleges and universities proclaiming the gospel across the United States. The expanding presence of XA on campuses now offers the significant influence of Pentecostal university ministry stateside and globally.

There are many ways to tell the XA story. Most importantly, it is the story of God's redemption and love, bringing His kingdom to bear on the university culture and the world. Thomas Moore said in *Ageless Soul*, "Even history from a certain valuable angle is a form of poetry." God's story provides the eternal poetic angle for XA Campus Ministries. Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:20 reminds me as I write about the story of XA that God "is able to do immeasurably far more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever!" I believe God's eternal story will continue to bring power to the ministry of XA in the generations to come.

This book is written from my vantage point as national director. It offers history, stories, testimonies, memoirs, and my perspective on how the XA ministry began and developed, what it has become, and where it is going. Writing from a national point of view differs from the local campus ministry perspective. This book provides insight into an evolving national organization. It highlights the spiritual and cultural dynamics that have transpired over time to birth and grow a national ministry and student movement.

History buffs will not be disappointed with this book. I include facts, names, details, numbers, lists, dates, and charts. There are anecdotes, notable quotes, and personal observations woven into each chapter. The book highlights the decades that span from the 1940s to 2020. I have researched more than eighty years of information, spoken with former national leaders from the first four decades of XA, conducted multiple interviews, and corresponded with current and past XA students, campus ministers, and missionaries.

I value inclusivity to a fault. My desire to include everyone proved challenging, and regrettably, I could not include all the names of the incredible campus ministry heroines and heroes I have known through the years. Every person involved in XA,

whether included in this book or not, has played a significant role in developing and growing XA. Their contribution of sacrifice and service to the kingdom of God lives on. I am grateful for each story written in eternity.

There is a reason why this book is important. College ministry remains the most strategic mission field in the world today. The university is uniquely suited for evangelism and discipleship. I agree with theologian Tim Keller who wrote in 2017 in an article, wrote, “University Missions and Evangelism Today,” that “There is no other place in our culture that affords listeners the space and freedom, time and posture, to talk about the meaning of it all.”

The role of university ministry in advancing the message of Christ’s love throughout the world cannot be emphasized enough. The university setting is pervasive—inquiry and searching are the norms. It is not just a place where some twenty million collegians gather on a few acres in buildings dedicated to learning. These students lead the way into the future. Their influence and leadership will shape the world. They will transform organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies for generations to come.

The Assemblies of God, a denomination birthed out of the modern Pentecostal movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, recognized early on the growing number of AG youth entering public and nonsectarian private colleges and universities. Chi Alpha was first introduced in the AG Fellowship in the 1950s as a Christian collegiate ministry. In the twenty-first century, I remain grateful for the foresight, wisdom, and guidance of the AG then and now. The AG continues to be firmly committed to supporting the growth and development of XA.

Chi Alpha first operated out of the AG National Youth Department (NYD) with a handful of student-led campus ministries in scattered locations across the United States. Over time, thousands of young men and women received Christ through the efforts of XA on campus. God called many into campus ministry following graduation. This period of growth and expansion led to changes for XA as it became a part of AG U.S. Missions (AGUSM) in the late 1980s. This move proved to be a watershed moment for XA. Identification with missions changed everything. The denomination recognized that the campus afforded an unprecedented environment in which to advance the gospel. The provision of national missionary appointment, the missionary associate position (MA), missionary career associate (CA) position, and missions methodologies set the course for the future of XA.

At this point in the twenty-first century, unparalleled opportunities exist on the university campus. Chi Alpha has developed, expanded, and refined its training for staff and students. A steady growth in numbers of single and married young men and women are called, equipped, and appointed to serve in campus ministry. More campus ministries are established nationwide as new leaders are sent out. Wave after wave of students find their life in Christ to have meaning and purpose not only on campus, but in the marketplace and the world. They are engaged in cross-cultural missions stateside and globally. Chi Alpha is a thriving national student movement at the center of societal change and influence with unlimited potential for shaping our world for Jesus Christ.

In 2013, my position as national director ended. In that same year, XA turned sixty. In this season of my life in retirement, I have had the opportunity to reflect and write on what has transpired in XA and my ministry of almost four decades.

Part 1  
Campus Ministries  
in the

# Twentieth Century