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SAN ANTONIO-The cross-cultural mix at Baptist University of the Americas will get even richer next month when two students from India begin studies at the BGCT-affiliated school.

Woodland Baptist Church, a San Antonio congregation heavily involved with the Banjara Gypsy Partnership for more than seven years, funded full scholarships for Mary Ramabathu and Karen Solomon.

The \$25,000 donation was over and above the church's budgeted financial support of both BUA and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

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In mid-December, the student visa was approved for Ramabathu, 35, a homeopathic medical doctor and the daughter of Narasingh Naik, director of Banjara Development Trust, a ministry of American Baptists in India.

The visa application is in the final stages for Solomon, 19, the daughter of VK Solomon, director of Gypsy Fellowship, a ministry of French Gypsy churches.

The visa applications hit several snags in recent months, which resulted in the process appearing regularly on the prayer lists of both BUA and Woodland Baptist Church.

"Both of these students will not only have a cross-cultural impact at BUA but will also return to India to ministry among their people group," said one of four CBF field personnel working with the Banjara.

"Banjaras live in 195 of India's 506 districts, and our goal is to see a Christian Banjara witness in every one of these districts so they too may bend their knee and confess with their mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord."

Ramabathu and Solomon are expected to play key roles, especially ministering to other Banjara women, he noted.

Gypsies, also called Romany, are believed to have originated in India before migrating to the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, Russia and the United States. Today, more than 20 million remain in India, known as Banjara.

"BUA is thrilled at this opportunity to help prepare the two young women for ministry and excited about what they can teach us," said Javier Elizondo, academic dean at BUA.

"As a theological university focused on missions, we actively seek to be a part of what God is doing everywhere in the world. We anticipate a long and fruitful relationship between BUA and Banjara Christians."

The impetus for the scholarships started last spring when Woodland approved a recommendation from its missions committee designating \$25,000 of budget surplus for the Banjara work.

The committee had studied a list of possible projects submitted by the CBF representative that included theological education for future leaders, purchasing a van for a mobile medical clinic, offering small business loans, paying for literature translation and production, and others.

Rather than making the choice, the church voted to make the contribution with no strings attached so the Banjara team could determine the best use.

They chose to put the entire amount toward scholarships.

"We had other worthy students who were not selected, but they won't be abandoned," he added. "We are searching for other funds for them to either attend BUA or schools here in India."

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