



Turning the Tide in Africa

Over 100 DBU Students, Faculty, and Staff Spend One Month Ministering in Swaziland

From May 24 through June 23, over 100 DBU students immersed themselves in the culture of Swaziland, Africa, traveling all over the country, teaching abstinence-based programs in the country's schools. The students' goal was to help "Turn the Tide" in a country where the AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa is devastating whole countries in a way not experienced since the Bubonic plague. In Swaziland alone, nearly half of the people between the ages of 25-29 have already contracted HIV. Public health officials observe that if drastic action is not taken immediately, countries like Swaziland may implode by 2010, ceasing to exist as we now know them.

Last October, these DBU students committed to going to Swaziland at the invitation of Bruce Wilkinson, who created the organization, Dream for Africa, in an effort to address the devastation that is occurring in the southern African nations. Sensing the Lord leading them, 111 students, faculty, staff, and administrators individually raised funds to pay their way to go and minister to this nation.

"With this incredible charge before us, university administration began planning and praying," explained Dr. J. Blair Blackburn, DBU executive vice president. "Throughout the fall and spring semesters, letters asking for prayer, financial support and encouragement were sent to many friends and families of the university and students. As the financial support poured in, we knew that God's hand would guide this mission."

Dr. Blackburn organized a leadership team for the trip: Jay Harley, director of spiritual life; John Adams, coordinator of auxiliary services; Nikki Walker, a former

Journeyman missionary to Swaziland; and Dr. Bob Garrett, professor of missiology. "We felt that these four people had expertise in areas that were needed for a trip of this magnitude," Blackburn shared.

Every morning for three weeks, the 30 teams of 10-14 people were sent out to schools all over the nation of Swaziland. Each team had 2-4 DBU students along with college students from around Swaziland and South Africa who had also committed to abstinence. "The teams were multi-ethnic and culturally diverse to generate a variety of teaching and creativity," said Nikki Walker. "The most important thing we wanted to show was unity among the nations. It was about empowering those who live there because they are the ones who really can make a difference in their country."

"The curriculum was very straightforward," explained Jacob Holt, a DBU junior. "On Mondays, we showed a special movie, *Beat the Drum*, to all the students. For the rest of the week, we used a workbook that talked about characters from the movie and encouraged discussion with the students about how values affect actions."

Beat the Drum depicts a young boy in a small village who has been orphaned by AIDS. While this may sound foreign to many people in the United States, this scenario is frighteningly all too common in Swaziland. "We used the movie as a platform to discuss the issues the students face on a regular basis in a non-threatening way," shared Lance Gardner, a DBU senior. "The Swazi people are the nicest people you may ever meet, but they don't discuss their problems out loud."

"They seem to think if they just don't talk about their problems, by ignoring them, they'll go away," said Holt.





"The reality is, they are slowly killing themselves off by not talking."

The students and DBU leadership knew the trip would be difficult, but nothing prepared them for the stories they would hear from the Swazi students. "I knew it would be a hard trip, but it was difficult in ways I wasn't expecting," explained Michelle Brackett, a DBU senior. "Hearing stories from young teenage girls tell about how they have been abused since a very young age by a teacher or family member was horrifying to me."

To support the students in their mission, DBU made preparations to have a different university vice president come each week of the trip. Dr. Blackburn was the first vice president to arrive, and DBU president Dr. Gary Cook came shortly after to visit the students and lend his support. The following week, Dr. Rick Gregory, vice president for university advancement, came, followed by Eric Bruntmyer, vice president for financial affairs, and Marvin Schoenecke, vice president for student affairs, closed out the trip. "It may have seemed like a small thing, but having a vice president there each week was a huge encouragement to the students," said Harley.

Brackett agreed. "I realized how lucky I am to have the administration we have at DBU," she explained. "I'm much more appreciative of what they do and how they care for us. Having someone from DBU's administration there was very calming to us. We knew they were there supporting us and praying for us every step of the way."

Each day at the schools, the teams were stretched more and more to be flexible, gracious and loving. "I

don't think our students struggled with cultural differences. It was the heavy issues the Swazi people encounter on a regular basis that challenged them," said John Adams. "I would venture to say most social workers in the U.S. may never hear or see some of the things our students saw. Swaziland, it seems to me, is a country that has literally hit 'rock bottom' in so many areas—socially, spiritually, economically, educationally and morally. And yet, our students addressed the concerns brought to them with grace, confidence, tact and strength that only comes from a total and complete dependence on the Holy Spirit."

"I was so proud to work with these students," shared Dr. Bob Garrett. "They were passionate about telling the Swazi youth that God wanted to bless them and give them hope for a long life. They were so clear in standing up for sexual abstinence and fidelity, and they did not blink at asking students to receive the Lord."

In the evenings, the teams met back at the camp and debriefed, going over the events of the day. After dinner they would spend several hours singing, praying and worshipping together. "Our team always prayed together first thing in the morning, and then I would spend time by myself in the evenings praying," said Holt. "This trip showed me how vital and necessary prayer is. I can't stop the AIDS pandemic, but I can pray. I can cry out to God on behalf of these people."

Marion Hill, director of career services at DBU, served as a team mentor on the trip, and she recalls being struck by the mistreatment of women and the lack of resources. "I certainly have a better appreciation for

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DBU Student Missionaries Help Turn the Tide in Africa



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being an American," she said. "We are very blessed here in the United States, and I think the students realize now that a lot of things aren't needed to be happy in life."

Several students returned to Dallas with confirmation of a call to full-time mission work, and others, like Brackett, received clarity on their role with missions. "This trip made me realize that while I may not be called to full-time missions, I want to be involved with other mission trips as opportunities arise," she shared.

For Jacob Holt, the trip confirmed his desire to serve as a missionary in a foreign country. "I have a huge burden for the people of South America, and I hope to some day serve as a missionary there," he said.

For Dr. Garrett, who himself served on the mission field for fifteen years in Argentina, this call to missions is a new and exciting trend among college students. "It used to be that people waited until they were in seminary before they accepted a call to the mission field, whether it was short- or long-term," Dr. Garrett explained. "Within the past few years, a call to missions has gone out to college students, and they are responding in droves. In the years to come, DBU plans to continue to foster this call among its students as well as work to instill a faith-oriented global perspective among the student body."



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