

WMU shares God's love 'to the moon and back'

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INDIANAPOLIS (BP)—Astronaut Charlie Duke, the youngest man to ever step on the moon, carried an emblem of the Woman's Missionary Union pin to the moon and back in 1972, Executive Director-Treasurer Sandy Wisdom-Martin told participants at the WMU missions celebration and annual meeting.

In addition to that treasured artifact, Wisdom-Martin said the national WMU archives also holds a handwritten note from Jim Irwin, astronaut on Apollo 15.

Irwin's note states; "To the Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention with gratitude for your great work in projecting the 'holy light' throughout the world."

"The moon does not produce its own light. We see the moon because it reflects light from the sun," Wisdom-Martin said to 350 attendees at this year's WMU missions celebration and annual meeting held June 9 prior to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"As Christ followers, we do not produce our own light. We only reflect light from the Son."

Surprising her audience, she removed her jacket to reveal an astronaut costume underneath.

"Are you projecting his light?" she asked. "Let's suit up and show a lost world we love them to the moon and back."

Wisdom-Martin talked about a WMU edition of the book, *50 Steps with*

Jesus: Learning to Walk Daily with the Lord, which is designed for a shepherd to guide a new believer through a 50-day journey with God.

“In 2024, we intend to raise up 1,000 disciplers using this material,” she said, revealing she recently started discipling an 11th person using this resource, written by Air Force Chaplain (Brig. Gen.) Ron Harvell (ret.) and his wife Marsha of Moncks Corner, S.C.

According to Marsha Harvell, the discipling resource was born out of a need for something to help her disciple a “brand new lamb of Christ who did not know anything about Christianity.”

“What if WMU had an army of 1,000 disciplers at the ready to invest in new believers in their communities or even those campus ministers and church planters were leading to Christ elsewhere?” Wisdom-Martin asked. “Just think of the significant kingdom impact that could be made.”

‘Pray we dream big dreams’

In her presidential address, Connie Dixon shared a quick report and described a lot of what she saw God do this past year.



Connie Dixon was re-elected president of national Woman’s

Missionary Union.
(Photo by Robin
Cornetet)

“I took 72 flights, had 59 Zoom calls. I spoke 51 different speaking engagements and wrote 23 articles. I spoke in 16 different state conventions and 12 conferences. I was trained in Mental Health First Aid. I was on numerous conference calls, and I wrote a book,” she said.

Noting she has spoken to thousands of WMU members across the nation, Dixon said she has heard hundreds of stories of what God has done in lives through WMU and the missions heritage being handed down through generations.

These included stories about 30,000 migrant workers coming to Jesus, book clubs for women coming out of incarceration and other types of groups and Bible studies, and despite major difficulties, the miraculous ministry happening in Cambodia, Nigeria, Mozambique, Philippines, Kenya and more.

“In spite of all of these difficulties, the faithful WMU people around the world are praising God and persisting with the word [of God]. What joy to hear from our missionaries and to hear their stories,” she said.

“WMU has always had challenges and oppositions. We have never felt like we had as much money as we needed or as many people as we needed, but we have always—always—had enough to accomplish what God has asked us to accomplish.

“Let’s pray that we proclaim from the heart the love of Jesus to a broken and hurting world. Let’s pray that we dream big dreams. Remember that any time an organization has more memories than it has dreams, the end is near. We need to dream big dreams.”

‘Prayer warriors’ for missionaries

This year’s meeting also included testimonies from missionaries and former WMU participants, including the Harvells; Dani Bryson, assistant district attorney at the 23rd Judicial District in Dickson, Tenn., and member of the SBC Executive Committee; Gay and John Williams, directors of Hawaii Baptist Disaster Relief in Honolulu; and Sarah Sanborn, a former IMB Journeyman missionary to Krakow, Poland, among others.

The Harvells, whose two children are serving as IMB missionaries in Asia (one in Japan and the other in an undisclosed country), told how they never put a “distance limit” on their children’s service to God. They also thanked WMU for being “prayer warriors” for missionaries, relating a story that surely was a result of such prayer.

Their daughter traveled to her country’s capital city to the U.S. Embassy to get a passport, Marsha Harvell explained. Living and serving in the jungle, away from simple luxuries, she looked forward to enjoying a cup of coffee at a nearby coffee shop, but she first needed to make copies of her documents at the guest house.

Uncharacteristically, the printer would not print. Knowing her precious moments at the coffee shop were dwindling, she frantically tried to get it to work. Then, all the sudden, she heard sirens and blared announcements to “Stay in place.” She later learned a terrorist bomb had just gone off at the coffee shop right next to the embassy.

“You precious WMU,” Marsha Harvell said tearfully. “For the past 136 years, you have prayed for our missionaries. Don’t ever stop!”

Ron Harvell, who has served a total of 34 years in military chaplaincy, has baptized more than 500 people. Acknowledging how easy it is for churches to harden their hearts to “transitional” military personnel, he urged his

listeners to love, care and pray for them, and to contact them during their next assignments.

It's a privilege to help them transform through Jesus, he said.

'Thank you' to women who serve in ministry

Bryson, who has served on the SBC Executive Committee and the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, is a legacy WMU member, who grew up participating in Girls in Action and Acteens, ultimately serving as a national Acteens panelist in 2005.

She said the "single biggest missional force" in her life was her mom, Carmen Westerman, who served as her Acteens leader and "a fearless and constant voice for missions."

"When women do missions, they bring their families with them," Bryson said, noting her mother took her "alongside her" to association meetings, WMU meetings, international mission trips and more.

"As a thank you to her and to all the women who serve in ministry," Bryson welcomed her mother to the stage, tearfully presenting her with a large bouquet of red roses.

Gay and John Williams shared their life-long missions journey, which culminated in their current role as disaster relief directors in Honolulu, after serving in student ministry for 26 years in three different countries and five U.S. states.

John Williams described the area's two major events in 2023, a super typhoon in Guam, where they helped with water and food distribution, and the fires in Maui, where they are helping with rebuilding.

“Hawaii is a very communal culture,” he said, thanking WMU for their prayers. “When part of the islands hurt, we all hurt.”

Sanborn presented testimonies of sharing her faith with other young women. One admitted she initially was annoyed at Sanborn for how much she talked about Jesus, but after becoming a Christian, she said: “I am now the weird one always talking about Jesus Christ. How could I not tell others about him?”

“We have to be bold in sharing and hopeful in waiting,” Sanborn asserted. “We can have steadfastness in our evangelism because we know God is who he says he is, and he will do what he says he will do.”

During the business session, Dixon of First Baptist Church, Elida, N.M, was re-elected president, and Texan Shirley McDonald of Greens Creek Baptist Church in Dublin was re-elected as recording secretary, each for another term.

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