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More than 200 Texas Baptist students head out for missions work worldwide

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ARLINGTON-Neither wars nor disease nor financial instability could keep more than 200 Texas Baptist students from embarking on summer missions projects this month.

Most of the student missionaries serving in conjunction with the Baptist General Convention of Texas departed for their assignments June 1 after obtaining training and inspiration at First Baptist Church of Arlington.

Students pray before being sent out for summer ministry.

Brenda Saunders, director of the BGCT student missions program, said she is impressed by the students' willingness to serve despite volatile worldwide issues. Volunteers will serve in 16 countries and 14 states.

“This year we're really excited to see the number of students,” she said. “With SARS and war, you'd think they'd want to stay close to home, but they see it as more of a challenge.”

The students, including those in “creative access countries” where Christian witnessing is not allowed, are as “prepared as they can be,” Saunders said. They have been trained in Texas for the specific countries where they will serve and will go through on-the-field training with experienced missionaries.

Saunders hopes the mission experience will deepen the students' faith and inspire them to take the gospel around the world for years to come. “Ultimately, I pray summer missionaries will become career missionaries and pastors to new-work areas.”

As they prepared to leave, many students said they eagerly awaited getting to their assigned locations and seeing God work through them.

“I'm really excited but don't know what the Lord is going to do,” said Jessica Berry, a Sam Houston State University music therapy major assigned to Washington. “You don't think people have never heard the gospel in America, but they haven't, especially in the north.”

More than 100 missionaries will face unfamiliar cultures and language barriers on foreign soils. Rather than looking at those aspects as obstacles, Coby Colley, a recent Texas Tech University graduate serving in Germany, looks for the experience to broaden his horizons.

Most of the students, including Texas Tech fine arts major Jordan Gray, are volunteering for the program for the first time. The possibilities for ministry seem endless to Gray, who is part of a team that will lead revivals in the Northwest United States.

“I honestly don't know what to expect,” Gray said. “I'm just going on faith. I

went to the interview not knowing if I was going to do this or not. I guess it was the right place at the right time. (God) said go and do it, so I'm doing it.”

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.