



Innocence and Experience



Robert Hunt, Director of
Global Theological Education

Recently I attended a day of lectures and workshops on mission sponsored by a large theology school in the mid-west. Several hundred students and teachers from around the world came to discuss the future of Christian mission, and the challenges that face pastors, congregations, and denominations in faithfully fulfilling God's call. Some of the discussions were rather surprising,

Perhaps most challenging was the often repeated message from church leaders outside of the U.S. They noted that while short-term mission groups and their leaders are well intentioned, often they did more harm than good. One leader from the Caribbean noted that youth work teams seemed more interested in building their own fellowship than in getting to know young people from their host church. "We want to be partners," he

said "not a tool you can use for your own purposes and then leave behind."

Another concern was the vast difference in material possessions. Groups that arrived in impoverished villages and worked while listening to their I-pods, flashing their digital cameras, or wearing designer work clothes seemed insensitive to the young people around them who could hardly afford shoes. What is commonplace in the U.S. can be major "bling" in other parts of the world. Sensitivity to local economic issues was also a concern. Not all communities welcome people who come two weeks and work for free when their own contractors and carpenters are unemployed.

Sometimes the problem is innocent ignorance. One group wanted to give a *baseball camp* in the Dominican Republic. That small country has enough players in the major leagues to suggest that Americans have little to teach them about how to play baseball!

But perhaps the biggest set of issues related to general cultural misunderstandings.

(Continued on page 2)

Bringing it Home from the 2008 Immersion Courses

In January and March of 2008 more than 35 Perkins students participated in immersion courses. These are their reports on what these experiences have meant.

From Bill Davis:

The trip to Mexico City was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. Through programs and individual efforts sponsored and supported by different protestant churches and Methodist Pastors the disenfranchised of Mexican society are being

cared for. However, they are caring for themselves as well. The greatest insight I have gained is that the greatest hospitality seems to come from those that appear to have the least. People in Mexico live in relationship; they give from their hearts and live their lives in the moment.

From Cliff Ritter:

The most important thing(s) I learned in Mexico is that the social, cultural and

(Continued on page 2)



Perkins South Africa Immersion 2008 - Leaning to listen to people's stories.

Innocence and Experience (continued)

Americans like to accomplish tasks, while in many countries it is equally important to build relationships. American men and women often treat each other with a familiarity that is shocking in cultures when persons of the opposite sex seldom relate to one another in public. American eating habits (particularly snacking, eating meals “on the run,” and drinking copious amounts of coffee and soft drinks) can be seen as both overindulgent and rude to people who expect the meals they serve will satisfy the appetite and food and drink should be savored along with companionship and conversation.

Cultural misunderstandings and conflicts may be unavoidable, but they can certainly be diminished through teaching and more importantly experience. Those who have lived in the presence of other cultures, whether within their own country or through travel realize that cultural differences are real and important in forming fruitful human relationships. Appropriate reading and teaching can prepare Christians for the cultures they will encounter in mission, and at the least prevent the worst missteps and misunderstandings. The GTE program goes further, giving students the experience of a different culture that prepares pastors-in-training with the foundation for ministry in a global context.

Bringing it Home 2008 (continued)

political landscape in Dallas, Texas looks significantly different when examined from the perspective of a foreign visitor in Mexico.

Immigration reigns as one of the most profound and troubling issues on both sides of the border, for radically different reasons. Small towns, villages, and cities are suffering under the burden of social and cultural problems exacerbated by a loss of working age men, young families, and educated workers. Those who leave respond not to a

call for prosperity, but from the warning sirens of grinding poverty and joblessness. They haven't escaped to some utopia, as we Americans might imagine. But, they have been forced to leave family, and culture, and a love for country, for the sake of meeting life's most basic need for food, medicine, and security.

In Mexico, I learned to stop begrudging my brothers and sisters their place in our shared culture as North Americans. I learned about the complexities of immigration and how people are impacted by the policies of both governments. I learned about human dignity, grace, and true hospitality.

