



Journal of the International
Coalition of YMCA Universities



Presentation

The International Coalition of the YMCA Universities is a partnership of universities, colleges and professional training institutes that belong to or are related to several national YMCA movements. They are university-level educational institutions that promote training to prepare professionals in the several areas of relevant services offered by the YMCA movement. The idea of the partnership was initiated in the year 2000. The present coordinator is Maurício Massari, of FEFISO, SP/BRAZIL.

Members:

Argentina - Instituto Universitario YMCA de la Asociación Cristiana De Jóvenes

Brazil - College of Physical Education of Sorocaba YMCA, Sorocaba, Brazil

England - YMCA George Williams College, London

Germany - a) CVJM-Kolleg, Kassel, Germany

b) International YMCA University of Applied Sciences, Kassel, Germany

Hong Kong - YMCA College of Continuing Education, Hong Kong

India - a) YMCA Training and Leadership Department of YMCA India, Bangalore

b) YMCA College of Physical Education, Chennai

c) Education Centre of New Delhi YMCA, New Delhi

Mexico - Universidad YMCA Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico

Uruguay - Instituto Universitario ACJ, Montevideo, Uruguay

USA - Springfield College, Springfield, MA, USA

Venezuela - Instituto Universitario YMCA "Lope Mendoza", Caracas, Venezuela



Summary

Editorial	p. 3-4
Maurício Massari	
Sharing Experiences	p. 05
Walking in the Workplace, Becoming a Chaplain Y	p. 6-17
Linda M. Kapurch	
Small Actions for Big Changes – You are Worth it! You are Loved!	p. 18-22
World Week of Prayer 2017 – YMCA/ACM Sorocaba and FEFISO	
STAND UP AND SPEAK UP - BE THE VOICE OF THE VOICELESS!!	
Laura da Silva Souza and Vitória Rodrigues Salmazo	
Interview	p. 23
An interview of Larry Whittlesey, National Director of the US Mission	p. 24-34
Network	
Robert J. Willey, Jr	
Announcement	p. 35

Editorial

Dear colleagues at the YMCA Universities Coalition,

"The Christian Youth Associations seek to unite those young people who, in relation to Jesus Christ as their God and Savior, according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be his disciples in their faith and in their lives, and associate their efforts to the extension of his kingdom among young men.

Any difference of opinion on other matters, however important, should not interfere with the harmonious relations of the constituent and associate members of the World Alliance. "

This is our Mission. This is our goal. This is our base.

This is our Paris Basis, written during the First World Conference in Paris in 1855 and reaffirmed by the 6th World Council of YMCAs in 1973. The whole YMCA around the world should work based on this phrase.

So we chose this theme for our Journal: "YMCA AND CHRISTIANITY". We believe that a college that works with the YMCA should work by following these principles.

In this issue, we have only three texts to read, unfortunately.

A United States sharing by Linda M. Kapurch (YMCA of the Great Brandywine) was intended to serve as a model for others seeking to connect the Christian mission in their organizations and the title is "Walking in the workplace, becoming a chaplain Y. "It is an interesting text to think about how we can work Christianity in the YMCA.

In the second moment, from Brazil, there is another "sharing experiences" about the World Week of Prayer 2017. The title is "Small actions for big changes - You're Worth It! You are

EDITORIAL

loved!" And Laura da Silva Souza and Vitória Rodrigues Salmazo told us about the experiences in the prayer of the week in Sorocaba, Brazil.

Finally, we have an interview with Larry Whittlesey, national director of the US mission network, interviewed by Robert Willey, Dean of Springfield College (retired).

I would like once again to thank Professor Gisele de Oliveira for her work on this issue. Without it, this edition could not be possible.

I'm still waiting for na article from each one of the colleges.

Thank you.

Maurício Massari, Ph.D.

Coordinator International Coalition of YMCA Universities

Principal – Physical Education College – Sorocaba – São Paulo - Brazil

Physical Education College

FEFISO – YMCA – Brazil

Sharing experiences

Walking in the workplace, becoming a chaplain Y

Linda M. Kapurch

chaplain@ymcagbw.org

<http://www.ymcagbw.org>

WALKING IN THE WORKPLACE...**Abstract**

Although many committed Y staff members engage in furthering the Christian mission emphasis throughout their organizations, it is still rare to find dedicated staff positions devoted to chaplaincy. The YMCA of Greater Brandywine is one such exception. In an emerging field in which there are few guideposts, this personal story is how one Y chaplain developed a series of *Chaplain's Note* messages as one way to minister in this large, diverse, and geographically dispersed association. It can serve as a model for others seeking to connect the Christian mission in their organizations.

WALKING IN THE WORKPLACE...

Walking the Workplace, Becoming a Y Chaplain

What happens when following your own plan doesn't turn out that way?

