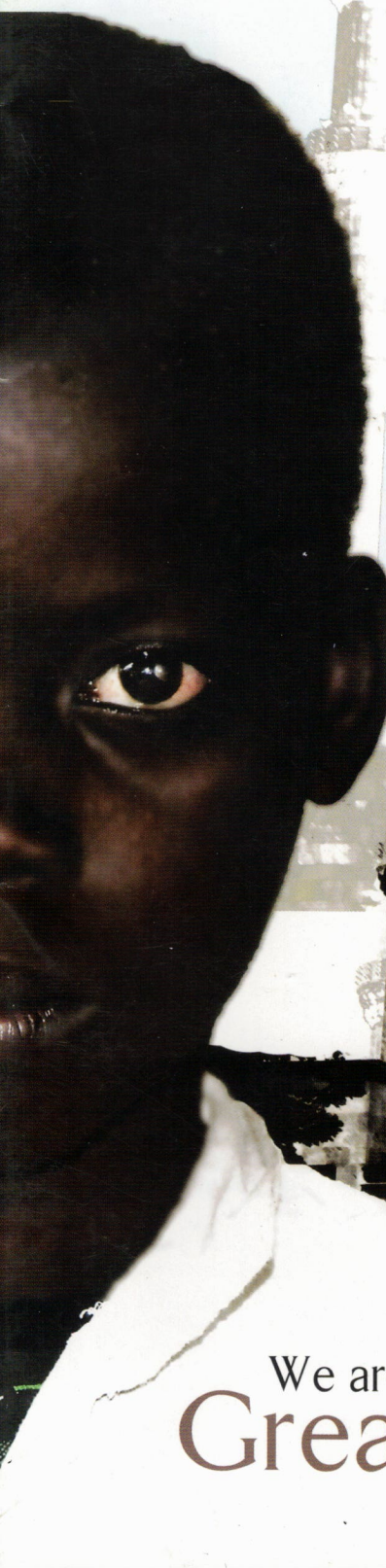


OUTLOOK

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We are a
Great Commission seminary



going
wherever He sends

“I love you, Lord; and I lift my voice.” A chorus of American voices drifted in the breeze across the Plateau State of Nigeria, their voices blending with those of their Nigerian brothers and sisters in Christ. Two languages intermingled in praise to the one Creator. This group of 19 students and three professors from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary traveled from Wake Forest, N.C., to encourage fellow

stories and photos by Joy Rancatore

believers in Nigeria in their walks with God and to teach them how to share the Good News with family and friends. They are part of a larger International Mission Board effort to emphasize the West Africa region in 2006 and 2007, because of dwindling missionary numbers and the ever-increasing spiritual need.

“West Africa contains the second largest number of unreached people groups of any region of the world—a total of over 1,600 distinct people groups, each with its own language and culture,” said Roger Haun, the IMB’s associate regional leader for West Africa. “Over 900 of these would be less than two percent evangelical Christian and about 350 would have no known evangelical witness of any kind among them. The year of focus was an attempt to present the needs of the region to Southern Baptists, enlist personnel and increase our prayer support.”

The students were a part of Southeastern’s never-ending effort to encourage and support the IMB while training Great Commission-minded students who will take the Gospel to the world. The students studied African Traditional Religion and Islam during the mornings and shared the Gospel, trained the Christians in the Baptist churches and assisted the Baptist missionaries in the villages and city during the afternoons and evenings.

Ed Pruitt, associate director of the Center for Great Commission Studies at Southeastern, said most trips Southeastern takes involve sowing, watering and harvesting; but this trip was primarily “field preparation.”

“If we don’t prepare the fields today then in 50 or 60 years, they won’t be harvesting,” Pruitt said.

This “field preparation” included training local Baptist congregations how to present the Creation to Christ story to their family, friends and Muslim acquaintances.

The Creation to Christ story, or C2C, presents the Bible from creation and the fall to Christ’s birth, death and resurrection, to the promise of his return one day. It is a way to share the Gospel in a story-telling form, perfect for a culture with an oral tradition.

According to Clint Bowman, a Southern Baptist missionary in Nigeria, the story is not so much an evangelistic tool, but more of a method to seek out the “man of peace,” the person on whom God is working, as referenced in Luke 10:6. That person will ask questions based on the story and seek out more information.

The story is also designed to share in sections in case the person telling it is interrupted for safety reasons and has to return later.

At the end of each training session, the stu-



Above: Ray Carr, a Southeastern Seminary student originally from St. Vincent, presented an envelope with more than \$780 to Appollos Handan, principal of the Jos Baptist Pastors’ School in Nigeria. The team of 19 students from Southeastern pooled their money in order to make this presentation for the completion of unfinished repair and upkeep projects.

Opposite: A child walks from student housing to the main campus at the Jos Baptist Pastors’ School in Nigeria. Students at the school, along with their families, are in constant danger of persecution by Muslims in the area. Many of the students come to the school from some of the many unreached people groups in the West African country. Upon graduation, most return to those groups to share the Gospel with their families and neighbors.

dents asked members of the congregation to commit to sharing the story with one lost friend, family member or neighbor. Many people in the area churches stood up and made that commitment.

