

THEOLOGY UPDATE



For Friends and Alumni of Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology
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McAfee Students Witness the Strength, Generosity of Bulgarian Christians

'A Profound and Moving Time'

by Jenny Butkus

When the 10 students in Dr. Ron Johnson's mission immersion class boarded a plane headed for the former communist country of Bulgaria in May, they were prepared to make a difference. They knew the Christians of Bulgaria were long persecuted and had been forced to run underground churches. Now free from the suppressive rule, the citizens of this economically depressed former Soviet country are struggling to build churches.

With plans to visit gypsy communities, orphanages and start-up churches in Sophia, Bulgaria, and the outlying villages, the students hoped to minister to the Bulgarians and give them a sense of hope. They weren't prepared for all they would learn from the people they were there to try to help.

After visiting Rome and Athens to see the historical sites of the early church, the students arrived in Sophia, Bulgaria. There they met up with McAfee alumnus Kristian Anguelov '01, a native Bulgarian who served as their translator, and French missionary Joel Chiron, a pastor of six churches in Sophia and outlying villages.

McAfee student Matt DuVall of Cordele said among his initial reactions to the country was amazement at the living conditions in the Gypsy communities. They lacked running water and sewage, and DuVall said he felt like it would be difficult for him as an American to offer the Bulgarian people hope.

However, he soon realized Christ was present among the Bulgarians. He met one man in his 80s who biked regularly to church down a dirt road. This was one example of the Bulgarians' strong commitment to their beliefs. "These people were willing to go to great lengths for their faith," DuVall said.

After the worship service led by DuVall and his fellow students, the same 80-year-old man took the students back to his house, climbed up a cherry tree and gave them bundles of cherries to thank them for worshipping with him.

This was just one example of the generosity of the people. Each evening the students worshiped with the natives of a different village, and each time the villagers would thank them

with store-bought cookies and drinks. This was a tremendous gesture of kindness by the Bulgarians because many of them were subsistence farmers struggling to grow enough food to feed their families.

"It was a profound and moving time. These people were scraping by for a living and some of them were literally in rags, but there they were giving us treats," said Beth DeLorme, a third-year student from Tucker. "When we left the villages in the evening, somebody was going to bed hungry. They gave from their staples."

DeLorme said the trip was a humbling experience. "I really felt like I was being

ministered to. I guess before the trip, knowing we were going to such an economically deprived

country, I had the arrogant thought that I would be the one giving. I wasn't prepared for the difference the Bulgarians made in me."

She noted she has worked at food shelters and volunteered for various Christian and charitable organizations, but when she has given, she has always given from her excess. The kind acts of the Bulgarian people made her wonder if she would be willing to give her staples. DeLorme said the trip taught her to see the villagers as people whom she could learn from rather than "a project."

McAfee student Max Stapleton said he too was amazed by the attitudes of the Bulgarian people.

Some of the areas they visited had unemployment rates as high as 90 percent, he pointed out. But the Bulgarians had immense spirit.

"People were living with little more than a roof and scarce provisions. Yet, they could manage to smile at our well-fed, well-dressed group. These people were living in the midst of their faith, and at times, I must admit, I had to question the strength of my own," said the Atlanta resident.

Stapleton said after visiting historical church sites, it was amazing to witness church history

in the making in Bulgaria. "Our Baptist brothers and sisters there were still seen and treated as outsiders. Many there see them as a cult. Because of the suppression of Christianity during Communist rule, the churches have little foundation to build on. In Bulgaria, this is an extremely pivotal time for Christians," he noted.

The students are committed to continuing to help the Bulgarian Christians they met during

their trip. In November, Kristian Anguelov and his wife will visit Atlanta, and several of the students have arranged for them to talk with area churches about the struggles of

Bulgarian Christians. The students have great hope that through the connections they have with various churches, Anguelov will meet people willing to support the struggling Christians in Bulgaria through either mission work or funds.

Dr. Ron Johnson, a professor at McAfee, said students return home from these mission immersion trips, such as the recent one to Bulgaria, changed.