In the midst of following my own plan as a card-carrying pastor in a large Episcopal congregation, I was called to become the part-time chaplain at the YMCA of Greater Brandywine in November 2013. This Y stretches over nine separate locations (“branches”) and serves some 80,000 members across Chester County (in southeastern Pennsylvania). How could a single, part-time chaplain be present for all—or at least—some of them? How would this chaplain learn to establish trust—the basic building block of any relationship—in a large, geographically diverse organization?

So, I started walking: walking aquatic hallways, walking the cardio rooms, walking into offices. I started the simple, serendipitous act of meeting people where they were along life's journeys and creating a safe space for them to talk about their personal and spiritual lives.

On my walks and talks around the various branches, I gleaned the joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears, the successes and struggles of individuals who work—and work out—at the Y. As their chaplain, how would I connect with them? Enter technology. One way became taking this “stuff” of the workplace and using it as the raw material for a series of bimonthly *Chaplain's Note* messages that went out to all staff.

What follows is a selection of these *Chaplain's Note* messages, beginning from 2015 and continuing to the present. They are meant to serve as illustrations of how this one approach—building relationships over a large organization—worked. The ones included here (from the larger body of *Chaplain's Note* messages) illustrate the process by which taking a theme from

WALKING IN THE WORKPLACE...

the larger universe (i.e., gratitude, mindfulness, decision-making, resilience, change, or identity) can be crafted for the workplace.

To begin, a couple of caveats are in order. One lesson I quickly learned was that, although each *Chaplain's Note* was designed to offer a spiritual message, my audience was largely one that was “spiritual, but not religious.” The “C” in YMCA reminds all of us that the Y was founded upon Christian principles. Today's Y, however, stretches across an all-inclusive interfaith, ecumenical, and “nonaffiliated” landscape. From the outset, *Chaplain's Note* sought to strike a balance between embodying a Christian message without overwhelming non-Christians (and nonbelievers) alike. The goal was to offer a reflection that would resonate with as many people as possible.

And, to my delight, resonate they did.

“Resonance” became one of the outcomes of all of this walking.

Whatever the topic, the *Chaplain's Note* became an extension of my “ministry by walking around”—spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ one step—one *Chaplain's Note*—at a time. Reaching people electronically deepened my chaplain's ministry, and became the conduit for further interactions and relationships. Many times, in response to one of the *Chaplain's Note*, individual contact was initiated, both via email and in person. The conversation that began via the *Chaplain's Note* continued—in the form of a prayer request, or asking for counsel on a work or family issue, or an invitation to offer an invocation at a fundraising dinner. They didn't start out that way but for me, as the chaplain, it was a gift to accept that these *Chaplain's Note* messages turned into an ongoing conversation—one that the Spirit did not leave one-sided.

WALKING IN THE WORKPLACE...

By way of illustration, this first section describes how *Chaplain's Note* came about as a vehicle for communication within the Y. The idea for publishing *Chaplain's Note* on a bimonthly basis came from management. The subject matter of *Chaplain's Note* was left up to me. As I was driving into the Y on a day when a *Chaplain's Note* was expected, I would enlist the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Similar to the “preaching muse” alighting upon my shoulder when I needed to write a sermon, it was very often this act of “driving in” that would lead to an idea—which could be spun into a message. Here are some of those messages.

Chaplain's Note: All “Camped” Out - July 20, 2015

“All camped out.” That’s the response I received yesterday from one of my parishioners when I asked his son, “So how’s your summer going?” Before the son could speak, his father gave the answer. I’m not sure if that’s how his son actually felt; before I could find out, I was called into another conversation. But the “all camped out” quote stayed with me.

And so a question kept rolling around in my mind: Can we have too much “camp?” Can we have too much of a good thing such as learning new skills, experiencing new surroundings, growing in confidence and independence, making new friends? (Go ahead and add to the list whatever you or your children come up with.) Maybe all of this newness can lead to camp fatigue and the resultant feeling of being “all camped out.” An individual call, for sure!

But one of the more significant by-products of camp is something we can never outgrow or have too much of: building community. I am reminded of how integral building community is to our life together at the Y every time I exchange my business card that reads, in part, *Y for Community*. Running such an ambitious and energetic camp program across all of the

WALKING IN THE WORKPLACE...

branches every summer is putting into practice what we believe about community—and making that belief accessible to all comers.

So, to all of your campers and camp counselors out there: You're making a far greater contribution than just keeping each other safe and cool and occupied. You're imparting a significant life lesson in those camps: what it means to live together in community—where the common good should always trump our own. We constantly need experiences that will do that for us.

You can never get too much camp.

Chaplain's Note: In Between Snowstorms - Feb. 8, 2016

As I write this from one of our branches today, the phone keeps transmitting the “Winter Storm Watch Remains in Effect” warning. It seems the last time I was able to get here (BEFORE the last snowstorm), the phones were “predicting” the same thing: an imminent and major inconvenience. Since the last wintry dump, it has taken me nearly until today to feel “caught up” with my responsibilities at church with any semblance of schedule or routine—even with these *Chaplain's Note messages!* It has seemed like weeks of just being “behind.”

