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World of Change

October 01, 2009 | Johnnie Moore

Rhea Dunkelbarger, 22, had graduated just before boarding an intercontinental flight with more than a dozen of her Liberty University peers for a week of service in Nepal — a nation with an evangelical population somewhere under .9 percent.

After a few weeks, Dunkelbarger's team had served orphans and hosted children's programs, built a security wall around and painted the inside of a Bible college, and had even taught English to a community of monks. Along the way, the students were sharing the Gospel. Having moved from "student" to "alumnus" status only hours before leaving for Nepal, this was Dunkelbarger's last experience with Liberty University.

When asked if it was a good decision for her to immediately trade her cap and gown for missionary service, she didn't hesitate to respond: "It was the best decision I have made in my life."



LU students pose with villagers in Nepal during their missions trip

Her experience is typical of the students at Liberty University. In May, more than 140 students and 16 mission leaders departed for 22 nations to participate in LU-sponsored missions.

Long before it was popular to protest the atrocities in Darfur, or to pray for the ending of child exploitation, or to live a lifestyle consumed with helping to lift the developing nations from their malaise, Liberty University students were taking the Gospel on the back of tangible compassion to the ends of the Earth.

LU students have distributed more than 6,000 pieces of Christian literature to Muslim immigrants in France and facilitated medical clinics in Senegal and along the Amazon River. They have shared Christ as they hiked through the Himalayas and Andes Mountains, held Christian programs in Brazilian public schools and put brand-new shoes on orphans in India.

A BABY NAMED "JESUS" IN AFRICA

Angelica Atkins, 20, worked in a medical clinic in the West African nation of Senegal. The Senegal mission was a perfect fit for this Canadian pre-med major who took French in high school.

On the final day of assisting at the clinic, Atkins was able to help deliver a baby.

As the baby was being delivered, Atkins and her teammates held the woman's hand and prayed for the mother's strength, physically and spiritually.

Later, as evidence that their message went through clearly, the Liberty team learned that the new mother had chosen to name her child (the Islamic name for) Jesus.

Now, Atkins hopes to use her education to “alleviate suffering and reach people in tangible ways in service to God’s kingdom.” One day, she believes, “God has a place for me in medical missions sometime, somehow, somewhere.”

their techniques at a faster rate.

CHAMPIONS FOR CHRIST IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Recent LU graduate Rhea Dunkelbarger, 22, spent a week in Nepal participating in missions service

Even Liberty University’s men’s soccer team got in on the missionary action this summer.

Sixteen team members, along with Assistant Coach Dean Short, spent two weeks competing in a Middle Eastern nation populated almost entirely by Muslims. Between soccer matches the team distributed Bibles, prayed through different parts of their city, and presented the Gospel to their opponents over dinner.

Soccer itself became the team’s greatest tool for ministry. Liberty’s players proved to be as tenacious on the field as they were in their faith by soundly defeating two of the nation’s all-star teams and capturing the first-place prize in a national tournament.

Surprisingly, many dignitaries were present for the concluding match, including the nation’s Prime Minister. After their final victory, the team found itself in the presence of the Prime Minister of this Islamic nation to receive its award.

Chris Phillips signed up for the trip because he wanted to “use soccer as a platform to share the Gospel.” He never imagined that soccer alone would give him face time with the leader of a Muslim nation.

FOCUSING ON THE UNREACHED

The majority of the nations targeted by Liberty University's summer missions campaigns are considered "least reached."

One LU team travelled through four eastern European countries in a single day and were shocked to learn that there were fewer evangelical Christians in three of those countries combined than there will be students at Liberty this fall.

Jonathan Allen, who ministered with Light Ministries in northern Africa, was deeply affected by a personal visit to an unreached people group. One day his team attended a performance with 3,000 people. Soon he realized that the 16 team members were probably the only ones there who had ever heard the Gospel.

"It is a sobering experience to go from a majority to a minority. That was an experience I still have not been able to move past," said Allen. Now, he and his wife plan on going back to serve full time.

Kaitlin Sones, 19, who said her group treated 459 people and pulled around 40 teeth in medical clinics, had a similar experience in Brazil.

"It is difficult to return to normal, everyday life knowing this fact [that many people have not heard the Gospel], especially after meeting the people, and being able to put faces to numbers," she said.

THE GOSPEL TO EVERY NATION



LU students trek through the streets of Peru

In the last five years, over 70 missions campaigns have taken Liberty students to more than 45 nations. Each Christmas, spring and summer break, students leave campus to take the Gospel around the world.

Meanwhile, enrollment in Liberty University's missions classes has skyrocketed, with a 61 percent increase over the previous year.

Missions agencies around the world are taking notice. Three agencies have stationed full-time personnel in Lynchburg to recruit future missionaries while 56 missionary sending agencies travelled to campus last year for Missions Emphasis Week.

Atkins, the Canadian student who helped deliver a baby in Senegal, said it well, "[Missions] rips off cultural blinders and opens your eyes to a world of diversity and need. Your heart will be broken for what breaks God's heart."

Liberty University's missionary agenda is simple: do everything possible to give the Gospel to every person on planet Earth.