

Literacy Missions Ministry and CWJC/CMJC combine to meet educational, relational, spiritual needs

*By Megan Young
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Leaders and volunteers from across Mississippi gathered for a training conference held by Literacy Missions Ministry and Christian Women's/Christian Men's Job Corps (CWJC/CMJC) from July 18-20 at Garaywa Camp and Conference Center in Clinton.

Though they are two separate entities, Literacy Missions Ministry and CWJC/CMJC share a common goal: to share Jesus through education and training.

The purpose of Literacy Missions Ministry is to train, equip, and partner with Southern Baptists to share Jesus by teaching English to internationals, helping students succeed in school, and assisting adults in improving their reading and writing skills. CWJC/CMJC, a compassion ministry of the national Woman's Missionary Union, equips women and men for life and employment in a Christian context.

The conference featured seminars hosted by Literacy Missions Ministry, including instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL), Tutoring Children and Youth (TCY), and Adult Reading and Writing (ARW). A certification course in ESL was also offered.

CWJC/CMJC seminars focused on strengthening job training sites across Mississippi, encouraging innovative thinking, and reviewing two books that will be required for site coordinator training.

'It was a calling'

Literacy Missions Ministry and CWJC/CMJC programs in Mississippi are largely run by volunteers who staff programs within their local churches or associations.

"I'm really encouraged by the folks who donate their time. Being part of a volunteer-run ministry, particularly a teaching ministry, is incredibly powerful because the people who want to participate have no other motivations," said Susan Russo, ESL seminar leader and Director of Missions and Belonging at Aspire Church in Jacksonville, Florida.

Most volunteers feel led by God to use their time and educational experience to serve others.

As a retired professor, state CWJC/CMJC leader Dr. Linda Donnell felt the ministry was a natural extension of the work she had dedicated her life to.

"I was called to it. It was a calling," Donnell said. "I knew I was very blessed to have a lot of people pour into my life growing up and even after. When I reached the point of retirement, I had more time and flexibility, and I felt the need to pour into others. When I heard about Christian Women's Job Corps, which was in its early stages, I was very active in WMU, so I knew about it. The minute I heard about it, I thought, 'Oh, God's calling me to that.'"

'We teach Jesus. We teach English. We teach love.'

Other volunteers are drawn to these ministries by circumstance and a desire to meet specific needs within their communities.

After witnessing a young Hispanic child translating for a parent at a pharmacy, Jay Smith, ESL volunteer and member of Indian Springs Church in Laurel, and his wife became increasingly aware of the growing Hispanic population around them. A subsequent government raid on a large industry in town

left families in this population devastated.

Brokenhearted, the Smiths decided to take action. They attended ESL training at First Church, Laurel, and started a program at their own church that has been operating for over a decade.

Referencing their hope to break down barriers within the community, Smith explained that it was simply “the need to see people” that motivated them to get involved. “We teach Jesus. We teach English. We teach love.”

‘A small part of something much bigger’

Conference leaders return year after year out of a desire to teach and encourage others in their educational ministry journey.

Rebecca Cooper, TCY seminar leader and children’s minister at Meadow Grove Church in Brandon, had a passion for reading and writing and a passion for children but didn’t know how God might combine those. Reflecting on her time as the former director of Reach One, an after-school ministry run by the Copiah Baptist Association, she saw how God prepared her and opened doors for her ministry. Though she felt at times that she didn’t know what she was doing, she relied on God to lead the way.

“The Lord’s like, ‘Hey, just trust me each step,’” Cooper said. “And so being able to equip people and to remind them He’s going to do the same thing for you that He’s already done for me. He’s already done it for countless other people in this type of ministry. So don’t be afraid. Just trust Him for each step. But also giving them the tools that we already have to equip and empower them for those types of ministries. That’s why it keeps me coming back. Just to realize that I have a small part of something much bigger is thrilling.

“And think about all the lives it’s going to impact and how

the Lord is going to use even the people that we're training to go out and reach even more of the state and different parts of the world for Him is really exciting. If meeting educational needs and relationship needs and spiritual needs all wrapped up in one ministry setting is a tangible way that we can share the love of Christ through our words and attitudes and actions, then why wouldn't we?"

'I saw that they cared'

The stories of individual lives impacted by Literacy Missions Ministry and CWJC/CMJC are what encourage volunteers to continue training and investing their time.

In a testimony given during lunch on July 19, Geraldine Jones, a current volunteer and 2007 graduate of the Pine Belt Christian Women's Job Corps, recounted how a personal history filled with family tragedy and drug addiction led her to a life of homelessness and despair.

After 14 treatment centers, three mental institutions, and a nine-month stay in prison, the last treatment center required Jones to attend a CWJC program. It was there that she encountered volunteers who not only wanted to teach her job and life skills but who also genuinely cared for her as a person.

"When I saw that they cared, well, who would care for someone like me? Who would sincerely want to be involved?" Jones asked. "They were not just giving me a fish but teaching me how to fish and how to maintain a worthwhile life.

"I had people who were hoping and praying that I would have a better life and a better opportunity. And that is why I'm here today – to let you know that what you're doing in this program is helping to change lives."

Literacy Missions Ministry and Christian Women's/Christian Men's Job Corps are supported through your gifts to the

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