



# Mission Alabama

## November 2009

### COVINGTON BAPTIST ASSOCIATION PROVIDES SCHOLARSHIPS FOR MISSION TRIPS

*By Sammie Jo Barstow, Freelance Writer*

"I knew there was no way I could afford a trip like that." That was Judy Sirmon's first thought when she found out Alabama Woman's Missionary Union was planning a mission trip to China last year. As Associational WMU Director, Judy has a passion for missions, and this was the kind of trip she had dreamed about. Although she thought the trip was impossible, a few months later, she was on a plane headed toward China.

Judy is one of many people in Covington Baptist Association who have participated in short-term mission trips with the assistance of the Missions Scholarship Fund administered by the association. So far in 2009, the scholarship fund has awarded \$17,900, primarily to first-time mission trip participants, including individuals as well as families.

In 2004, the association had allocated some money for an On Mission celebration five years in the future. According to Larry Cummings, Director of Missions, "We were seeing that people in the association were especially interested in participating in the partnership the Alabama State Board of Missions had established with Venezuela, so we started using the interest on that money to fund some scholarships for mission trips."

Since then, scholarships have been funded through contributions from the 54 churches in the association either by an annual designated offering or by donating a budgeted amount each month. Individuals also contribute to the fund.

The scholarship fund is maintained by the association with oversight from the Mission Scholarship Committee. Awards up to 50 percent of the cost of the trip are available to persons who are members of Southern Baptist churches in Covington Baptist Association, but there are other criteria, also.

"We have an application process," said Cummings. "They must fill out an application, including their written personal testimony and a letter of endorsement from their pastor. Then the trip must be a project that's sponsored or endorsed by the association, one of our member churches, the Alabama Baptist State Convention or a Southern Baptist entity." Applicants must also meet the requirements of the cooperating agencies, and they must submit a written report of their experience within 14 days of returning from the trip. Additionally, they must be available to speak about their experience with various groups in the association, upon request.

First-time mission trip participants get first priority for the scholarship funds, especially college students and graduating high school seniors. Pastors who have never taken a mission trip also receive priority status for funding. After that, if funding is available, repeat mission trip

participants may also receive funds at varying levels, perhaps less than the 50 percent awarded to first-time participants.

According to Barry Wilkinson, pastor of Hopewell Baptist Church in Andalusia, funding by the scholarship program has made it possible for many of his church members to participate. "It's always a life-changing experience for them. They see that God is able to use them to minister to people that are much different from them and in situations that are uncomfortable, so it helps them experience God in a unique way. When they come home and relate their experiences, our church family is encouraged to look for opportunities to be on mission with God and to do more things for Him here locally, as well."

Cummings believes the work of the scholarship fund reaches into the future in many ways. "We strongly feel that God may use the mission opportunities for these high school seniors and college students to be a part of the calling process in their lives for career missions or any other service."

Scott Ferguson, pastor of Westview Baptist Church in Opp, agrees. He says several young people in his church are considering whether God may be calling them to career missions and one young man from their church is currently a seminary student. "He benefited from the scholarship very early in its existence, then served as a Journeyman in one of the restricted countries and is now preparing for full-time missions."

Although the call to career missions is not the result for most mission trip participants, Cummings realizes that a missions experience also affects those who return to serve in their churches. "We believe that even those young people or adults who are not called to career missions, just by their involvement and having contact with our missionaries and missions work, will be strong supporters of the Cooperative Program, Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong offerings and other missions work. We think the long-term effects will be that we're helping build strong missions leaders for our churches in the future."

Cummings will gladly share more information about the application process, funding or any other aspects of the mission scholarship fund with church or associational leaders. Contact Larry Cummings at 334-222-3009 or email: [Larryc@CovingtonBaptist.org](mailto:Larryc@CovingtonBaptist.org).

You can be involved in this ministry through prayer.

- Pray for the Missions Scholarship fund to grow and expand.
- Pray for Covington Association's partnership with Ribne Oblast, Ukraine and a mission team going to work with them in the spring.
- Pray for the churches of Covington Association to develop a Kingdom vision to see the many people around the world without the Gospel.
- Pray that Alabama Baptists will rise to the challenge of the Great Commission.
- Pray for churches to grow in their Cooperative Program participation.