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By Teresa Young

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PLAINVIEW-Bernard Kabarú has a vision for reaching Kenya with the gospel. And he believes Christian leaders in that country could do it, if they just had the training.

“Missions should be empowering the local church, with partners coming along to help in that mission rather than bringing in their own vision and expecting people to follow,” said Kabarú, principal of Kenya Baptist Theological College.

Bernard Kabaru, principal of the Kenya Baptist Theological College, shares his vision for educating Christian leaders in his native country during a recent visit to the Wayland Baptist University campus in Plainview. Wayland has been involved in a partnership with the Kenyan college five years.

“What we are going to do with the present generation of Christians will determine what the church in Africa will be in the future.”

In 1999, Wayland Baptist University began a formal academic partnership with the Kenya Baptist Theological College with the goal of helping train ministers in the East African nation.

Five years later, Wayland has conferred 16 associate's degrees in theology to ministers who are now better equipped to disciple their church members and minister to unreached populations.

The university continues to send faculty for short visits to teach courses toward the associate's degree.

The first student group visited in the summer of 2002 as part of a three-week mission endeavor, and another group plans to visit in May 2004.

On a recent visit to Wayland's Plainview campus, Kabarú described strategic planning involving the Baptist Convention of Kenya and the theological college and the goals leaders set for increasing the educational level of Kenyan pastors.

Of the 3,000 pastors in Kenya, only seven hold a bachelor's degree in theology, and only five hold a higher degree, he said. About 100 have earned a diploma through the Baptist college, and another 90 have certificates of theology.

Only about 25 percent have received theological education by extension, Kabarú said, noting the college wants to reach 100 percent by 2010. Many of the most highly educated Baptist leaders in Kenya are serving as teachers at the college.

The challenge of educating Kenyan pastors is not a lack of willingness but a lack of resources, Kabarú noted. Ministers who attend the Baptist college

often must travel days to get to the campus in Limuru, leaving family and churches behind while earning their education.

About 95 percent serve bivocationally. Most receive no financial compensation from the churches they serve, and attaining theological training often means leaving a paying job at least for a short time, he said.

Students at KBTC are required to be in ministry at the time of enrollment, and Kabarú said it is important for them to be learning while they are serving. But they're not just pastors or ministry leaders; many are businessmen, farmers, teachers or homemakers.

"Those who have been the recipients of western missions have experienced significant numerical growth in church starts and are urging to move forward into maturity, but the western (world) still has the resources," Kabarú said.

"Kenyans have caught the vision, and the momentum is there. They are already working on church-planting strategies among the churches. The locals are doing the work, but they need trained leaders."

Wayland's involvement brings great hope for the vision of leaders at the Baptist college in Kenya to be fulfilled in coming years. Kabarú said.

"You all have been a godsend. I really feel God has affirmed my role in this by bringing the partnership with Wayland," he said, adding that the college had approached others about the possibilities of partnering but found little interest.

Vaughn Ross, professor of biological sciences and a former missionary to Kenya, brought Wayland and the Kenya Baptist college together after visiting with Kabarú and realizing the university's mission went hand-in-hand with KBTC's goals.

Members of Wayland's religion faculty are excited about the venture with Kenya, both for what it now represents academically and for what it may mean to missions.

“We are envisioning establishing a missions center here that would involve a faculty member in missions and would serve as a direct link to the Kenya campus, coordinating activities there such as students traveling there for courses or missions opportunities,” said Fred Meeks, chairman of the religion and philosophy division at Wayland.

“The missions center would also serve as a focal point for churches wanting to do missions and partnering with Wayland for endeavors. We would be the ones providing training and equipping them on how to do missions, perhaps even providing some language training,” Meeks added.

Meeks and his faculty have been instrumental in helping develop and deliver the associate's degree in religion at the Kenyan college, but they see this as just beginning in terms of Wayland's academic involvement.

“We are currently only able to offer the associate's degree, but our goal is to offer the baccalaureate degree, and, in the future, we would envision even offering graduate-level training on that campus,” Meeks said. “We have a long-range vision for this campus, with long-term opportunities for 'doing missions' in that area.”

The college continues to work through a lengthy and complicated accreditation process for the Kenyan government, Kabarú said. But that will eventually require better housing facilities for students and other upgrades.

Wayland has been offering the program to the theological college at no charge, adding the expense to the university's regular annual budget. Wayland would like to help the college make technological and library upgrades that will get it closer to eventually offering a bachelor's degree,

but those efforts are costly.

Scholarships for students also are needed, Kabarú added.

Since Kenyan nationals have little income, the cost of attending the Baptist college—though reasonable for theological education—is still a financial hardship. Scholarships that help students cover cost of tuition, books and other requirements for school would help ensure more students are able to further their theological education.

Special gifts such as a \$15,000 donation from First Baptist Church in Plainview are used directly in the cost of delivering the associate's degree to Kenya.

Ross hopes more churches in the area will see that through gifts like this, West Texas residents can be involved in missions on the other side of the globe, and the gospel will be spread.

“What KBTC needs is a full spiritual partnership where all participants prayerfully understand the challenge and each brings to the vision the resources God has given them stewardship over,” Ross said.

A very real part of that, he said, is prayer support and sending groups on mission trips.

The key, Ross added, is getting involved. “It's a full expression of what the body of Christ is: What gifts you have you bring to the body.”

For information on the Kenya partnership project, contact Wayland Baptist University at (806) 291-3427.