"They experience Christianity in a new context. They get a sense of the struggles of people living in two-thirds world countries, and they gain new insight and direction," he said. "Often students come home from this trip with their whole seminary experience knitted together."

Next year's mission immersion trip is already planned for Belgium.



The members of the group after a church service with a grandmother and her grandson. Left to right, back row: Mark Ujah, Reeda Allen, Matt DuVall, Jody Anderson, Mark Basehore, Dr. Ron Johnson, Max Stapleton, Becky Brannon. Front Row: Joe McKee, the Bulgarians and Ginny Brewer-Boydston.



ABOVE: Kristian Anguelov '01, center, a Bulgarian native, served as a translator for the American students.



LEFT: McAfee students Jody Anderson (standing) and Matt DuVall helped paint the trim of a new church.



MERCER THEOLOGY UPDATE

Fall 2003

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Comments or questions should be
addressed to:

MERCER UNIVERSITY

Office of University Advancement
1400 Coleman Ave., Macon, GA 31207
(478) 301-2715 • (800) 837-2911
www.mercer.edu • http://theology.mercer.edu
3001 Mercer University Dr., Atlanta, GA 30341
(678) 547-6400 or (800) 837-2905

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From the Dean:

Teaching is a Theological Activity

God is remembered as a teacher in the Old Testament. The Psalmist exclaimed, “O God, from my youth you have taught me” (Ps 71:17), Job marveled, “See, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him?” (Job 36:22), and the prophet Isaiah promised, “All your children shall be taught by the Lord” (Isa 54:13). Let me develop four features of teaching as a theological activity.

1. It really does take a community. One of the functions of a church is to be a community of learning, a mentoring community. In *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* Sharon Parks lists the following features of a mentoring community: “a network of belonging” that reassures and encourages the development of inner-dependence, “big-enough questions” to prompt

conflict and stimulate the process of imagination and ongoing development, and “encounters with otherness” that raise transforming questions and open new ways of making meaning. Parks cites Douglas Steere’s insight: “God is always revising our boundaries outward” (*Dimensions of Prayer*, 1982). Access to images is important for the formation of worthy dreams. Parks discusses “images of truth: a world of suffering and wonder,” “images of transformation: hope for renewing the world,” “positive images of self,” “images of the other as both similar and unique,” and “images of interrelatedness and wholeness: institutions that work.” Finally, Parks emphasizes that mentoring communities are communities of imagination and practice, where humanizing practices are a way of life.

2. Teaching is about more than the subject matter. The role of the teacher includes the perpetuation of a tradition and the formation of character. Teachers are mentors, and their role includes the following critical elements:

A. Awakening — Parks notes that all human beings need to be seen or noticed, and you can learn a lot about a person’s pilgrimage by asking, “Who recognized you?” Amazed that Jesus called him “an Israelite in whom there is no guile,” Nathanael answered, “How do you know me?” Jesus responded, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree, before Philip called you” (John 1:48 NIV).



R. Alan Culpepper

‘Teachers can both affirm the gifts and abilities they see in students, and challenge students to see that they can indeed make a difference in the lives of others.’

B. Calling — All of us need to find our calling in life, that pursuit that is both personally fulfilling while contributing to the needs of others and the betterment of society. Teachers can both affirm the gifts and abilities they see in students, and challenge students to see that they can indeed make a difference in the lives of others. Jesus called disciples to be with him and to be sent out (Mark 3:14), and after they had been with him for a while he sent them out by two’s so that they could begin to practice the things he had taught them.

C. Encouraging — We all respond better to affirmation and encouragement than to other forms of motivation or discipline. Barnabas was remembered as the “son of encouragement” in the early church (Acts 4:36). He could not stop the famine in Judea, but he had a field that he gave so that the church could buy food. When others would not give Paul, the converted persecutor, a chance, Barnabas stood up for him. Later, when Paul himself refused to give John Mark a second chance, Barnabas stood by John

Mark, who according to tradition went on to write the first gospel. Barnabas did not become the great apostle to the Gentiles that Paul was, nor did he write a gospel, but who knows whether Paul or Mark would have achieved their greatness without him?

