

ETBU student-athletes serve refugees in Greece

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Student-athletes from East Texas Baptist University began the new year in Athens, Greece, serving with a ministry to refugees.

A group of 34 student-athletes, coaches and staff with the ETBU cross country and track program participated in the Tiger Athletic Mission Experience trip. They partnered with International Sports Federation and Streetlights, a community discipleship ministry that focuses on working with refugees from Europe and the Middle East.

“TAME was created in order to give ETBU Tiger student-athletes the opportunity to use their God-given talents and abilities to share their faith with people across the globe as they strive to transform the world for Christ,” said Ryan Erwin, vice president for athletics at ETBU.

“Our student-athletes were nothing short of amazing as they fought through exhaustion. They did an amazing job interacting with and showing love toward the local children in Greece.”

Outreach, ministry and worship

The ETBU student-athletes joined in outreach to refugees of all ages during a community festival facilitated by Streetlights, assisting with face painting, dance competitions and games.

“The kids loved getting to laugh and play,” senior Michael Sanders said. “It was amazing to see God work through our actions to spread the gospel.”

Some Tigers attended an Iranian church service where they served lunch to

over 75 Iranian refugees.



Student-athletes from East Texas Baptist University journeyed to Greece, where they assisted with painting, cleaning and making needed repairs at a local kindergarten, elementary school and the facility for Streetlights, a ministry to refugees. (ETBU Photo)

“As we arrived at the church, the leader greeted us, and we prayed for God to open our hearts and eyes to the world we were about to see,” graduate student Beau Billings said. “While at the church, we were able to meet a man and learn his story through Google Translate. It showed the true power of God and how appreciative the people we were serving are.”

A small group of Tigers took trains to reach a local refugee camp, where they visited and ministered to residents of the camp and were inspired by

their stories of suffering and triumph.

“We introduced ourselves and sat down to visit with a family,” freshman Kennadie Ransberger said. “The woman shared her testimony with us. She was not a believer, but her story was extremely moving and brought tears to my eyes. She talked about her past that brought her to this camp and how difficult and heartbreaking it was.

“However, she also talked about how strong she is today and the person she has become because of it. It was such a humbling and eye-opening experience for each one of us. Leaving the camp was so sad. They did not want us to go.”

The ETBU group also assisted with painting, cleaning and making needed repairs at a local kindergarten, elementary school and the Streetlights building.

“I have really enjoyed getting to know my teammates through this experience,” freshman Hope Shipp said. “Not only have I gotten to know my teammates, but I’ve also met some really awesome new friends. I cannot wait to see the other amazing things God has planned for us in my time at ETBU.”

Rare opportunities

In addition to ministry opportunities, Tigers had the rare opportunity to run a marathon or 5K race through the streets of Greece, finishing at the site of the original Olympic Stadium.



During a mission trip to Greece, student-athletes from East Texas Baptist University hiked to the Acropolis and Parthenon before climbing Mars Hill, where the Apostle Paul delivered the message recorded in Acts 17. (ETBU Photo)

“This was no ordinary race,” junior Kylie Embry said. “We were running through the city streets of Athens with cars all around us. In the midst of the chaos around us, our team was a unit, working together, encouraging one another and enjoying the experience.”

The ETBU student-athletes also hiked to the Acropolis and Parthenon before climbing Mars Hill, where the Apostle Paul delivered the message recorded in Acts 17. The group reflected, sang worship songs and took part in communion with Christian tourists.

“This trip has been an incredible experience, resulting in bringing our team together, enlightening and changing our perspectives, creating a space for hearts to awaken, and fostering a deep gratefulness for the many blessings we take for granted,” said Natalie Bach-Prather, ETBU men’s track and field head coach.

“It was so special to see many of our athletes have soul-awakening moments throughout the week, and it was very evident that God was

working through our group to reach others. I am so grateful for this opportunity we had to grow as a team and witness life-changing moments.”