“I knew that when they stood up, that was not a false profession, because some of them could lose their lives,” David Cooper, a recent Southeastern College at Wake Forest graduate, said.

“I have done church planting in the U.S., and I’ve done evangelism training in the U.S. And I’ve done them both out here, and I’ve found that Nigerians do tend to be more faithful to follow through with that commitment,” Bowman said. “The persecution issues that are here may be one of the reasons that Nigerian Baptists take their commitments more seriously than it seems people do in the U.S.”

This trip took place Dec. 31 through Jan. 14, but Pruitt said Southeastern plans to take teams back to West Africa the next two years in January. The next trip is already slated for Dec. 28, 2007-Jan. 15, 2008 in Nigeria.

Haun said the IMB has been discussing

with Southeastern the possibility of sending “2+2/2+3” students to West Africa in 2008. Southeastern’s Master of Divinity in International Church Planting degree is nicknamed the “2+2/2+3” program, because it allows students to do two or three years of field work in addition to their on-campus time.

“These [students] would serve three years in West Africa and, hopefully, return as career missionaries in our region. We’ve identified several key unreached people groups where we would like to place these students,” Haun said.

The Hausa Muslims are a perfect case-in-point of a large group of people who need missionaries. More than 30 million Hausa live in West Africa with 26 million of those in Nigeria. All of these men, women and children living in darkness have only one Southern Baptist missionary couple.

The Jos Baptist Pastors’ School is an example of the seriousness of commitments the Nigerians hold to Christ. The school has an enrollment of 255 students. In order to graduate, each student must plant or help plant a new church. Ninety-seven students graduated in May 2006.

While the American missionaries are relatively safe in Nigeria, the native Christians are not. These students' homes and families are targeted by Muslims. These men and women live in constant danger for living out their faith and obeying God.

The purpose of the pastors' school is "to train men and women for Christian ministry," according to the principal, Appollos Handan. He said they "believe very strongly that it is important to train both men and women."

The school offers a dual track for pastors' wives. Handan said it is important for women to be trained in order to minister to other women.

Some of the Southeastern students had the

opportunity to visit the school early in the trip and others returned toward the end to join the Nigerian students in a chapel service. The purpose of their return was to make a monetary presentation to be used for some of the school's unfinished building and repair projects.

The students on the trip pooled their money in order to present more than \$780 to the school for ongoing improvement projects and other needs.

"After we visited the school and saw the conditions under which the people had to study...and sleep, it made me realize how fortunate we are in the states," Ray Carr, a first-year seminary student, said. "I felt very proud of our students because not only did they give, but they gave a lot."

Following the presentation to Handan by Carr, a group of the women in the congregation came to the front of the chapel and danced in celebration. They sang in the Hausa language with jubilation as the smiles translated across languages when the words they were singing did not.

"I think [their response] said it all. It was overwhelming," Carr said. "I hope that this will not be the end of this."

Although the nature of the trip to Nigeria was different than that of many Southeastern trips, the students had the privilege of seeing four Nigerians come to faith in Christ. A woman and two young boys professed faith after watching The Jesus Film in the Hausa language. A for-

'til all have heard

When God has plans for an individual, or a whole family, He makes sure those plans become realities—even if it takes 12 years.

In 1993, Todd Black, who worked in the software industry and traveled all over the United States demonstrating software to corporations, sat in a pew listening to a woman share her experiences as a missionary. He knew then that God had put a burden on his heart for the lost.

"A missionary came to our church to speak, and after hearing her I knew God was speaking to my heart about following in missions," he said. "My wife quickly said 'No. If you answer the call to missions, God will send us to Africa.' Very funny now considering where we are located. But, I continued to pray and waited 12 years for God to change her heart and feel led to missions."

It was in 2004 on a volunteer mission trip to Nigeria where Margaret Black joined her husband in hearing God's call and surrendered her heart, life and family to wherever God would lead.

"After returning home from that trip we experienced what is said in West Africa, 'It's hard to shake the dust off your feet once you've been here,' " Todd Black said. "So we began to pray, and God provided us with an opportunity to come work with Him on the field here in Nigeria. We were open to wherever the Holy Spirit wanted us to go. We felt very strongly about coming back to Nigeria, and God seemed

to open every door. We went through the application process with the IMB (International Mission Board),—which took a year to complete—sold everything and drove to Richmond on Jan. 7, 2006, for our training."

Since March 2006, the Blacks and their two children—Rachel, 14, and Nathan, 11—have lived with their dog in the city of Jos, Nigeria, where they have the privilege of working among a diverse and traditional people.

They plan to complete their two and a half year term in the International Service Corps (ISC) through the IMB in June 2008. Black said they will return to the United States at that point in order for him to complete his Master of Divinity at Southeastern before returning to the field.

Black began course work online through Southeastern in the spring 2007 semester. The online options Southeastern offers have enabled him to begin working his way toward a degree now while he

is on a different continent.

