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Road was sometimes rocky, but still led to mountains

By Sarah Farris

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BOULDER, Colo.âLife had taken a wrong turn. A minister with a passion for unreached people was called to work in Waco with Baylor students, and a Rocky Mountain girl who wanted to attend Colorado University ended up at Baylor University.

But God used their detours to create an unlikely partnership between First Baptist Church of Woodway and Boulder, Colo.

Bobby Erickson is the college pastor at First Baptist Church of Woodway. Before coming to Woodway, Erickson and his wife, Tyra, served two years in East Asia.

âWhen God unexpectedly led us to Waco, we couldn't understand at first why he had led us to such a saturated place. Then we began to see Baylor as an incredible resource. Thousands of 18 to 22 year-olds passionate for Jesus.â

The Ericksons began an intentional effort to make the college group at First Baptist of Woodway a sending ground for students to go to âfrontier places overseas and secular campuses in the states.â

Christina Gibson's desire to invest in the students at Colorado University never subsided. But she believed God called her to Baylor, so she invested her time and energy in ministry among Baylor students. She became involved in Woodway's college group, and eventually she was one of the student leaders.

During the summer of 2002, one of the reasons God sent her away from Colorado became clear to her.

College group leaders were discussing strategies for reaching secular colleges. Out of that conversation, several individuals began feeling God's call to work with college students after graduation.

The group began weekly prayer meetings about moving to Boulder, and all seven of the current mission team members came out of that group.

“From the beginning, the student who was going to carry this vision to others was Christina,” Erickson said. “Her heart was in Colorado, and her desire was to see the students (at Colorado University) have the same opportunity she had during her college years at Baylor.”

While the team knew that that they were called to Colorado, they had no idea what that would look like. After pursuing several avenues, doors opened to work with Cornerstone Church of Boulder Valley. First Baptist of Woodway's vision for ministry was to plant a college group at an existing church.

Cornerstone Church, a Southern Baptist congregation, is only two minutes from the university, but it had no college group.

In preparation for the new ministry, First Baptist of Woodway sent short-term mission teams to Boulder during school holidays before any long-term team members moved there. The trips, which the church has continued, focus on praying for Boulder, the university, the team, the church and the

ministry, rather than evangelism.

Gibson and her husband, Brett, along with a concert violinist, two engineers, an outdoor recreation specialist, and a non-profit administrator make up the team. All work full-time at regular jobs except for the Gibsons, who are the full-time college ministry leaders at the church. Because Cornerstone does not have the budget for college staff pastors, the Gibsons are supported financially by some members of First Baptist of Woodway.

The strategy of the team, besides holding weekly college group services, is to build relationships with students and to start Life groups, small groups to encourage spiritual growth and accountability among the students .

In the groups, “Students can interact on an intimate level and challenge each other's pursuits of Christ,” said team member Ashlyn Reynolds.

“Especially exciting is when students catch on to the idea of committing to each other's relationship with Christ. We have seen students form accountability on their own who normally would not necessarily even socialize, but who are learning about the deeper connection they have by being a part of the body of Christ.”

The team, made up of Baylor University graduates, has found the environment of the Colorado University different than the one to which they were accustomed.

“At Baylor, students are raised in the Christian tradition and know all the right answers, but few are willing to live out their convictions. At CU, students are not concerned with conforming to a belief system they do not live out, but rather flaunt their lifestyles,” Reynolds said.

“All ideas and religions are accepted and practiced. CU students are open to anything except Christianity,” said team member Derek Polk.

The team hopes the students will become leaders and take ownership of the ministry. Their biggest challenge has been the lack of commitment or continuity by many local students involved in the budding ministry, but still a core group of students have developed, and after almost a year since the team began full-time work in Boulder, Cornerstone's college group sent a small summer missions team, lead by the Gibsons, to Asia.

Erickson says he has "seen a dramatic increase in dependence up on God and one another."

"I think we can talk spiritual community theory all day in Waco and really not know what we are talking about," he said. "In Boulder, those students have had to live it.

"They know the struggles and the successes of living in a close community with a team of believers all living under the same vision for the same purpose. It is not always pretty, and it's definitely not easy, but for those who endure—and thankfully our entire team continues to persevere—the experiences of genuine spiritual family and purpose is far greater than the momentary struggles that must be faced."

For the seven members of the Baylor group in Colorado, ministry has taken on a new meaning—it has become everyday life.

"Life is your ministry, not just college students," said team member Josh Duncan. "Therefore, your team, coworkers and neighbors also make up the reason for being where you are."

For the Ericksons and the Gibsons, it wasn't a wrong turn after all. But it wasn't a short cut either.

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