D. Modeling — The distinctive mark of Jesus’ teaching is that it was incarnational, that is he embodied, modeled, and lived out what he taught. He not only taught about God’s grace for all; he ate with the outcasts and stayed with a tax collector. He featured a “good Samaritan” in one of his parables, and he asked for a drink from a Samaritan woman’s jug.

3. Teaching is about helping students to write their future stories. Theologically, it is important that teaching is an exercise in hope. A teacher is engaged in shaping the future. We never know what influence we may have on our students, where they will go in life, or what great things they may do. But teaching arises out of the conviction that what we say and do can have a life-changing influence on our students. A teacher always believes that students can and will be more than they are now. Teaching is therefore oriented toward the future, toward providing the motivation, vision, incentive, habits, creativity, imagination, moral integrity, and resources to become something the student is not yet. Does this sound like the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1 — “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”?

4. Every student is important. Deeply rooted in Judaism and Christianity is the common commitment to the infinite value of the human soul, the belief that every person is a unique and beloved child of God. The story of John A. Broadus should be repeated as an example for every teacher. Broadus wrote a classic textbook on preaching, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1870), that is still in print over a century after its publication. The manuscript was a compilation of his lectures for his first preaching class, for which he had only one student — and he was blind.

Students Build Preaching Skills at Conference

By Sonal Patel

Two McAfee students shared their preaching skills with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) of Georgia at its worship service on Nov. 10 in Columbus.

LeAnn Gunter, a third-year student from Panama City, Fla., and **Andrew Smith**, a second-year student from Nashville, Tenn., were nominated by McAfee faculty to accept CBF of Georgia’s invitation for two McAfee students to preach at this year’s fall meeting.

“My professors have always been supportive of my calling and provided many opportunities for me and my fellow students to explore different gifts for ministry,” Gunter said.

She has followed her passion to preach since her high school days. She is grateful for her McAfee experience, and especially the many opportunities she has had to shape her preaching skills.

“I answered God’s call to ministry as a high school senior,” said Gunter. “My time at McAfee

has given me many chances to teach, serve and preach in the local congregations and in CBF-supportive churches throughout the states. Opportunities like this have allowed me to explore new callings and future avenues of ministry for me.”

Gunter looks forward to pursuing a career as a pastor when she completes her studies. Smith hopes for a career in pastoral ministry as well and appreciated the faculty nomination to preach at the CBF of Georgia meeting.

“I was touched when I heard that I was being asked to address the Georgia CBF meeting,” said Smith. “It was a vote of confidence regarding my call to ministry.”

Like Gunter, Smith answered his call to ministry in his senior year of high school. He hopes to



LeAnn Gunter

serve as a local church pastor, and continue to carry out his passion for preaching.

“I love preaching because it allows me to explore the ways in which the conceptual and experiential realms of religious life can support rather than oppose each other,” said Smith.

While CBF of Georgia and McAfee already have a strong relationship, the organization hopes it will continue to grow as it creates opportunities for seminary students.

“We feel it is important to hear the voices of those who are in the up-and-coming generation of ministers, and we want them to know that there is a place for them within the life of CBF,” said Devita Parnell ’01, associate coordinator for congregational life for CBF of Georgia.



Andrew Smith



Faculty Highlight

Meet Dr. Thomas B. Slater

Three things have been significant thus far in my life: (1) my family; (2) my call to the ministry and (3) my time studying in the United Kingdom.

My parents were staunch Christians who were active at all levels of church-life. I represented the fourth generation of Slaters in King's Hill A.M.E. Church in Magnolia, Ark. (I am now a C.M.E. minister.) Two of my great-grandfathers were among the founders of that congregation. King's Hill had about 60 members in my youth and was thoroughly populated with Chappels, Colvins, and Hunts, all my blood relatives. It provided an extended family for this only surviving child that nurtured and encouraged many in my generation. That nurturing has served me well in life.