I don't know about you, but I don't like this pervasive, low-grade feeling of being “behind.” It's *not* that I manage to tie my “to-do” list up into a neat bow *every* day. But most days I look back at it and think: That can wait until tomorrow. Now that things are “stacked and packed” up—almost as high as those dirt-encrusted, leftover snow piles in Giant's parking lot—I haven't been able to think that as often. And so, this feeling of being overwhelmed and

WALKING IN THE WORKPLACE...

uneasy is self-perpetuating. And back to that warning on my phone: “Winter Storm Watch Remains in Effect.”

There is a spiritual practice that’s a lovely antidote to this cycle. It’s called *mindfulness*. For those yoga practitioners out there in my reading audience, you are probably already well-acquainted with the practice and its benefits. I’ll leave you to Google the steps involved in how it’s done (and if you’d prefer to attach a specific religious affiliation to it). But for today let’s just say it’s a practice of “being in the moment”—training our minds and spirits to just *be* in whatever moment we find ourselves. It’s also an excellent lesson in loosening our grip on what we can control—and what we cannot (like an impending snowstorm). Learning to recognize this difference does wonders for our energy levels, motivation, and mood. Try it!

Meanwhile, I’m going to try something different: Stop looking at my phone. AND decide *today* that IF it snows tomorrow, *I’ll* deal with *it then*. Now, back to that to-do list.

Chaplain’s Note: “Commercially Yours” - June 21, 2017

Far be it for this space to advocate paying attention to a TV commercial! But there is one worthy of being held up for your attention—if you hadn’t noticed it yet. It’s probably only 30 seconds long (I didn’t have the time to calculate), and it begins with the familiar litany of all of the sorts of troubling activities that kids get into over the summer and otherwise: too much TV, drugs, picking on siblings, among other things. The voice-over starts to lament the phenomenon of “idle hands”—at first I thought it was a public service announcement for Child Protective Services or addiction recovery programs. Until at the very end when the signature “Y” appears and, along with it, the scenes shift to what kids—and the rest of us—are

WALKING IN THE WORKPLACE...

truly capable of. We are all “capable of amazing things” when we step out and stand for “*a better us.*”

For after school. For safe spaces. For creativity. For recreation. For tutoring. For mentoring. For youth development. These are the things that go into creating “*a better us.*”

We could all use more of “*a better us*” around about now, don’t you think? I don’t know about you, but I long to hear again those wonderful phrases like “we’re all in this together,” “win-win” (instead of “I win, you lose”), “two minds are better than one,” “the common good.” What thoughts come immediately to your mind when you hear “*a better us?*” What ideas do you have to contribute to the conversation?

If you need some encouragement—or reminding—remember where you work, where you spend most of the hours of your day, and what the Y stands for: amazing things so sorely missing from our greater society today—safe spaces, creativity, capability for all. The final clip of this “Y-commercial” has a young person “diving deep” into one of our Y-(indoor) pools. This summer, take a “deep dive” yourself into those values that we hold in common, and can be justly proud of—now that you are capable of amazing things!

Sometimes a commercial is simply worth it.

The second set of examples comes from the “sporting life,” which, not surprisingly, found an easy resonance with an audience like the Y’s. Events from the life of sports—besides contributing to the Y’s holistic vision of mind, body, spirit—foster many of the qualities from the life of the spirit within each of us.

WALKING IN THE WORKPLACE...

Chaplain's Note: Wearin' o' the Green - April 13, 2015

Jacket, that is.

Today's buzz in sports circles is all about the phenom Jordan Spieth whose record-smashing win in Augusta yesterday (Sunday, April 12) enabled him to "capture(s) a Green Jacket" (*The New York Times*, April 13, 2015, p. D7). Even before this newspaper article came across my screen, I overheard the chatter about him while standing in various and sundry Monday morning lines. Words like "prodigy" and "true champion" were repeated often.

Full disclosure: I'm not a golfer or fan of the sport. But I found myself reading less about Spieth the golfer and more about Spieth the person. I make it my business to read about people's lives and how they got to the place of capturing headlines. It's the "human interest story" that piques—and keeps—my attention. So, I read on, and in the middle of all of the golf lingo, this article turned to these "human" aspects of Spieth—in particular, his loving relationship with his younger, 14-year-old sister, Ellie. Because of what the article called "an undisclosed neurological disorder," Ellie reportedly has the mind of a 5-year-old. The article goes on to describe their special bond—with Spieth even admitting to himself that Ellie "keeps him grounded."

Which got me to thinking: What REALLY makes a champion?

We all know that prowess and talent and lots of "true grit" go into winning championships. These are the things we tell our children as they make their first forays onto the court or field or track. We try—and hopefully, lead by example—to cultivate those qualities that are proven "winners." But, as this ONE example of Jordan and his sister, Ellie, illustrates, things like compassion and humility and acceptance can also go into the making of a champion. I'll go

WALKING IN THE WORKPLACE...

even a step further: Perhaps it's these things that separate the "true champion" from the faux one who is all about personal accolades and acclaim.

