

THINKING GLOBALLY

Union makes new connections around the world

President David S. Dockery's book *Renewing Minds* charts the course for much of Union University's recent journey as an academic institution. Among the chapter titles in the book are calls to love God with our minds, shape a Christian worldview, establish a grace-filled community and reclaim the Christian intellectual tradition.

The final chapter is "thinking globally about the future." It is a worthy goal, but something Union has yet to fully implement.

But Union faculty and staff in recent months have taken part in global opportunities on new levels of significance. The connections they have established show great promise as foundations are laid for thinking and acting globally.

David S. Dockery/Singapore

An April trip to lecture multiple times in Singapore left Dockery "physically exhausted, spiritually exhilarated" and hopeful about a future partnership between the university and

Singapore Baptists.

"If Union University is going to be involved – as I'm committed for us to be – in being a Great Commission university, to be a part of a Great Commission resurgence in Southern Baptist life, I pray Singapore is our partner to help make it happen," Dockery said.

Dockery lectured at the Baptist Theological Seminary, which is celebrating its 21st anniversary. A leader at the seminary who issued the invitation had heard Dockery's presentation at the 2007 Baptist Identity Conference and read his book, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal*.

Dockery lectured four times at the seminary on such topics as Baptist history, identity and beliefs. He gave two



public presentations at International Baptist Church for the Singapore Baptist Convention on why Baptists are different from other Christians and what Baptists have in common with other Christians.

"The Lord blessed every session," Dockery said. "The receptivity to my talks was terrific. I think the opportunity to encourage missionaries, to visit with pastors, and to help strengthen the work of the convention were all things that were spiritually energizing for me."

Located on the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia, Singapore is an island city-state of 5.6 million people. Dockery said the city is expected to grow to 7 million inhabitants over the next 10 years.

"It's a very pluralistic, diverse population," Dockery said. "Within all that diversity, different than any other place in Asia, 95 percent of the people speak English. I didn't need a translator for anything."

The Baptist convention in Singapore consists of 36 fairly strong churches, with about 12,000 members. The convention has reached a state of health, and "they are thinking strategically how to be united, cooperative, Great Commission people," Dockery said.

Dockery envisions a partnership that could help equip the Baptists in Singapore to do their part in reaching the nations with the gospel. The city is strategically located, with Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Tokyo, Australia, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, India and the Philippines all within just a few hours of travel time.

"Singapore is the ideal place for us to think about," Dockery said. "I'm hopeful that we can find ways to be a strategic partner with Singapore Baptists and the Baptist Theological Seminary there for years to come."

Carla Sanderson/Iraq

University Provost Carla Sanderson spent four days in Iraq in January, sharing her expertise with academic leaders who want a more democratic form of higher education in their country.

The invitation to join this delegation of leaders in education came as part of a U.S. Agency for International Development grant with the U.S. Department of State. Sanderson has worked as a commissioner for the Southern Association of Colleges



and Schools, an entity of the U.S. Department of Education.

The four-day workshop was held at the Cultural and Social Center of Salahaddin University in the city of Erbil, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world.

According to Sanderson, students in Iraqi universities have no choice in their courses of study. They take aptitude tests that determine which fields are best for them. For example, those who score highest on the tests must study medicine.

She said students therefore have little motivation to perform well academically. In addition, ongoing wars over the years have greatly disrupted the nation's educational growth.

But Sanderson says she left Iraq encouraged by the progress the group made and hopeful for the future of education there if war can be averted.

"I leave recognizing that they are at a very fine starting point for reform, and hopeful that education can be the vehicle they need to turn things around as a nation," Sanderson said.

Michael Penny/Nigeria

Professor of Music Michael Penny spent three weeks during winter term in the Nigerian city of Ogbomoso, where he taught at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary.

Penny taught classes in worship, conducting, English diction and applied voice.

Penny sees opportunity in Nigeria, which has the fourth largest Baptist convention in the world. Much of that strength relates to work Southern Baptists have been doing in the country for many years.

Penny says this part of Africa could one day be the center of the Christian world.

"Our hope is that Union can develop a permanent relationship with the Nigerian Seminary," Penny said.

Justin Barnard/Iran

Associate Professor of Philosophy Justin Barnard spent a week in Iran as part of an academic exchange between Christian and Muslim philosophers on the topic of religious epistemology.

The trip involved scholars from Union and five other universities and was jointly sponsored by Christian philosophers from the United States and by several universities and institutes in Iran.

Barnard and an Iranian philosopher spearheaded the event. Much of the initial communication between the two was done via e-mail.

"The goal was to get Christian and Muslim professional academic philosophers together in a single setting where they could host a symposium and have dialogue with a goal of mutual understanding," Barnard said.

Religious epistemology considers ways of coming to know that God exists. It also involves an examination of the circumstances in which people are justified in holding their religious beliefs, and considerations of what constitutes religious knowledge.



"When we set up the conference, we recruited people on the basis of their expertise in this area," Barnard said. Each participant presented a paper relevant to the larger topic.

After returning from Iran, Barnard said he had a better sense of which schools of thought have the biggest influence in that region, and the types of discussions that are most popular.

"The biggest benefit for me was better understanding of what the reality of life is like there, not only for ordinary Iranian citizens, but for the academic culture more broadly," Barnard said. "Iran has an incredibly rich intellectual tradition. It's also very clear that they have a vibrant set of learning communities." 卐