My involvement in the church led to my going on a mission trip to Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago. This trip inspired me to enter the ordained ministry. I have never regretted that decision. Being an ordained minister is very much who I am and ministry is what I do, whether or not I am a pastor of a congregation. Ministry is not about place as much as it is about relating to people in meaningful ways. I once asked a Mormon campus minister how much his ministry was based upon his building, the most attractive



Dr. Thomas B. Slater takes a moment to discuss a point of theology with a student.

and best equipped at UT-El Paso at that time. I shall never forget his words: "We could do the same thing in a barn. It is the people that matter." Indeed.

I bring that same approach to my teaching. My area of concentration is the New Testament. My favorite books both professionally and *confessionally* are Matthew and Revelation. Scripture can elucidate both the murky and the

mundane. By elucidating the murky, I mean the Bible has a revelatory dimension that often clarifies life's deepest and most pressing questions. In so doing, it calls us to a decision to be with or against the One Who imparts this revelation. Moreover, the Bible also elucidates the mundane. Sibling rivalry in your home? Look at Jacob and Esau. Did your family want you to make truck-loads of money? Look at Matthew 12:46-50. Do you know someone struggling with answering the call to ministry? Tell her/him to read Jeremiah 1. Have you confused your vocation with a career? Read Matthew 18:1-5. I also point out these "mundane revelations" to my classes. In this way, I hope to demonstrate the relevance of Scripture for life today.

The third factor is my education in King's College London, one of the founding colleges of the University of London. I am proud to be an alumnus of King's. It is a great school. Moreover, I made friends literally from all over the world at King's and also Chelsea Methodist Church, my home church while there. My family considers the Brown-Stephensons of Battersea family. Indeed, the Bowie-Davieses of Chepstow are family! My time there gave me a deeper understanding of the word "tolerance" and much more sympathy for international students.

Connie Campbell Shares Knowledge of Children

By Jenny Butkus

Connie Campbell, a 1999 graduate of Mercer's McAfee School of Theology, understands children. As Minister to Families with Children at First Baptist Chattanooga in Tennessee, she knows how to effectively communicate with youngsters and how to get them excited about God's Word.



In September, she shared her knowledge about children with ministers from across the country at the annual Preaching Consultation, sponsored by McAfee and the Center for Baptist Studies, at St. Simons Island. The former elementary school teacher presented a paper about how to preach to and preach for children.

In her presentation, she told ministers to think not only about children when writing the traditional children's sermon, but also about preaching to children when writing adult sermons.

"By considering children when writing sermons, you review the text in a fresh way. Thinking of children while writing also helps you to simplify the language so all can understand," she said.

Campbell also gave tips on ways to make children feel more like a part of the church. During her workshop session, she recommended the ministers sit with the children and get on their level rather than stand.

In her two-and-a-half years as minister to families with children at First Baptist Chattanooga, Campbell has initiated many new concepts to the ministry. Borrowing from a concept one of her

'Children bring an honesty to their faith. ... They can help you experience your faith all over again.'

peers used in the children's program, Campbell introduced a rotational model for religious education at First Baptist Chattanooga.

Along with other church staff and members, she transformed the kindergarten through fifth grade Sunday school classrooms into different stations based on the various ways students learn. One is a computer room; another is for art. The rooms are also used for science, music and cooking. The students rotate from classroom to classroom throughout the unit of study, so they get to learn in various formats.

The program has been a great success, and Campbell is currently working with church members to renovate their preschool classrooms. They will reflect a Creation theme. Campbell said she enjoys working at Chattanooga First Baptist because the church community comes together for projects like this.

"It's nice that the children are valued," she said. "Children bring an honesty to their faith. Children help us to be less cynical. They can help you re-experience your faith all over again."

Another project Campbell has initiated is a "lunch bunch" program in which she eats lunch with students at their schools. She began the "lunch bunch" program to let children know that she cares about their everyday lives and that she's not only concerned about them when she sees them at church on Sundays.