Camp season is soon upon us. And we'll have so much opportunity to form our charges into champions. The question is: What kind of champion do we want them to grow up to be?

Congratulations, Jordan.

Chaplain's Note: Hero-Making - Feb. 22, 2016

Yesterday, February 21, was the anniversary of Eric Liddell's death in 1945. He was the Scottish track star who brought home the gold medal in the 400 meter race in the 1924 Olympics. Reading (somewhere?) about this anniversary, I was reminded of the movie that immortalized his fame: *Chariots of Fire*. I remember that film well, as much for the soundtrack as for its images of great natural beauty. And I still remember thinking: I wish I could have run—back in the days of my (so-called) "running career"—as effortlessly as he did. In my mind, Eric Liddell became one of my sports heroes.

Also happening yesterday, our Sunday School teachers put together a little skit for our kids called "Superheroes of the Bible." They wanted to introduce the children to some of those larger-than-life heroes like David, the champion over Goliath. But, after the skits, they also took the time to ask the kids what they thought went into *making* a hero. What are some of the things that make up the character of a hero or heroine? So, with heroes all around me, I am compelled to ponder the same question: What makes a hero or heroine?

Our minds conjure up lots of things when we hear the words "hero" and "heroine"—lots of things that our culture convinces us are true from them. Physical prowess, charisma,

WALKING IN THE WORKPLACE...

extraordinary feats, maybe even a certain way of thinking. I'd like to suggest that, in addition to these obvious and observable things, there's also something that gets overlooked in the heroic nomenclature. It's the old, well-trodden Nike commercial: *Just do it, USA*. Eric Liddell is a sports hero of mine, not *only* because he won Gold, but because he was out there—every day—just running his heart out. It's true: He was handsome and sleek and talented. But he was also principled and purposeful and persevering. These traits—these qualities that we can see—are likely to be the ones that stick with us about our heroes and heroines long after the gold has lost its luster. And they're the ones worth imitating in our own lives every day.

So, who are *your* heroes and heroines? And how do you think they got there?

Chaplain's Note: The Tide Has Turned—to Jan. 10, 2017 - Jan. 10, 2017

It's the day after...Jan. 9, 2017. For all of you Tigers fans out there, congratulations! Especially on rising to Number 1 in the College Football world. For us Crimson Tide fans—after a suitable period of hand-wringing, “if onlys” grief, and disbelief—comes the realization: We're now Number 2 in those college football rankings. It's different. Even the visuals (e.g., the trophy that gets hoisted for the Number 2 team) looks differently. It takes some getting used to.

The crass and unsportsmanlike retort would be: Get over it. True enough: There are enough issues in our world, and right down to our family lives, to occupy our hand-wringing, second-guessing, and downright grief. But back to being Number 2. Because *it's not only in sports that we can find ourselves there*. Ever learn about that coveted job you sorely wanted that went to another candidate—and you ended up being the runner-up? Or ever get one of

WALKING IN THE WORKPLACE...

those thin letters announcing you or your high school senior just missed the cut on your first choice college so you have been relegated to the “waiting list”?

Seems to me that getting adjusted to living out of coming in second—whether it’s in sports or academics or in the workplace—is a good discipline to hone. Rather than beating ourselves up for being “second best,” let’s change the lens. After all, we’re not like that car rental company that, several years ago (at least), used to advertise: We try harder. We’re not a bunch of rental cars! Maybe it’s time to get used to the idea that we won’t come in first in everything—and take it from there. This *could* mean trying harder—if we judge the goal to be worth it. But it could also mean a period of self-reflection and self-adjustment as to what our values and priorities really are.

I texted my Alabama grad (Class of 2011) niece this morning. And I ended it with the signature sign-off, Roll Tide. I hope she knows I meant it.

These *Chaplain’s Note* messages became a way into many things: pastoral care, storytelling, diving more deeply into the spiritual journey. As I look back on them, I recognize this series of *Chaplain’s Note* messages is one approach to shaping the field of workplace chaplaincy—and getting there by simply walking.

WORLD WEEK OF PRAYER 2017...

Small Actions for Big Changes – You are Worth it! You are Loved!

World Week of Prayer 2017 – YMCA/ACM Sorocaba and FEFISO

STAND UP AND SPEAK UP - BE THE VOICE OF THE VOICELESS!

Laura da Silva Souza

Vitória Rodrigues Salmazo

WORLD WEEK OF PRAYER 2017...

YMCA/ACM Sorocaba and FEFISO (Physical Education College) would like to share the experience we had in this year (2017) during the World Week of Prayer.

The Young Men's Christian Association of Sorocaba is the keeper of the College of Physical Education of Sorocaba (FEFISO). Both located in the city of Sorocaba, in the countryside of São Paulo state - Brazil, seek in their branch of activity to be a reference in Physical Education, quality of life, formal and informal education with the commitment to extend the kingdom of God as it is in the Paris Base. The YMCA as an ecumenical institution seeks dialogue and respect among different religions and creeds.

