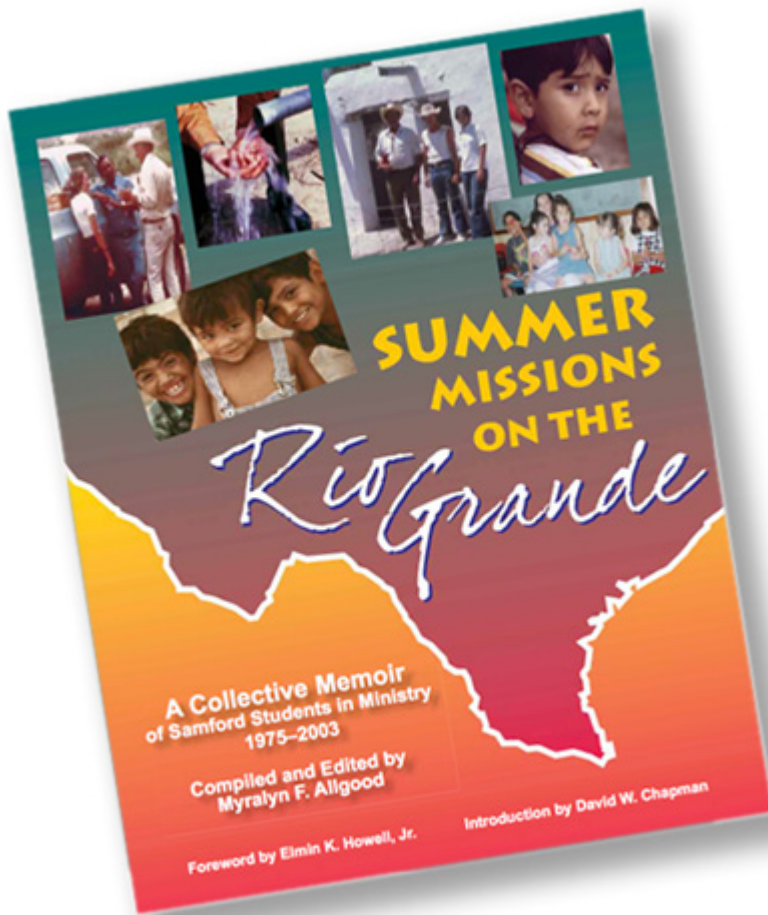


Book explores link between Samford University, River Ministry

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala.—A new book by Myralyn Allgood, professor emerita of Spanish at [Samford University](#), celebrates the long-term role of students from an Alabama Baptist school in Texas Baptists' ministry along the Rio Grande.

Nearly 40 years ago, Allgood journeyed from Alabama to Texas to learn how Samford students could participate in a summer missions program along the Texas/Mexico border.



Allgood, who served 24 years as chair of the world languages and cultures department at Samford, met with Elmin Howell, founding director of Texas Baptists' [River Ministry](#). Out of that contact grew a missions partnership that continued nearly three decades.

Students' missions experiences along the Rio Grande continued to inspire them long after they left the river, she noted—a theme that emerges throughout *Summer Missions on the Rio Grande*. She called the book “a collective memoir” of Samford students who served with River Ministry between 1975 and 2003, and she described the project as a labor of love.

“From time to time, from here and there—a student’s journal entry, a casual word between friends, encounters with River Ministry alumni over the years—there has been an ongoing echo of the same theme: ‘Señora, when are we going to write a book about all this?’” Allgood wrote in the book’s preface.

That question led Allgood to a three-year exploration of the materials and

memories that became the book. It was an enormous task, but Allgood kept faith in its importance.

“I think we all sensed from the outset that God’s hand was on this project, and watching him move in the lives of those involved was a remarkable thing to behold—and to recount,” she said.

However, Allgood was quick to point out the collaborative project never would have developed had it not been for Howell’s directorship.

“It was Elmin who opened the door for us to join hands with Texas Baptists in this ministry and whose creative thinking produced a series of life-changing projects for us on both sides of the 900-mile Texas-Mexico border,” she said.



Man herding goats toward a Mexican village. (Photo: Summer Missions on the Rio Grande) In the book’s foreword, Howell likewise praised Allgood and the students she enlisted to serve as summer missionaries alongside missionaries and border-area pastors, working 10 weeks in the summer with only room and board provided.

“Sometimes the room and board was lacking, but the summer missionaries

did not complain,” Howell noted. “The people they were there to help had much less, and the less fortunate did not complain, either. All were grateful for their newfound friends. Samford University could not have sent out more effective ambassadors.”

David Chapman, dean of Samford’s Howard College of Arts and Sciences, and former Samford professor Max Gartman also contributed to the book. But mostly, it focuses on alumni reflections, newsletters, correspondence, candid photos and news clippings, most reproduced in their original forms to create the appearance of a scrapbook. It even ends with a poem by Van Gladen, the ministry’s “poet laureate.”

Wilma Reed of Cleburne, one of the authors of [*With These Hands*](#), a two-volume history of River Ministry, enjoyed the memories rekindled by reading Allgood’s book.

“At first, I devoured it,” she recalled. “Then I slowed down, so I could savor every word—as I savor pieces of my favorite chocolate candy. Oh! The memories. ...”

Students who participated in the ministry and have read the book praised Allgood’s effort in recording the history of the summer missions project.



Samford student Becky Boggs chats with Mexican pastor Juan Lara and Rural Work coordinator D. L. Kite in 1975. "It is absolutely amazing and a tribute ... to all those who were blessed to have this life-changing experience," Linda Ables observed. She and her husband, Ed, were career missionaries in Ecuador and Argentina. After they retired from international missions, she taught Spanish and led missions projects at Samford.

Larry Sharp, pastor of [First Baptist Church in New Tazewell, Tenn.](#), spent the summers of 1976 and 1977 working on mechanical and agricultural projects with River Ministry. His wife, Susan Jones Sharp, worked with River Ministry as a nurse in villages near the Big Bend in 1977.

"So many opportunities and memories," he acknowledged after reviewing Allgood's book and reflecting on his experiences along the Rio Grande. "I have been truly blessed. My one true regret in life is that I only get to do it once, and I have not been faithful keeping in touch with friends. Thanks for giving leadership and tremendous influence on a young combat-soldier-turned-student who was blessed by your vision, ministry and wisdom. I am but one of many who know the blessing you bestowed in Christ's name."

Summer Missions on the Rio Grande is [available online](#). It also can be ordered by calling (205) 726-2834, and River Ministry summers missions

alumni receive a discount. Samford's Howard College of Arts and Sciences also has made the book available free-of-charge as [a downloadable PDF file](#).