

Program enables watershed experience for seminary students

February 2, 2008

Posted: 2/02/08

Program enables watershed experience for seminary students

By Bob Perkins

ATLANTA—A program endowed by a \$100,000 gift from Oklahoma Baptist Robert Stephenson has ensured that seminary students from around the nation could participate in the historic celebration of the New Baptist Covenant.

The Stephenson Seminary Scholars program helped underwrite the participation of 178 seminary students from 16 different divinity schools.

Bailey Nelson, the program's coordinator, said her involvement has been an inspiration.

• [See latest photos](#) and the latest [video clips](#) from the New Baptist Covenant Meeting. ([And go here to see our complete coverage of the event](#)).

“I am overwhelmed by the diversity of the group and the passion they show,” Nelson said. “They are driven and hungry. Their big question is: What’s next?”

Nelson said the meeting has been a watershed moment for many members of the group who are beginning to understand their role as Baptists.

“We can’t wait for others to tell us what to do. It’s time for us to decide for ourselves,” she said. “It’s not about becoming members of the power structure; it’s about developing relationships.”

Because there had been no contact among the seminarians prior to this week, Nelson said the students are exploring ways to keep in touch after

the event. "There's been talk about starting a Facebook group to stay connected with each other through e-mail, and there are others who are talking about collaborating on a book."

Derrick Sellars, who attends Shaw Divinity School in Raleigh, N.C., said the program has helped students from different backgrounds share experiences.

"It really forces us to deal with what we've been trying to hide for many years," he said. "There was a time when black people weren't allowed to go to seminary. This gives us the opportunity to find out what others are teaching and maybe we are learning what we should be teaching seminary students."

"It helps us to learn the intellectual side of what it means to be Baptist," Shaw said. "I think some of us don't even know what Baptists believe. Yes, we submerge believers in water, but it's much deeper than that."

Angelita Clifton, who attends Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, N.J., shared Shaw's excitement about the Baptist identity.

"I think we will be bringing back the tools for us to share with our congregations what it means to be Baptist, and to be more aware of the Baptist identity," Clifton said. "I came here with the idea that I was going to learn something from this once-in-a-lifetime gathering of Baptists."

"It's much easier to think that we are all somehow different," she said. "But when we come together to exchange ideas and theology, we find out that we don't have to agree on everything to be able to work together on common goals. We are unified under the umbrella of God's love."

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Baptist churches, in Texas, the BGCT, the nation and around the world.