For all our actions, we asked, "What do we intend to do, is it in accordance with our institutional mission? Does it agree with our Base? How are we extending the Kingdom of the Master in doing a certain action? "

Thus we believe and seek to extend the Kingdom of the Master in all our actions.

The World Week of Prayer is an action that aims to unite all the YMCAs and YWCAs in the same prayer, praying and developing actions for a better world. Each year a theme is explored, showing the difficulties that happen in different parts of the world and the works developed by the YMCAs and YWCAs to help change lives, paradigms, and realities in search of equality, respect and justice.

The 2017 World Week of Prayer was held from November 12th to 18th with the theme **STAND UP AND SPEAK UP! BE THE VOICE OF THE VOICELESS!** It is a current and opportune theme. It made us reflect about our importance to those who are being oppressed, silent, left aside from society. We reflected about knowing what side we are or choose to be according to our actions. May we be oppressing too? Are we being passive, keeping quiet before the injustice made against the disadvantaged? What can we do to help these people?

WORLD WEEK OF PRAYER 2017...

What can we do to help our brother? How can we be better to the others? How can we be as Christ is?

Every year the Christian Mission Commission of YMCA Sorocaba with its collaborators, leaders, volunteers come together and elaborate practical and direct actions for members, collaborators from all sectors of YMCA/ACM, FEFISO and the community. This year was not different.

Besides working on the actions related to the World Week of Prayer, together, students from FEFISO and YMCA Sorocaba collaborators developed a project titled "You're worth it" where people tried to make people aware of the problem of depression, one of the psychological diseases that has been affecting thousands of people in the world and that may lead to suicide. The goal was to deliver messages of appreciation to life that would lead people to reflect on themselves and how important they are to God and the people around them. In the messages there was a theme such as: "You are loved", "You are important", "You are not a failure", "You are special", among others, with Bible verses showing the great love of Christ for us, bringing breaths of life and hope to those who received the messages. It also had the hashtags #eufaçofefiso (#IDoFEFISO #YouAreWorthIt #YMCASorocaba). The messages were delivered with a candy - a gentle way of approaching -, and a short explanation about what was happening, about the importance of listening more to our neighbor and of talking about our feelings, because many are the struggles that as humans we fight every day, in our unconsciousness, so it is very important to know that we have people by our side and especially we always have God's mercy and love for us.

WORLD WEEK OF PRAYER 2017...

The impact of this action was very positive, even knowing about possible resistances of people who do not believe or do not share the same beliefs and also about laic education in our university, there was much respect and admiration for what was happening.

According to the students and YMCA collaborators who were delivering the messages, it was extremely rewarding because it surprised people and when they read the messages, there was a moment of complicity and gratitude for that gesture. The project contributors reported that some people who received the messages shared on their social networks what had happened and the feeling they felt when receiving the message.

These actions also impacted the organizers of the project. According to Lauriele Elias, 22, a student of the fourth semester of the College of Physical Education (FEFISO), who collaborated with the project, the impact these actions had on her life and the lives of those she had the opportunity to deliver the messages to was, in her words: "When I was delivering the messages, my heart warmed and I felt complete satisfaction inside me. I suffer from depression and the act of giving a word of love to my neighbor made me feel good and know that Jesus is taking care of me too. "

We took the messages with the candies to the streets with the aim to reach the community. We sent the messages to an ILP (institution of long stay), a rest home, we gave them to all the old people who were there, some of us read what was written, we talked and we could see and feel the need of those people. We do not know their stories, why they are there, but we know that the feeling of loneliness, of incapacity are feelings they face every day and when we gave the messages to them we could see the gratitude in their eyes, moments that have affected us a lot.

WORLD WEEK OF PRAYER 2017...

We tried to include all departments that are part of the YMCA/ACM Sorocaba and FEFISO, sectors such as maintenance, staff, IT, Human Resources, Personnel Department, FEFISO Board, FEFISO Secretaries, English Course, Warehousing, Professionals, Interns and Volunteers. We had a very positive feedback, and this fact was reported at the Board meetings.

The YMCA/ACM Sorocaba Christian Mission Commission is very happy and grateful for partnering with FEFISO students on this beautiful and blessed mission. There are many feelings that fill our hearts, but the greatest of them is to know that Christ is being praised and His message is being spread like a small seed in the lives of people around us. We ask that His Word warms the hearts of those who are experiencing difficulties, that we can always help people even through a simple message. Once I read the following phrase "When we take care of another person's pain, God cares for our pain" and how He is faithful.

“He must become greater; I must become less.” – John 3:30.

Leaders

Christian Mission Commission of YMCA Sorocaba

Collaborators and Interns of YMCA Sorocaba

Body of Leaders

FEFISO Students

May God bless the life and mission of each one immensely on this journey, because together we can do more and more for the Kingdom of our Master!