From Heather Spencer:

My trip to Israel and the Palestinian Territories was more amazing and transformative than I ever imagined it would be. When I got to the Holy Land I met real people whose life stories mirror the stories we read about. Visiting the Christian holy sites was eye-opening, but what taught me the most about myself and God was meeting the people of the land. I wrote a 40-page journal about my trip and took approximately 1,200 pictures. This summer I plan to turn my recorded experience into a slide-show presentation full of historical, biblical, and socio-political facts from the Holy Land. I hope to be able to take my presentation around to various churches throughout the coming summer to educate American Christians about the situation in the Holy Land and about our need to help our fellow Christians in Palestine. An amazing trip! Truly amazing

2009

Immersion Opportunities

January Term

- **Monterrey Mexico and the Borderlands** - Understanding Mission and Ministry in the Latino/a Context, Dr. Hugo Magallanes (Associate Professor of Christianity and Cultures) (January 4 - 18, 2009)
- **Southern Spain** - Convivencia and Inquisition: Relationships between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, Dr. Jessica Boon (Assistant Professor of Church History) (January 2 - 17, 2009)
- **Hong Kong** - Text and Context: Reading the Bible in China and Taiwan. Dr. Sze-Kar Wan. (Professor of New Testament) (January 4 - 19, 2009)

Spring Break

- **Slovakia/Czech Republic** - Post-communist Christianity in the 21st century, Dr. Robert Hunt (Director of Global Theological Education) (March 7 - 15, 2009)

Summer

- **New Orleans** – Youth Learning and Working after Hurricane Katrina, Dr. Evelyn Parker (Associate Professor of Christian Education) (June 12 - 27, 2009 in Dallas and New Orleans)
- **Northern Ireland** – Christian Reconciliation in the Wake of Terrorism, Dr. Billy Abraham (Albert Cook Outler Professor of Wesley Studies) (July 5 - 18, 2009)
- **Buenos Aires, Argentina** – Another World is Possible, Dr. Joerg Rieger (Professor of Systematic Theology) (June 6 - 21, 2009)
- **Iona, Ireland and Scotland** - Exploring Celtic Spirituality and its Antecedents, Dr. Michael Hawn (Professor of Church Music) and Dr. Elaine Heath. (McCreless Assistant Professor of Evangelism) (May 17 - 29, 2009)

Exact dates may change depending on available flights. Costs will be announced before registration opens August 25th, 2008. Pre-registrations will be accepted up to August 25th. See smu.edu/globaltheology for details and forms.



Orthodox Christmas Mass at the Church of the Nativity, Jerusalem, 2008

Intercultural Immersion Experiences for Every Student

In Fall of 2008 the Global Theological Education Program will pass an important milestone. Funds from individual contributors, endowments, and the university will allow us for the first time to offer full travel stipends. From 2009 onward every Perkins Master of Divinity student will be able to participate in at least one intercultural immersion course before he or she graduates.

To continue this progress we now need to raise money for travel stipends for our other Master Degree students, as well as building up permanent endowments so that future Perkins' students have the opportunity for an immersion in a different culture. Already two generous families have established endowments for the GTE Program,. We want to thank Paul and Patti Smith, as well as the family of Wilma Hogg for their initiatives. The Smith and Hogg endowments are the first steps toward a fully endowed program.

If you would like to create or contribute to a named endowment, or have more information about endowments at Perkins School of Theology, please contact Dr. Robert Hunt, GTE Director, or Todd Rasberry, Director of Development.

Southern Methodist University will not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, or veteran status. SMU's commitment to equal opportunity includes nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Intercultural Immersions 2008



*Can we break down the walls
between us?
Perkins Immersion Groups in
2008: South Africa, Mexico,
Palestine/Israel, and El Salvador.*



SMU | PERKINS
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

***Global Theological Education:
Preparing pastors for local ministry
in a global context***

Southern Methodist University
PO Box 750133
Dallas, TX 75275-0133
USA

Phone: 214-768-1374
Fax: 214-768-1042
E-mail: globaltheology@smu.edu
perkins.smu.edu