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Liberty students follow the great commission to the Amazon

June 01, 2008 | Johnnie Moore

Belem, Brazil— Before the ink was dry on their spring semester exams, 16 Liberty University students majoring in religion, education, athletic training, nursing, pre-med, and communication joined three Liberty University Center for Global Ministries [CGM] staff members for two weeks of missions and adventure on the Amazon River.

Their base of operations was a two-story river barge equipped with a kitchen and space for 30 hammocks. They ate, slept, and used the docked boat as a medical clinic for villagers with the help of Word of Life in Belem, Brazil.

Word of Life is a CGM partner working among the 30,000 communities situated on the 4,250-mile-long Amazon River. The river contains one-fifth of the world's total river flow, and many of South America's Unreached People Groups live on its banks.

Olivia Reyes, a 19-year-old student from New York City, enjoyed roughing it on the river.

“Our eyes were opened in so many ways,” she said. “We didn’t need a warm shower or shampoo. Being on the Amazon taught us to live on what we had.”

Two to three times a day the boat would dock on the banks of an Amazon village so that the team of LU nursing students could hold medical clinics while other team members played with children and held impromptu church services.

The medical clinics were facilitated by 2006 Liberty Nursing Alumnus Kata McLaren. The new crop of students from her alma mater impressed her.

“I just tear up when I think about it. . . . Some of these villagers were very sick, yet even our girls ignored their own inhibitions, and told and showed them how much Christ loves them. It was so encouraging to be around another generation of Liberty students,” she said.

Many of the students were deeply moved through encounters with villagers. Sabrena Carter, who is studying for a master’s degree in communications, recalled a frail old man who arrived at the clinic with an incurable foot condition.

“The missionary told us there’s nothing we can do for him, but wash his feet and to pray for him,” she said. “In that moment I knew that this was all that I had to give to him, and that’s all the Lord required of me. This act showed this man Christ’s love, and I told him ‘I’m honored to wash your feet because Christ has washed my sins away.’”

In one village a dozen Brazilians accepted Christ as their savior, and in another a man stood anxiously outside of the church embarrassed to enter the building because he didn’t have a shirt to wear. Immediately this need prompted a student to give the man his own shirt.

One village had been closed to Christianity for 11 years until the Liberty team arrived. Their short visit ended with village leaders pleading for another team to return.

In all, Liberty students assisted 468 patients with everything from parasites to small cuts. They also pulled 141 infected teeth, building upon a dental ministry initiated by CGM director Don Fanning on a previous trip.

Liberty students put smiles on the faces of hundreds of children, prayed for the elderly, and prepared the way for Christian missionaries to spread the Gospel among the Amazon basin.

“It was awesome to see how meeting physical needs pointed these people to their spiritual needs,” said Chris Deitsch, a campus pastor who led the trip with Pastor David McKinney. “At one point we traveled 12 hours to a single village. These people couldn’t believe we loved them enough to come so far to clean their wounds. We didn’t just tell them the love of Christ, we demonstrated it.”

The CGM team will leave after holding an English Language retreat for more than 50 local business leaders. They will use American football, education, and medicine as a means to teach English, and English as a means to present the Gospel.

This missions excursion was funded by private donors and Liberty University’s Campus Church. Each year Liberty’s Center for Global Ministries facilitates dozens of missions campaigns on every inhabited continent, sending hundreds of students to the frontlines of the Great Commission. Next year students will have the opportunity to travel again to the Amazon or to one of 20 other nations.

The Rev. Johnnie Moore, campus pastor at Liberty University, visited the team in Brazil in May.