Gratitude

Christian Mission YMCA Sorocaba

Interview

AN INTERVIEW OF LARRY WHITTLESEY...**An Interview of Larry Whittlesey, National Director****Of the us Mission Network, with Bob Willey,****Dean of Springfield College (retired)**

An Introduction: A critical question facing YMCAs throughout the United States in the twenty-first century is the place of the YMCA's Christian heritage in the mission and operation of YMCA associations as well as the national organization, the YMCA of the USA. One organization that has advocated for the preserving, nurturing, and advancing of that Christian heritage is the US Mission Network. The US Mission Network is a collaborative effort of YMCA leaders in the United States who are committed "to make an eternal difference through [their] collective efforts to lift up Jesus in the YMCA."

Through September and October of 2017, Dr. Bob Willey, retired Dean of Springfield College and former Coordinator of the International Coalition of YMCA Universities, interviewed Larry Whittlesey, National Director of the Network, by means of an email exchange. The interview follows.

AN INTERVIEW OF LARRY WHITTLESEY...

Question: *Why the US Mission Network? What prompted the founders to form the network?*

Response: *As we all know, the YMCA was founded as a prayer meeting led by George Williams in London. The initiatives laid out by George Williams and those early adopters of this new organization were clearly focused on addressing the spiritual lives of the men they were serving. Over time the organization developed other initiatives centered on physical fitness, education, war relief, social service, and many other issues. While all of these are noble endeavors, at times the central focus on the spiritual lives of those being served was lessened or even replaced with these other initiatives, especially in North America.*

The spiritual emphasis of the YMCA in the United States declined significantly after 1960 with the explosion of the fitness industry. YMCAs began to primarily become “gym and swim” in many places, leaving behind the wealth of spiritual heritage that had been the hallmark of the organization since its inception. By 1999 a group of young YMCA executives became increasingly concerned about this “mission drift” and banded together to launch the “John 17:21 Conference,” based on the founding verse of the YMCA, John 17:21. Led totally by these YMCA executives and dedicated volunteers, this conference brought together a few like-minded people from around the country for a two-day event focused on the application of the foundational Christian principles of the YMCA.

By 2008 this group of young executives were all moving up in their careers and were no longer able to take on the responsibilities of organizing this type of conference event. In its place, an ad hoc group of those interested in continuing to meet began to gather at Silver Bay YMCA Conference Center in New York for a time of fellowship and encouragement. An informal network began to grow between some of these YMCA executives, the limited number

AN INTERVIEW OF LARRY WHITTLESEY...

of YMCA chaplains working around the country, and a few church planters who were serving churches based in local YMCAs. Identifying with YMCA mission networks in other parts of the world, this loose-knit collaboration began to call themselves the US Mission Network. Though there was nothing formal about the organization, the group continued to gather at Silver Bay each October.

Early in 2013 Bob Hall from the YMCA of Columbia-Willamette in Portland, Oregon, began to sense a more formalized effort was needed if this mission drift was going to be addressed on a national level. He approached several other YMCA executives who had served with him in organizing the former John 17:21 Conferences about the possibility of creating a national office for advancing the Christian mission of the YMCA. With their approval and pledge of financial support, he wrote and received a grant from the Murdock Trust to fund this new initiative for three years. Following a nationwide search, I was hired to fill the leadership role of this newly created position in December 2013.

By the spring of 2014, this new effort had begun to take shape and established some basic priorities based on the stipulations outlined in the grant proposal. Realizing the overlap of effort with the existing informal network, I worked alongside of a number of other key leaders to develop a process to unite the new initiative with the existing informal US Mission Network. Adopting their name aligned this new effort with similar efforts around the world.

The US Mission Network was organized to “preserve, nurture, and advance the Christian heritage and purpose of the YMCA across America.” The primary goal of the founders of the Network was to lift up the “C” in the YMCA by exposing YMCA leaders to new methods, resources, and approaches in service to their community. The purpose was not to replace the many fine programs being offered by local YMCAs that focus on physical fitness, education, or

AN INTERVIEW OF LARRY WHITTLESEY...

other things, but rather to insure that there will always be a seat at the table for the Christian mission of the YMCA. The triangle of Spirit, Mind, and Body first outlined by Luther Gullick is incomplete if the Spirit is left out of what it means to be a YMCA. The true value of the YMCA is best demonstrated when the spiritual component plays a central role in all the YMCA does. Following the example of the founder of the YMCA, those who formed this network wanted to make sure we never lose sight of that as our primary mission.

Question: *You mention that in your original grant proposal some "basic priorities" were established. What are those priorities for the Network?*

Response: *The intent of the group that wrote the initial grant proposal was clearly the advancement of the Christian mission within today's YMCA. By that they meant the elevation of the Christian heritage and purpose within the larger YMCA culture; to make it more visible, obvious, and a routine part of the expression of a YMCA in a local community. Since the board of the Network is comprised of senior level YMCA executives, they understand that no such movement will be effective unless we can reach out to their counterparts and those that make the decisions on a local level. The Christian emphasis rarely moves past the interest of the CEOs/COOs and their local boards. This ability to generate interest in local leaders is what will create the momentum needed to truly advance the Christian mission in any local association. But that interest is not generated without some type of facilitation, that is, someone who will reach out to these local leaders with a clarion call to the YMCA's history and heritage and offer a practical plan on how to implement such an emphasis in today's YMCA. One of my roles has been to serve as a facilitator for this type of renewal, calling*

AN INTERVIEW OF LARRY WHITTLESEY...

