

Tarleton State University: Partnership means giving and receiving

October 12, 2016

A trip to the Pacific Northwest last year sparked an ongoing partnership between the Baptist Student Ministry at Tarleton State University and Northwest Collegiate Ministries.

In June 2015, Clayton Bullion, BSM director at Tarleton State, and his wife, Bethany, ventured to Portland, Ore., to visit five of their Go Now summer missionaries who were serving with Northwest Collegiate Ministries.

“Our hope was to encourage our team, visit as many campuses as we could, and get a feel for college ministry there and see if there was anything we could do to help,” Clayton Bullion said. “We were not prepared for what we encountered.”

They visited 12 campuses—from Eugene, Ore., to Seattle, Wash.—and discovered hundreds of thousands of university students were going through school and not being engaged with the gospel.

“You can’t walk among lost and unengaged students like that and it not shake you to your core,” he said.

The Bullions sat at a coffee shop on the Portland State University campus to visit with Ken Harmon, director of Northwest Collegiate Ministries.

“We told him: ‘Ken, we don’t know what to do. We don’t know whether God is asking us to move up here next week or send everybody we know,’” Bullion recalled.

Harmon remembered that conversation.

“Clayton and Bethany arrived in Portland all starry-eyed, filled with youthful zeal,” he said. “We talked about how they could be most effective. We talked about whether they needed to be in the northwest or stay in Texas to mobilize students and other workers to come to the northwest. It takes a courageous couple who will submit their personal desire and passions to the Lord to be more influential in kingdom work.”

The Bullions returned to Stephenville determined to prepare workers for service in the Pacific Northwest. They began to pray God would prepare the hearts of Tarleton students and local churches and give them the reach the northwest.



Go Now Missionary P.J. Prewit is pictured with student leaders from the University of Oregon. Since that time, the BSM at Tarleton State has sent 43 students and staff to work with Northwest Collegiate Ministries on 10 college campuses. Texas churches also have sent students and other members, staff and resources.

In November, a 14-member team from Texas will serve in Seattle, providing meals for the Northwest Collegiate Ministries fall retreat.

But the partnership is not one-sided. In August, Northwest Collegiate

Ministries sent a nine-member team to Texas to serve alongside Tarleton BSM volunteers during their first week of classes.

Matt Munger, Northwest Collegiate Ministries director at Oregon State University, brought one of his students to Tarleton to help with “Howdy Week.”

“I caught a renewed vision for my campus at Oregon State,” he said. “Ministry here has been slow and difficult these past two years with little student involvement from the student leaders I have had. To see students not only leading other students, but motivating each other to work hard and share the gospel during harvest season was reinvigorating to watch.”

During their week at Tarleton, the Northwest Collegiate Ministries team conducted spiritual surveys on campus, distributed popsicles and BSM information, and engaged new students on campus in conversation.



During Howdy Week at Tarleton State University, a couple of members of the Northwest Collegiate Ministries team helped cooked more than 200 of pounds of meat for a picnic. “This was an extremely humbling week,” Bullion said. “NCM came in and worked hard and loved our students well. They served and took the behind-the-scene jobs so our students would be freed up to engage their peers. They were ready to serve and constantly asking questions trying to learn. It was an overwhelming experience to see their eagerness to serve in

every aspect.”

Harmon also noted the impact the mission trip had on students from the Pacific Northwest.

“True partnership is together,” he said. “We are so accustomed to receiving, sometimes we forget the sending. It has been a great joy to send a team from the northwest to help a Texas BSM with their welcome week on campus. ... We have received way more than we have given, and selfishly I must admit that even in coming here and serving, we have received more than we gave.”

With a partnership that is now a year and a half old, Tarleton and NCM students have formed encouraging friendships that are not limited by thousands of miles.

Garrett Harmon, a student at the University of Oregon, enjoyed serving alongside his Texas friends on their campus.

“It was really encouraging just being able to work alongside so many other college-aged Christians,” Garrett said. “With an NCM of only three other college-age students on leadership, it is great to work and talk with other student believers.”

Tarleton’s BSM has begun a 2025 vision. Over the next 10 years, student leaders pray 20 Tarleton graduates will move to the northwest after graduation to work among college students.

Their prayer is that in 10 years, they will be able to mark 20 northwest campuses from the unengaged campus list because of Tarleton BSM graduates. Currently, three Tarleton students are preparing to move to the northwest after graduating in May.

“This week I got to see the passion of the NCM students. I think it really

helped myself and our leaders see that there are people that live in a place with less believers that still have as much, if not more passion than we have here at Tarleton,” Wesley Fuller, a senior at Tarleton said.

“Our partnership with NCM has given my wife and I a path to do college ministry after I graduate in May. We found a calling to an unreached people group that we get to go and serve.”

Sharing ideas, students and leaders with one another to see an even greater impact in their ministry fields is something that has benefited both Tarleton and Northwest Collegiate Ministries. Tarleton BSM Associate Director Warren Ethridge emphasized its importance.

“Different things work in different places,” he said. “But just as scientists know that sharing their data helps advance the whole of science forward, collegiate workers must share the “what, why, and how” behind their practices for the advancement of the kingdom.”

In the last three years, God has blessed Tarleton with a harvest of students who are ready to go and to serve. Visiting the northwest and spending time on their campuses has encouraged Tarleton to be constantly wrestling in prayer for their friends in the northwest.

“Our NCM friends serve on hard campuses. Many of them have been doing this longer than us, they pray more than us, work harder than us, and they are not seeing the fruit that we are seeing at Tarleton,” Bullion said.

“It is very humbling. It makes me give thanks with more vigor and pray with more ferocity for the northwest campuses.”

A year and a half ago God began to answer the prayers of Portland State University NCM Director Miriam Rainwater, by giving Tarleton a vision to partner with Northwest Collegiate Ministries to reach the unreached of the northwest.

“I think the biggest way our partnership has affected me personally is knowing that God is preparing people to be future laborers in this city,” Rainwater said. “I have been in the northwest for four years and have been continually praying for more leaders who can reach the unreached campuses in the Portland area. When I drive by PCC Cascade or Marylhurst or Lewis and Clark or other unengaged campuses, I ask God “How long?” Spending time with several students from Tarleton this week who are planning to move to the northwest when they graduate gives me hope for the university students in the greater Portland area. God is sending laborers to precious fields!”

Morgan Little is a Go Now Missions campus missionary intern serving at the Tarleton State University Baptist Student Ministry.