

# Summer missionaries learn how to 'do much for Christ'

*By Lindsey Williams*

*Writing Specialist*

In 1947, the first summer missionary, a young woman from Blue Mountain Christian University, set out to serve in Hawaii. Seventy-seven years and 5,662 summer missionaries later, Baptist Student Union (BSU) students across Mississippi continue to answer God's call to the nations. Inspired by 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, the BSU Summer Missions theme is, "Called by His Name. Compelled by His Love."

"Our summer missionaries are going to be on six continents this year – everywhere except Antarctica: 20 countries, 14 states, and two US territories," said Jennie Taylor, the Collegiate Ministries Associate Director of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB), coordinator of the annual BSU Summer Missionary Learning Retreat, and former long-term missionary.

"I started calling this our Missionary Learning Retreat about 10 years ago. Most people would refer to it as orientation or training, but I like the idea of retreat. I had a pastor who used to say that we must retreat before we can advance. Sometimes we need to pull back, reflect, and consider important questions to help us get on the right path to move forward. All the students will receive more orientation when they get to their field, so here, we retreat so that we can advance."

## **Humility and teachability**

This school year, 129 BSU students answered the call to summer missions, and all attended the weekend retreat April 12 – 13. Summer missionary alumni returned to mentor the teams engaging

in the areas in which they previously served. Between the student missionaries, their assigned mentors, and facilitators of the retreat, 188 people gathered at Garaywa Camp & Conference Center.

“The purpose of the retreat is to provide the students with biblical information and practical tools,” Taylor explained, “so we kicked off with Don Dent (a former long-term missionary) sharing about the mission of Jesus, the *panta ta ethne* statements found throughout Matthew, for reaching the nations.

“So many of our students will write on their applications, ‘I want to do this and share the Gospel, but I’m a little bit hesitant. I’m not sure what to say. I have a hard time bridging to the Gospel.’ So we gave them three practical tools to use.”



Don Dent and Robert Fortenberry

Former IMB missionary Don Dent speaks during a Cross-cultural Panel at the Missionary Learning Retreat for students serving this summer. (Photo credit: Hope Joy Owens)

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“We tell our students that the two main qualities that are needed in order to serve are humility and teachability,” Taylor stated. “If you are humble and teachable, you’re going to serve well. If you go thinking you have all the answers,

that will not communicate love. Sometimes as a summer missionary, and certainly as a career missionary, we put this pressure on ourselves that we're supposed to know all the answers. We don't want to admit that we don't, but we can be so much more effective in humility."

Friday night, a Cross-Cultural Panel of former missionaries (Don and Anne Dent, Fortenberry, and Taylor) related their experiences and advice from long-term missions on the field, totaling 98 years of service between the four of them.

### **House churches**

Another way the retreat prepares the summer missionaries is with *house church*. Divided into 10 groups, and led primarily by former summer missionaries, the "house churches" studied Acts 2 in the veil of night, without electricity, and under the dim light of candles or battery-operated flashlights, similar to how real house churches often operate on the field. Prohibited to use their phones, the students brought physical Bibles and followed the instructions of their leaders – some told to remove their shoes before entering the "house" as is the custom in many Southeast Asian countries, others taught a particular greeting from the etiquette of a specific Hispanic region, and all told to follow their leaders' guidance in the particular "country" of their house church.

"The goal of house church is for it to be a worship experience outside of their comfort zone," Taylor described. "They sit on the floor; they don't have electricity. Think about what the early church was like. Think about the way a majority of Christians in our world gather for worship today, often under difficult circumstances. We also make this a participatory study, so that the students can realize, 'I can duplicate this. I can take a Scripture passage, prepare questions, and lead an interactive study like this.'"

Concluding the services with prayer for the nations, the

students divided into debriefing groups to relate their thoughts and the aspects which surprised them most. "This is the third year we have had house church services," said Taylor, "and many of the students say, 'I wish that we worshipped like that here,' or 'I could do that all the time.' And they begin to reflect on worship and ways we can be more engaging."

### **'Count the Cost'**

Inspired by the work ahead of them, the students listened to the testimonies of two former summer missionaries who chose to serve longer terms. Summer missions impacted both young missionaries and their hearts for the nations. Sarah Wright shared her testimony as a journeyman in the Philippines and Cody Smith\* shared his experience as a journeyman in Southeast Asia.

For further preparation, the students joined contextual breakouts specific to the mindsets/religions of their assignments: children's ministry, Islam, Post-Christian culture, Hinduism, Mormonism, Buddhism, Catholicism, and tribal beliefs. "We have such a short amount of time," said Taylor, "but these breakouts are a launching point for summer missionaries to begin thinking about the people they are going to engage. What do they think of the world? What do they think about God? How am I going to be effective in relating to them?"

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stKristen White leads students in an exercise called “Count  
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“It was like acting out the Parable of the Sower,” Taylor



explained. "One student is tasked with going as fast as possible throughout the room to physically tap as many as possible – a visible sign of touching them with the Gospel. Sometimes you need to touch people several times in order for the Gospel to take root, but then the adversary may come to confuse things and take it away, so you need to go back and touch them again. In one of the rounds, the student who had been tasked with tapping as many people as possible in the time allotted seemed hesitant about what to do, but then the other students started cheering him on, and he took off. It was a great picture of how we all need help and encouragement to reach people with the Gospel."

### **Adopt a summer missionary**

As the students prepare for mission amid academics, Taylor explained how MS Baptists can support them. "Right now, you can pray for the students who are trying to get visas into their countries. Some are still fundraising for their mission assignment.\*\* We're grateful for MS Baptists being a part of the process for these students, encouraging them and helping them financially. We also have an opportunity for churches to adopt a summer missionary, which does not require a financial responsibility, but our goal is for churches to intentionally pray for them and send them encouragement while they're on the field. Many churches and WMU groups will invite the students they have adopted to share about their experience after they get back."

"If you come back and your worldview is changed by the mission, that's a big win. So many of our students will go thinking, 'I'm going to share the Gospel and see many people come to Christ.' And they might, but they might not. So they learn, 'I need to be faithful to plant seeds and leave the results up to the Lord. I don't have any control over how people respond, but I must be faithful to share the Gospel.' Even those who come back and say, 'That was so hard,' will also say, 'It was the best summer of my life,' because you

learn the deepest truths in the hard situations outside your comfort zone, when you allow the Lord to teach you. That's our prayer, that the missionaries will get in tune with the Lord, and that the mission will translate into the students being more effective right here at home when they return, having more compassion to reach people on their campuses and in their communities."

In the closing of the retreat, Taylor challenged the students with this quote from Baptist missionary Ann Hasseltine Judson: "A little while and we are in eternity. Before we find ourselves there, let us do much for Christ."

For more information about BSU summer missions or collegiate ministries, contact Jennie Taylor at [jtaylor@mbcb.org](mailto:jtaylor@mbcb.org) or Collegiate Ministries Ministry Assistant, Hannah Mullins, at [hmullins@mbcb.org](mailto:hmullins@mbcb.org).

For more information on Adopting a Summer Missionary, visit [Adopt a Summer Missionary – Connect to Mississippi BSU](#).

*\*Missionaries serving in high-security regions assume aliases.*

*\*\*Each campus BSU raises money for the BSU State Missions Fund (a goal of \$120,000 this year). The fund is instrumental in providing scholarships for students serving internationally, and airfare and insurance for students serving in the US/Canada. Additionally, each campus BSU, families, friends, and church families help their students raise the funds necessary for international assignments.*