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## **SARS outbreak knocks out summer missions plans**

**By Kambry Bickings**

*Staff Writer*

The SARS outbreak in Southeast Asia knocked out plans for mission work by several Texas mission groups this summer.

The SARS epidemic, also known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, has run a vicious course throughout Asia since February, directly affecting 8,295 people and killing 750 people from 28 countries.

Because of precautions prescribed by health boards and government departments, some Texas mission groups have cancelled plans to travel in Southeast Asia this summer.

Texas Baptist Student Missions, for example, has rerouted and rescheduled trips due to the SARS outbreak. The Texas Baptist student missions ministry originally scheduled five trips in the region this summer. Two of the five trips have been rescheduled for near Christmastime, and three have been rerouted the other locations.

One group has been reassigned to Thailand, working among teenage and college-age student monks.

The second group was rerouted to work with a church starter in Vancouver,

Canada. Forty-nine percent of the Vancouver population is Asian immigrants; therefore, the group remains on its original path to reach Asians during their 10-week stay. The group hopes to train immigrants to take the Christian faith back to their home countries.

The third summer group is serving in Berlin at a refugee center for southeastern Asians.

Brenda Sanders, student missions consultant for the Baptist General Convention of Texas Center for Collegiate Ministries, has received e-mails from both the Berlin and Vancouver groups. All the student volunteers are excited about the work there, she reported.

“The goal was not to stop any of the trips,” Sanders said. “We now see the Lord's new strategy for our Texas student missionaries this summer-reaching the same people groups in a different location. The Lord's purpose continues.”

The SARS epidemic in Southeast Asia also impacted the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's annual program to send teachers to China. The educational program was cancelled this year due to the SARS epidemic.

Normally, about 80 CBF volunteers spend a month in various cities of southeast Asia teaching English in colleges and universities. They are allowed to develop relationships with students and faculty and discuss their faith with non-believers.

CBF's program is coordinated with the Amity Foundation, a non-governmental Chinese-Christian organization that partners with Chinese professionals who have a vision for meeting the needs of disadvantaged members of Chinese society.

Despite this year's cancellation, next year's trips are being planned as usual, said Gary Baldrige, CBF's global missions co-coordinator.

Texas churches planning to travel in Southeast Asia have made a variety of changes in plans due to SARS.

Champion Forest Baptist Church in Houston had a trip to Asia scheduled through the Southern Baptist Convention International Mission Board to teach English, but it was cancelled due to SARS.

Brazos Meadows Baptist Church in Hewitt also had a mission group headed to northeast Asia for the second half of the summer. Yet, due to the SARS epidemic, they chose to redirect their work to a Central Asian country. The group, which consists of 14 Baylor University students and two church members, will depart July 2 for a six-week mission. They will work among the same people group originally targeted in Asia, a large Muslim population.

The Hewitt group plans to teach English classes at universities. "We are still reaching the same people group and look forward to opportunities to engage them in conversations about Jesus Christ," said Eric Herrstrom, associate pastor.

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.