"There are a couple reasons for choosing Southeastern," Black said. "First, my home church [First Baptist Church of Indian Trail, N.C.] has a long-time relationship with the seminary, and I had always heard good things about the programs from the church members that had gone there. Secondly, I realized they offered a good selection of classes online



Todd Black speaks with a student from Southeastern

merly Muslim man accepted Christ after hearing the Gospel from one of the students during a soccer match in a village.

“The number of opportunities to share the Gospel are greatly increased with the participation of the students,” Haun said. “The missionaries are encouraged by this, as are the local believers. In addition, hospitality toward strangers is an important value in almost all West African peoples. West Africans—believers and non-believers—are very honored that someone would come all the way from America to visit them. This provides an opening for sharing the Gospel with some who might not be receptive to a witness from a local believer or even a missionary who has lived a long time

in the area.”

Patti Huffman, hostess of the Baptist Guest House in Jos where the team stayed, was encouraged by the team’s spirit and passion for the mission field and the people of Nigeria.

“I think most people out here are excited that someone wants to come out and see it for themselves,” Huffman said. “We feel like the best way to touch lives is by getting people on the field, because we desperately need more people in West Africa. The way to show people the true need is to get them out here. We don’t try to sugar coat anything.”

Pruitt said he was impressed with the enthusiasm of the team members. He was encouraged that some would be called to career missions,

others to short-term and still others would return to their home churches revitalized and impassioned about missions.

“I hope that the Lord will work on some of [the students] to bring them back for career missions. They seem[ed] to really be having some great experiences. Not only do I want them to go home with the academics, but also I want them to go home with a piece of Africa in their hearts,” Pruitt said. “We’ve got some great students. We really do. By in large, they’re a cut above. Someday in eternity, there will be a whole lot of people there because our students are willing to give and go.”

and knew I would like to start my work while on the field. So far everyone has been very cooperative and has worked in conjunction with my contacts in the United States to make sure I receive all the materials I need to be successful with my online classes. My first class was hermeneutics in the spring of 2007. I enjoyed having the lectures on DVD so I could feel a part of the classroom setting even though I was remote. The quizzes and papers were a good reminder that it would have been easier taking them 20 years ago!”

He will complete two more classes before they return home and expects to finish his degree in 2012. At that point, the Blacks hope to return to the Nigerian people they have grown to love.

“The largest number of unreached people groups is in West Africa, and the majority of them are in Nigeria,” Black said. “While the engagement team is working on finding and engaging these groups, there is still the need for churches both locally and from the United States to adopt these people groups to share the Good News and see them come to Christ.”

The Blacks and the other missionaries in Jos spend most of the dry season going out into the bush and gathering information about villages and unengaged people groups in those areas. During the rainy season, they often cannot get out to those villages, so they spend that time planning strategies for planting churches, training leaders and setting up itineraries for mission teams which travel there from the United States.

One of those teams had quite an impact on a completely Muslim village. This team from Edwards Road Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., arrived in December 2006 split into two groups when they arrived in Jos. One set went with Black to research a new territory and give out seeker cassette tapes with a Gospel message and other literature in the native language.

“As we stopped in each village they were amazed to see that people from America had come to see them in Nigeria,” Black said. “We prayed for each village as we went along the dry dusty road. After we got back to our base village we began to talk and then pray for a particular village that is 100 percent Muslim. I later told my supervisors that this would be a strategic village in the work among this people group.”

Black said they decided after their visit to assign a student from

the Jos Baptist Pastor’s School to that village for the summer.

“As I took the student around the area and showed him the village in question I saw something that made my heart drop—a new mosque had been erected outside the chief’s house and stood as a sign that Islam was standing firm there,” Black said. “We sent out prayer requests for these people and the planting of a new church to all our prayer supporters, which number nearly 15,000. Through the power of a bold witness by the volunteer team and months of prayer from December through June, God planted a church in that village with 18 new believers in July 2007, and through the continued prayers there has been no persecution of those believers to date.”

In addition to mission teams from the United States, Black said they have been working through many of the local churches, urging them to send teams to surrounding villages.

As a result of one trip from Unity Baptist Church in Jos, 40 people came to accept Christ, and a church was started in a village which had once shown hostility toward missionaries.

Because Nigeria is filled with such a large number of unreached people, Black stressed the need for more missionaries to the West African country.

“The number of missionaries in Nigeria working through the IMB is not as large as it has been in the past,” he said. “A lot of people are fearful of coming to Nigeria due to things they read or hear about on the news. You realize it’s not so once you get here. I would say that there is a great need in Nigeria for people to come for as long as they can—short term, Journeymen, ISC or career missionaries would all be welcomed to come help turn back the darkness in this area of the world.”

Black remains upbeat and optimistic while pointing out the needs of the Nigerians. Like many missionaries around the globe, he signs his letters with the words, “‘til all have heard.”

“Although missionaries have been here for 150 years, there are still millions of people who have never heard the name of Jesus,” he said. “I know that one day, because it is written, we will see someone from every one of the unreached people groups in Nigeria around the throne of God. But the question is—how long is it going to take ‘til all have heard?”