

Updated: Coronavirus compels major adjustments

March 10, 2020

Baptist mission-sending agencies and universities scramble to make adjustments prompted by coronavirus-related travel restrictions and advisories.

The Southern Baptist Convention International Mission Board is offering missionaries in affected areas [the option of relocating](#) to other regions where travel and interpersonal contact is not as restricted. The IMB established a task force to provide consistent information about medical advisories and travel directives to all personnel. On March 9, the IMB recommended that [mission volunteers](#) from the United States postpone international travel at least through April 30.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global Missions field staff also have been affected, according to a March 11 announcement: “CBF has evacuated a field personnel family from China, and in conversation with its Japanese Baptist partners, a CBF field personnel family presently in the United States has delayed its return to the region. Also, CBF field personnel in Asia have canceled their annual meeting planned for March in Indonesia, and CBF field personnel that are a part of the Europe team have shifted their meeting online.”

Leaders of Texas Baptists’ [Go Now Missions](#) program for college students made the decision in February—prior to summer student missions appointments—to cancel all trips to East Asia.

“We also have cancelled a summer trip to South Korea. We are in the process of reassigning those students,” said Brenda Sanders, collegiate missions consultant for Texas Baptists.

Before the IMB issued its recommendation regarding volunteer mission groups, Go Now Missions leaders already had decided to delay the purchase of tickets for any flights until later, she added.

“Any student missionary on an international team that is cancelled will be moved to a location in the U.S.A.,” Sanders said.

Student missionaries have been told Go Now Missions will continue to monitor issues related to COVID-19, closely following information from the U.S. Department of State and the Centers for Disease Control in addition to updates from missionary supervisors in international locations.

“If, at any time, it is deemed unsafe to send a team to a particular country, we will move the team to another U.S.A. or foreign location,” according to a statement from Go Now Missions.

Universities restrict travel; some extend break

Travel restrictions and medical advisories also prompted Texas Baptist universities to postpone travel, extend spring break or make other changes.

Giuseppe Conte, prime minister of Italy, announced March 9 that a lockdown in the northern region of Lombardy and other provinces had been extended to include the entire nation. Several days prior to the nationwide lockdown, Baylor University and its Center for Global Engagement announced it had temporarily postponed university-sponsored [travel to Italy](#), after already halting travel to China and South Korea.

“Five students enrolled in the program in Italy have been advised to return to the United States,” according to a statement Baylor issued March 3. “They will return to their permanent residences and self-monitor for any symptoms for 14 days while completing their courses remotely. Eighty

students studying in Europe have been restricted from traveling in Italy.”

On March 11, Baylor President Linda Livingstone sent an email notice to the campus community announcing spring break would be extended one week and instruction would shift strictly to online classes from March 23 to April 3. The decision affect all Baylor-related campuses and locations, including Truett Theological Seminary.

“We will continue to monitor the conditions around COVID-19 during this time period, and a future decision will be made as to when face-to-face instruction can resume,” Livingstone stated.

That same day, Dallas Baptist University made a similar announcement.

“To begin addressing the unique concerns posed by the spread of the virus across the country, DBU will extend spring break for one additional week. All classes will resume online on Monday, March 23, 2020 through Sunday, April 5, 2020. Classes are scheduled to resume in-person on Monday, April 6, 2020. However, if a community outbreak occurs in Dallas or the situation otherwise worsens, DBU is prepared to provide classes online for a longer period. Students, faculty, and staff will continue to receive updates regarding the status of classes,” according to a [statement](#) posted on the DBU website.

The following day, Hardin-Simmons University announced it would extend spring break through March 22 and offer instruction online from March 23 to April 13.

East Texas Baptist University initially cancelled all university-related travel to countries designated as Level 2 or 3 by the [Centers for Disease Control](#). Currently, the CDC lists Level 3 travel notices for China, Iran, South Korea and Italy and a Level 2 travel notice for Japan.

“Anyone traveling to a CDC designated Level 2 or 3 country will be

required to self-quarantine off-campus for a period of 14 days before returning to East Texas Baptist University,” a notice on the [ETBU website](#) stated.

On March 11, ETBU President Blair Blackburn sent out a notice suspending chapel through March 25, for the two weeks following spring break, and cancelling university-related participation in professional seminars and conferences for the remainder of the spring semester. ETBU also cancelled all university-related air travel for the rest of the semester.

Blackburn also announced ETBU is developing contingency plans for the option of shifting to online classes for the remaining seven weeks of the semester.

The University of Mary Hardin-Baylor announced students who were slated for a study abroad trip to China will travel and study in Peru instead.

Jim King, professor in the McLane School of Business at UMHB, had been planning the trip to Zhuhai, China, and the Yunnan Province for nearly two years as the intended capstone of courses he teaches on impact enterprises and on culture and global business.

After travel warnings for the region were issued, King considered Peru as an alternate destination and began making contacts there. He previously led multiple trips to the region and had worked with Threads of Hope, a group that is changing the lives of impoverished women through textile sales.

“Now, instead of visiting the Great Wall of China, our students will be visiting Machu Picchu,” King said, according to a March 6 news release from the school.

Editor’s Note: The article was updated to include additional information made available March 11 after it originally was posted on March 10.

Helpful links to information about COVID-19

A Coronavirus Guide for Texas Baptist Churches

<https://texasbaptists.org/response/covid-19/guide>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Baylor Scott & White Health

<https://www.bswhealth.com/Pages/coronavirus-information.aspx>

U.S. Department of State

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/ea/novel-coronavirus-hubei-province-china.html>