And she's been able to share what she learned at McAfee with the church children, too. Using

information from her Baptist heritage class, she held a Baptist History Day during which the teachers taught about Baptist heroines and heroes.

Campbell said her education at McAfee gave her the fuel she needed to introduce innovative concepts like this in the church. "My time there opened my eyes to what all can happen in a local church," she said.

Although she has been out of theology school for four years, she said supportive professors have continued to help her along the way. Dr. Loyd Allen at McAfee has remained in touch with Campbell. Her former professor said she's the best minister to children and parents he knows.

"Connie Campbell understands the meaning of childlike faith as well as anyone I know. Not childish faith, but the wise, uncomplicated joy in the presence of God, God's people and God's creation that is characteristic of mature Christians," he said. "She understands this because she knows children, and they know she understands."

McAfee Reaches Record Enrollment

McAfee School of Theology reached its highest enrollment with 201 students attending classes during fall 2003.

"While this student body represents the largest number ever enrolled, I am frankly more excited about the caliber of student we continue to attract," said Dock Hollingsworth, director of Admissions for McAfee. "The diversity of their gifts and the size of their commitment continue to inspire me to be hopeful for the church."

There are several areas of diversity within the enrollment. Some 16 states and 9 countries are represented in the student body, with more than 62 percent of the students calling Georgia their home. Other countries represented include Brazil, Canada, China, England, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Liberia and Nigeria.

Several denominations are also represented. While more than 81 percent of the students are Baptist, there are also students who are AME, Assembly of God, Christian Church, Church of Christ, Church of God, Disciples of Christ, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic.

Mark Your Calendar

■ Jesse Mercer Plaza Dedication

In 1996, Teena and Don Haugen of Marietta were commissioned to sculpt a life-size figure of the University's founder, Jesse Mercer, for a new plaza on the Macon campus' historic quad. Earlier this year, the Haugens were commissioned to reproduce the Jesse Mercer sculpture for a new plaza on the quad of the Cecil B. Day Graduate and Professional Campus in Atlanta. A gift to the University from **James and Carolyn McAfee** in honor of Mr. McAfee's mother, Frances Zoe Hilliard McAfee, the new artwork and plaza, which are adjacent to the McAfee School of Theology, will be dedicated at 11:30 a.m. on Nov. 21, 2003. Students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends are invited to attend the ceremony.

For more information, contact Sharon Lim at (678) 547-6425.

■ Self Preaching Lectures

Dr. William Hull, University Professor and former provost of Samford University, will be the featured speaker at the 2004 William L. Self Preaching Lectures, March 8-10. The program will be held in Day Hall on Mercer's Cecil B. Day Graduate and Professional Campus in Atlanta.

A noted author, lecturer and educator, Hull is the 1999 recipient of the Charles D. Johnson Outstanding Educator Award presented by the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools. He served as Samford provost and University professor from 1987 to 1996, when he retired from his position as chief academic officer to teach full-time. From 1954 to 1975, he was instructor, professor, dean and provost at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky. Between 1975 and 1987, he was pastor at First Baptist Church, Shreveport, La.

A graduate of Samford and Southern Seminary, Hull is the author of several books on theology and numerous chapters in other books as well as articles in scholarly and denominational publications.

For registration information on the William L. Self Preaching Lectures, call (678) 547-6470 or toll-free (888) 471-9922.



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Mission Immersion: Bulgaria



Students from Dr. Ronald Johnson's Mission Immersion Class spent nearly two weeks in Rome, Athens, Paris and Bulgaria in May. During their stay, they visited historical sites of the early church and worshiped with Bulgarians struggling to start churches in the formerly communist country. Above, Dr. Johnson, center, and McAfee student Joe McKee speak with an Athenian priest.

Share Your Latest News!

Alumni Services would like to keep your classmates up to date on your latest news. If you've recently moved or are planning to relocate, please send in this form so we can keep our records current. We also want to know if you have recently married, had a baby, received a promotion, retired or accomplished something else noteworthy.

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