YMCAs back to the original intent of the founders and offering them ideas and resources on how to make relevant changes in their current programming to accomplish that purpose.

As we have seen thus far in our brief history, this plan is working. We have created a brand that is being noticed throughout the YMCA across the United States, and literally the world. The US Mission Network has been reaching out to individual YMCA leaders, state alliances, AYP conferences, regional associations, and the YMCA of the USA to create awareness of how vital the Christian mission is to the healthy expression of the YMCA in any local community. As the leaders connect with one another through the Network, momentum is built and the visibility of the Christian mission is elevated. This is the by-product of the plan outlined in the original grant. As our capacity to do more grows, that momentum is certain to increase locally, regionally, and nationally.

Four basic priorities are outlined in the grant as to how it was thought these purposes could be accomplished:

- *Regional and national conferences for staff*
- *A board forum*
- *Leadership training courses*
- *Consultation with local YMCAs*

As we have developed the Network over the past three and a half years, we have successfully done three of these four priorities. We have hosted regional and national conferences, offered a series of training opportunities, and consulted with hundreds of local YMCAs. To this point we have not been successful in conducting a board forum or a similar event primarily geared toward local board members. A number of board members from

AN INTERVIEW OF LARRY WHITTLESEY...

various associations have attended our events, but we have not offered them a separate program.

The desired outcomes of this project are:

- 1. Enhanced ability among staff and volunteers in the YMCA to promote Christian principles in and through the work of the YMCA.*
- 2. Active networks of Christians in staff leadership and board governance that will continue to advance Christian principles and priorities throughout the YMCA.*
- 3. Greater effect from the programs of the YMCA in youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility as they demonstrate greater fidelity to Christian principles.*
- 4. Strengthened culture and ethos of the YMCA to embody core Christian principles and to strengthen Spirit, Mind, and Body for all people.*

Question: *The Network's focus is on the United States. But have you had connections with the international YMCA movement?*

Response: *From our inception we have had a working relationship with a number of international YMCA leaders, specifically with those working with the various World Mission Networks. Our connections have been:*

- Steve Clay, Black Country YMCA, England*
- Tabea Koebel, YMCA National Office, Germany*
- Caesar Molebatsi, Former President of the World Alliance, Southern Africa YMCA*
- Annie Ngwira, Nigeria YMCA and African Alliance*

AN INTERVIEW OF LARRY WHITTLESEY...

- *Oscar Ordenes, Chile YMCA and South America Alliance*
- *Joachim Schmutz, Munich YMCA, Germany*
- *Sam Stevens - India YMCA; other Asian YMCAs; President India Gospel League*
- *Jack Young, Hong Kong YMCA*

We have met and worked with a number of others, especially representatives from England last July when this group gathered with six United States representatives from the US Mission Network to work on plans for the upcoming World Mission Network Conference in Chiang Mai scheduled for next July preceding the World Council. This is also the group that planned a similar event at Estes Park prior to the last World Council gathering in June 2014.

We now meet together via phone or Zoom to share ideas and plan the upcoming event. We have also worked fairly closely with Peter Posner, current President of the World Alliance of YMCAs, and Juan Simoes Iglesia, Secretary General of YMCA Europe. A few of us have attended the Europe YMCA Unify Events, and others have traveled to various nations on goodwill tours.

In the United States we work with YMCA of the USA International Group led by Tom Valentine and the YMCA World Service led by Mary Tikalsky, both out of Chicago.

One of our primary initiatives is to continue to build these relationships and work with the other world mission networks to build awareness. The group mentioned above has been close friends with a shared sense of purpose. Joachim Schmutz is the primary organizer of this effort, but the involvement of our United States contingent seems to be vital to any real collaborative effort.

AN INTERVIEW OF LARRY WHITTLESEY...

While in England last July we toured the roots of the YMCA movement in England, then travel south to visit the birthplace and boyhood home of George Williams, the drapery factory and church in Bridgewater where he got saved, and a number of other significant historical sites in the YMCA movement. At each place we gathered for prayer and asked God to “do it again” in the YMCA.

While we have no formal relationship with the World Alliance of YMCAs or any of these national mission networks, we are certainly connected at the hip. We are striving to be good stewards of our resources, ideas, and relationships to maximize our impact on the movement.

