

Missionary calls teens to 'fall in love with Jesus'_81103

October 10, 2003

Posted: 8/8/03

Missionary calls teens to 'fall in love with Jesus'

By Erin Curry

Baptist Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)-Greg Benno, an International Mission Board worker in southern Africa, encouraged 6,500 Acteens to go to the nations, give money for missions or pray for unreached people out of a love for God.

"We hope you're having a great time here, but our message more than anything is fall in love with Jesus," Benno said.

The teenage girls in grades seven through 12 gathered in Nashville, Tenn., for the National Acteens Convention, with the theme of SyncroNations.

Before Benno spoke, a group of male vocalists from Zambia gave the teens a slice of African culture. "You've noticed that there's a lot of life in Africa-the way that we pray, the way that we sing. But on this global tour, I want to show you that there's also a lot of death in Africa, especially in southern Africa," Benno said.

In Zimbabwe, one out of three people are infected with the HIV virus, and at a typical high school, half the students have lost a mother or a father to HIV, Benno explained. The average life expectancy for a 15-year-old in

Zimbabwe is 32 years.

Benno went to Zimbabwe as a missionary Journeyman wondering what a boy like him knew about Africa.

God told him, "You don't have to do anything other than just be in love with me and walk with me and watch me do amazing things before your eyes," he said. "That's what he always said to people in the Scriptures, 'I will do it through you.'"

The greatest need people in southern Africa have is to know Jesus and understand God's commandments, Benno said.

Lisa Sproull, an IMB worker in Mali, described how God is working even through language barriers in other countries. She told about a pastor in Mali who was prepared to preach but needed an interpreter. The one who was scheduled could not come, and people were eager to hear a word from the man if only they could understand in their language. Someone ended up bringing a man in off the street to translate the pastor's message, but there was one problem: He was Muslim.

The Muslim man knew the language, but his vocabulary did not include Christian words, Sproull explained. He was concerned he wouldn't be able to translate properly, but they asked him to try. During the course of the pastor's sermon, the Muslim man laid out Scriptures for the people as he translated. Now, the man is searching the Bible to see for himself if he believes it.

A teenage girl from Africa then shared prayer requests. She asked that the Acteans pray for peace in war-torn countries; for a Christian witness among unbelievers, idol worshippers and Muslims; and that God would give the countries God-fearing leaders who love the people and have their interests at heart.

Vicky Smith, an IMB worker in Jordan for more than 15 years, told the teens God has put a love in her heart for the people of Jordan, for their language and for their culture. She said Islam is darkness, and she has a love to see the light of Jesus spread in that country.

Islam is “a religion of good works, good deeds-human attempts to draw themselves close to God,” she said.

Ninety-nine percent of the people in Jordan are Muslim, Smith said, explaining that parts of the country are very dark and oppressive while other parts are just “normal.” She emphasized Arab Muslims in general are not like the stereotypes that have emerged from recent world events.

“These people live in darkness, and they need to know the light,” Smith told the girls. “They need to know the freedom that Jesus brings, and they need to know that they are special and God loves them.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.