

Students experience church planting in Canada

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Instead of heading south to the beach, eight [University of Mary Hardin-Baylor](#) students journeyed north to Canada's Rockies for an education in church planting.

Bell Baptist Association's Mission Director Tom Henderson, an adjunct instructor at UMHB, organized a class field trip to the [Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary](#). There, UMHB students shadowed church planters and received insight about Christianity in the region.

As a supplement to his church planting course, the educational excursion idea came from Henderson's time at seminary.

University of Mary Hardin-Baylor students Tommy Wilson, Michelle Hunt, Autumn Woolsey and Patrick Munoz stand in front of a frozen waterfall in Canada while on a church planting class trip over spring break.

A teacher there provided him with the experience of seeing ministries out of state. Henderson hoped to pass on that opportunity to his students.

"We see this as helping students the way we were helped. It is exciting to see the students' enthusiasm," he said.

Henderson's goals for the trip included offering students first-hand insight into the church planting ministry, showing them the seminary and giving them time for spiritual evaluation.

“We took time to seek God’s direction for each student’s life purpose, and because it was a busy time, we built in a place to just pray. We provided some spiritual guidance Bible studies to help them process what they were seeing and ask questions,” he said.

The assignment for the first part of the week divided students into three groups and asked them to observe church planters in Lethbridge, Okotoks and South Calgary. Later the teams met with faculty at the seminary, went on prayerwalks in the city and on sightseeing excursions.

Junior youth ministry major Autumn Woolsey described the trip as eye-opening. She said the multiple unplanned side excursions revealed information about the country and its people and kept her engaged throughout the trip.

“I thought it was going to be boring. I was not expecting to build a relationship with the church planter, learning from him and hearing what he had to say. I was really interested the entire time. I never lost my focus,” Woolsey said.

The power of prayer and what it means to ministry became apparent during her time with church planters.

“They constantly prayed and prayerwalked, and they quoted the verse which says, ‘Wherever you set your feet, I will give to you.’ So, prayerwalking is very important to them. Because of this, (prayer) is a new passion of mine,” she said.

As she studied church planting, the exposure to this different country yielded some unexpected truths.

“A lot of people think the Canadian culture is the same as American culture, but it is not. There are a lot of differences,” she said.

“I was expecting there to be more Christians up there, but there wasn’t at all. You couldn’t say things like, ‘I feel the Lord drawing me to this ... ,’ because they would think you were absolutely crazy. They would have no idea what you meant,” she said.

She understands now the importance of studying a culture before trying to establish relationships. She realized how church planting depends on the culture where the planter is working.

“You really have to study the culture and the people to be effective. In Canada, only through a trust relationship can you share the gospel,” Woolsey said.

Another UMHB student, senior psychology major Kevin Waden, noticed the absence of churches. Lethbridge, Canada, has a high Mormon population and only one Baptist church in a city of 90,000 people.

From the trip, he gained an appreciation for Canadian church planters as he saw how successful they are although they are extremely understaffed and underfunded.

“They have one person who is in charge of church planting for the entire western half of Canada, which is the size of the United States,” Waden said.

Some Canadian approaches to church starting and evangelism differ from those in the United States, he noted. In the end, however, Christ’s message is always the same.

“God is the same God, no matter where we go,” Waden said.