
A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

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Seminary students learn
in global classroom

By Beth McMahan

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The world became a classroom for seven students from the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond who spent the summer in hands-on missions projects.

Although they worked in diverse settings, their reflections had a common thread -- they learned by listening to the persons to whom they went to minister.

All students of the Richmond seminary are required to complete a "mission immersion" experience. This summer students worked in three locations -- Appalachia, Washington, D.C., and Zimbabwe.

In the Appalachian hills of eastern Kentucky, one team of students explored rural ministry in and out of the classroom through a program sponsored by the Appalachian Ministries Educational Resource Center.

Classes focused on the region's social context, music, industry and religion. Students also visited churches, farms and social-ministry centers in the area.

Gary Akin worked at Crank's Creek Survival Center, which helps with basic needs such as housing, food and clothing. He said getting to know the people who came for assistance was the most valuable part of the experience.

"They were very warm and giving, if you were willing not to be condescending to them," Akin said.

In Washington, Ted Fletcher worked with several ministries sponsored by the Church of the Savior, an ecumenical congregation in the inner city. Much of his time was spent at Lazarus House, a refurbished apartment building that provides housing and support for persons recovering from drug and alcohol abuse.

"The spirituality of recovering people just blew me away," said Fletcher. "They know God deeply because they need God so deeply. They are truly living out the transformation of the gospel."

"Someone from the Church of the Savior told me that you can't always see God in the big events of history. Instead, you see God doing a new thing in the small things, in the one life."

In Zimbabwe, three students likewise found significance in small things -- like balloons, harmonicas and a few words in the native language.

Small gifts like balloons and bubble gum opened the door for relationships. When Steve Fitzgerald found himself in a host's home without an interpreter, he gave each family member a harmonica from a supply of 35 he had brought, and the language barrier was broken. "We sat around and had a ball tooting those harmonicas for two hours!"

Bonnie Dixon recalled visiting a squatters' village and using the few words she had learned in the Shona language. One Zimbabwean woman was particularly surprised, Dixon reported. "She couldn't believe we were using her language."

Nationals also were amazed the visitors would drink their water, sleep in their homes, and ride in the back seat of cars instead of in front, where white people customarily sit.

Hosted by the Baptist Theological Seminary of Zimbabwe, the Richmond students were exposed to a cross-section of life and ministry in the African country.

Team members stayed in a variety of houses, from dirt-floored village huts to concrete block houses in townships. Often they were the first whites ever to stay overnight in the towns.

In each place, they said, they found the Zimbabweans gave generously out of the little they had. Hosts slept on floors so the visitors could have their beds.

"The sacrifices some of these folks make every day are something we have no concept of," Dixon said.

Fitzgerald met one Zimbabwe pastor who lived in a two-room house with his wife and six children. "They left their seven-room house because he felt God calling him to move to this township," Fitzgerald said. "He makes 6,000 Zimbabwe dollars a year -- about \$900 U.S."

By the end of the three weeks, the students found they were seeing the world through different eyes. Fitzgerald, who stayed on in Zimbabwe to attend a Baptist World Alliance meeting, said: "After living with nationals for three weeks, I had a hard time staying at the Sheraton (hotel) for the BWA, especially since my bill for a few nights was as much as some of them make in a year.

"The culture shock came not in going there, but in coming back to the U.S.," he said.

It was clear to the students that their presence also had an effect on the nationals.

"I tried to thank one of my hosts for his hospitality," said Dixon. "He said: 'You have loved my child as your own child. You held her and did not worry about her blackness rubbing off on you. You have loved my wife as your own sister. Your coming here and sharing our home has been the high point of our life.'"

-- Beth McMahon is director of public relations for the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

Richmond seminary
begins third year

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond opened its third year this fall with two new faculty members and its highest enrollment.

The enrollment of 121 students is a 41 percent increase over last fall's 86. Students come from 10 states and several foreign countries, including China, Denmark, Hungary and Myanmar.

The new faculty members are Samuel Balentine, professor of Old Testament, and Marilyn Christian Nelson, associate professor of Christian ministry.

Balentine, a graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Oxford University, taught Old Testament at Southeastern before coming to the Richmond school.

Nelson was director of Christian social ministries for the District of Columbia Baptist Convention and director of the Johanning Baptist Center in Washington. She is a graduate of Washington University and a doctoral candidate at Catholic University of America.

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Gardner-Webb adds
divinity degree

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. (ABP) -- The divinity school of Gardner-Webb University, now in its second semester of operation, has added the master of divinity to its degree offerings.

The divinity school opened last January, offering the master of arts in Christian ministry. It now has 45 students.

Gardner-Webb, a Baptist-affiliated school in Boiling Springs, N.C., is one of a handful of Baptist colleges to begin divinity programs in recent years.

The trend toward college-based ministry training has arisen since conservatives gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention's six seminaries during the last decade.

Supporters of Gardner-Webb's divinity school met Sept. 13 to commemorate the school's founding. Speakers included Robert Mullinax, executive director of the council on Christian higher education for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. The state convention supports the divinity school through student grants.

"We will support you in prayer and within the limits that our dollars will permit," Mullinax promised.

The master of divinity is the basic degree for students entering the pastorate. Gardner-Webb's degree features a mentor program that links

ministry students with area pastors for the length of their study, not just for a semester as is common in other schools.

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Romanians protest
woman's election

KISHINEV, Moldova (ABP) -- Romanian Baptists boycotted a recent European Baptist Federation meeting to protest the election of a woman as president of the federation.

Birgit Karlsson, an ordained minister in the Swedish Baptist Union, was installed as president during the Sept. 18-26 meeting of the 100-member council of the European Baptist Federation. She has served as general secretary of the Swedish union for 10 years.

A letter from Romanian Baptist leaders explained they consider the ordination of women as pastors to be "unbiblical." Romanian Baptists are considered the most conservative of the Baptist unions in Europe.

European Baptist leaders, who argued the role of president is "functional and not sacramental," had hoped to avoid the conflict. They noted the Romanians did not object to Karlsson's election to the post three years ago.

Both parties said they do not want the dispute to affect the relationship between Romanian Baptists and the EBF.

That relationship has endured other strains in the past. At last year's council meeting, the Romanians cast the only dissenting vote to a partnership agreement between the EBF and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which last year began sending missionaries to Europe.

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WMU to distribute
book for Fellowship

By Susan Doyle

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union has announced details of an agreement with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to distribute a customized edition of the book "Operation World."

"Operation World," a day-by-day prayer guide which focuses on the entire world, is written by Patrick Johnstone and published by Zondervan Publishing House. The volume offers detailed descriptions of each country and various people groups.

The Fellowship has arranged with Zondervan to print a customized version of the book which will describe the Fellowship and its one-year-old missions program.

WMU has agreed to distribute the book for the Fellowship. WMU will keep the revenue generated from the sales of the book to cover the costs of

order processing and distribution.

Promotion of the book will be handled by the Fellowship. WMU will not promote the book through any WMU materials.

The book is scheduled to be released before the end of September.

The agreement with the Fellowship falls within guidelines established by the WMU Executive Board last January. The board voted to allow WMU to consider requests to produce and handle missions materials for evangelical groups other than the SBC. But WMU is not permitted to provide any financial support for non-SBC groups.

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