Question: *What do you think the "real collaborative effort" between the US Mission Network and other world mission networks will look like?*

Response: *While the various mission networks around the world are all unique in their scope and ministry priorities, they all seem to hold to a central core that seeks to unite their efforts with other similar efforts around the world in the YMCA. Our common history and heritage draws us together to celebrate what God has done in the past and has created a deep desire within these various mission networks for God to “do it again” in the YMCA.*

Those of us who are now in leadership of the US Mission Network have a passion to connect with our brothers and sisters around the world and to find a way to be a source of blessing. As perhaps the most resourced group, we are looking for ways to use God’s favor on the United States work to impact the worldwide efforts to lift up the “C” in the YMCA. This would include our deep involvement in helping to plan the upcoming World Mission Network Conference in Chiang Mai, as well as an increasing connection between mission network leaders.

AN INTERVIEW OF LARRY WHITTLESEY...

As we move forward we sense this will include groups from the United States traveling to other places in the world to support and encourage other YMCA ministry leaders, the Y's they serve in, and their regional/national gatherings, such as UNIFY in Europe. While some of these trips may resemble a short term mission project, we sense we are in it for the long haul. It is our hope to build and solidify long term relationships with our counterparts and local Y's around the world as they focus on their own Christian mission opportunities.

It would seem apparent that this will call for a constant flow of information back and forth from the field, helping to keep the United States counterparts aware of what is going on and find ways for us to come alongside of our brothers and sisters in other countries.

In turn, we believe there would be a great deal of benefit in exposing our local YMCAs to the efforts of those in other countries that are finding ways to bring Christ back into their work. We would love to see representatives from various countries impact our own events in the United States by sharing about their efforts in other parts of the world. Their sacrifice, creativity, and commitment are truly an inspiration to many of those of us here.

I believe the US Mission Network and the various world mission networks can work together to help re-establish a culture of prayer and faith-based priorities to the larger Y movement. By reminding Y staff and members about our rich history, by working together to identify needs of the "Spirit" in people's lives, and by sharing the stories of those around the world are making an impact through such efforts, I believe we can create momentum that could call the movement to its faith-based roots. The US Mission Network plays a key role in that possibility because, for better or worse, the world mission networks look to us for leadership, despite the fact that many of their national movements have remained much closer to those original priorities than the YMCA in the United States has.

AN INTERVIEW OF LARRY WHITTLESEY...

Question: *As you look to the future, what is your greatest challenge?*

Response: *I think one of the biggest challenges to this spiritual renewal effort in the YMCA is how to fund such efforts. The reality is it takes time and money to do many of the things that help fuel these fires. Events, staffing, publications, websites, etc. are all needed to push any agenda forward, and the mission networks are no different.*

Our biggest challenge in the US Mission Network is how to fund this effort on a long-term sustainable basis. With no other revenue stream, we are totally dependent on personal and corporate gifts. The same is true of all of the other mission networks around the world. Their activities are paid for by individuals or a budget raised through giving campaigns.

While YMCAs will hire program directors, aquatic directors, childcare workers, administrative staff, etc., only a very small percentage of the Ys in the United States or anywhere else actually fund staff members to care for the “Spirit” part of the YMCA triangle. The spiritual needs of our constituents have gone from being the primary concern of the YMCA worldwide to an afterthought in many places. It would seem that if we are really going to make a long term difference in the Y culture, we will need to find a way to fund such efforts on a long term basis.

Question: *Any final thoughts?*

Response: *As the YMCA, we enjoy a rich history and heritage. The accomplishments of the organization are astounding. Across the world the YMCA is recognized as an innovative leader that has addressed countless needs in our society. The world is a better place because the YMCA has been a part of it the last 170+ years.*

AN INTERVIEW OF LARRY WHITTLESEY...

But the future will require us as a YMCA to reconsider our place in the larger society. Have we allowed our organization to be relegated to a social service agency or a health club? Have we moved away from the passion and priorities of our foundation? Are we doing lots of good things but neglecting the most important things?

My sense is the YMCA movement needs to take a breath and relearn its own history. Through all the changes of the decades of our existence we have morphed into a lot of different expressions. Perhaps it is time to take a step back and realign our movement with the original intent of those whom God led to start the YMCA.

Change is a natural course for any person or organization over time. It happens gradually, sometimes almost imperceptibly. But every once in a while we should all take time out and re-evaluate whether those changes are for the better or worse. Different isn't bad, but it may not be best. I believe if we, as an organization, would humbly seek God's direction for the future of the YMCA we just might find out that the original ideas George Williams believed in aren't too much different than what God would have us do today!

In closing....

For more information on the US Mission Network, see <https://usmissionnetwork.org>, or contact Larry Whittlesey at lwhittlesey@ymcacw.org.

For responses to the interview, contact Bob Willey at rwilley1019@gmail.com.

ANNOUNCEMENT FOR THE TENTH EDITION

**“YMCA AND SPORTS: performance, education and
peace”**

We welcome articles, essays, sharing experiences,
interviews and book/film reviews in English or in
Spanish.

Contact: gisele@fefiso.edu.br / massari@fefiso.edu.br

Deadline: June 2017

Publication date: July 2017