



billy graham center centerline

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News from the **Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College**, Wheaton, Ill.

Building Bridges with Muslim Background Believers

Laurie Fortunak

For Muslim Background Believers (MBBs), their new Christian walk can be wrought with obstacles and challenges which collide with deeply-held cultural practices. Indeed, many MBBs have given up family, friends and way of life to follow Christ. In a recent survey of nearly fifty MBBs, 72% of those who came to Christ were the first ones in their family to place their trust in Jesus. Nearly 56% of the MBBs polled in North America came to Christ while in America. And the North American church plays a vital role in how MBBs come to view not only Christianity but the American culture as well.

"For the MBB, the church unlocks the North American culture," said Roy Ok-snevad, director of Muslim Ministries at the Billy Graham Center. "Yet the North American Church has often become so self-centered that it doesn't meet the MBB's expectations. We are the host culture and

it is our job to reach out to those in our midst. They are in our house. The responsibility lies with us."

The task of the North American Church to make the newly-converted MBB feel welcome is formidable, but desperately important. Statistics show that only 9% of MBBs worship in an ethnic church in their native language. That leaves 91% who are either worshipping in a typical English-speaking, white North American church or in a multicultural, English-speaking church. And it is indeed the job of those in the church to reach out to these immigrants who have left home, family and religion for Christ.

Keys to the MBB Heart

"MBBs are more social than westerners," said Tat Stewart, director of Persian ministries for the Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church. "When they go to church,



Muslim Background Believers meet in a church fellowship hall.

they aren't necessarily asking how good a sermon is or how wonderful the choir may be, they are asking, 'Is anyone here going to be my friend?' They are looking for signs that they will be honored and welcomed and that they will find acceptance."

Herein lies one of the main obstacles for MBBs who are living in a new land and trying to adapt to a new culture. Many MBBs see Americans as friendly, but not as "good friends," Stewart says. North Amer-

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A Brush with the Eternal: Selected Paintings of Ron DiCianni

Extended through July 2006

Five years after his initial exhibit, "Beyond Words," at the BGC Museum, Ron DiCianni has once again placed biblical events in contemporary settings in a way which makes scripture come alive. DiCianni has created dozens of biblically-centered paintings since his first piece, *Spiritual Warfare*, in 1992. With a background in illustration, he considers himself "a Christian cleverly disguised as an artist." As both an artist and an author, DiCianni has reached not only Christian audiences, but is making an impact in the secular market as well.

Since the exhibit opened at the Museum on July 1, 2005, more than 20,500 people have visited and more than 155 people have made either first-time commitments to Christ or have rededicated their lives to the Lord.

Museum Hours: Monday-Saturday, 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. • Sunday, 1:00-5:00 p.m.

For more information, call the Museum at 630.752.5909

www.billygrahamcenter.org/museum

at the museum...



Museum coordinator Christian Sawyer and his daughter admire one of DiCianni's paintings.



director's devotional

Lon Allison

December with Three Kings

Early in December I took my first visit to Memphis, Tennessee. I was there for the Proclamation Evangelism Coalition. The meeting ended early, and I was able to take a short tour of the city with a friend from the Olford Institute for Preaching.

Our first stop was Graceland, home of the king, Elvis Presley. To be honest, I have never been much of a Presley fan, but I've often been impressed by his near god-like status during his life and after his death. Graceland includes Presley's home and grounds, a museum and local hotels which all have some link to the king and his name. A memorial-like fenced area contains thousands of love notes, flowers and pictures from devotees. They even have an area with Presley's personal airplanes. The whole thing was a bit dated and over the top, but I was seeing Memphis' most famous site. Or so I thought.

From there we went downtown to Beale Street, home of "the blues." As we drove down the street, we saw B.B. King's large club and I was reminded of many of his songs. I nearly fainted as we passed the Gibson Guitar Center (as I am a guitarist myself).

My driver chose the third tour stop. We left the glitzy Beale Street and the downtown area. Only a few blocks away, all the glitz was gone. We had entered a poorer area of the city; I was about to be shown a third Memphis king. To my embarrassment, I had completely forgotten that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered on the balcony of a motel in Memphis. The motel has been made into a memorial and museum and from the parking lot I could see the balcony where one of America's greatest persons was tragically killed. It was there that I felt the full weight of my shame.

I had remembered Memphis for El-

vis and B.B. King, and had forgotten the much more important fact that Martin Luther King Jr. was killed there. The issues that Dr. King faced were far more important to the Kingdom of God than Elvis' jet or B.B. King's guitar were. Since that December day in that parking lot, I have been thinking quite a bit about this. I realize I am a victim of my "popular culture." It displays itself through a million images on television, banner ads on the Internet, billboards, magazines and more. These images seek to have me spend hours thinking about irrelevant matters. I must wage war against these trappings. As Neil Postman warned us in his 1980s book, we are indeed *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

My December in Memphis has also become a metaphor for a kind of spiritual warning. We are admonished in the scriptures to set our minds on things above, not

on things of the earth (Col. 3:2). While doing my ministry labors, many days I am far too focused on the temporal and barely aware of the eternal. This morning, I am finishing this article and finalizing a sermon. I must also find a tire repair shop to replace the bent rim which resulted from my daughter's spin-out in a snowstorm last night. These are good and even noble tasks. But are there not deeper realities within and around each task? Am I praying deeply and carefully as I examine the text I will focus on for my sermon tomorrow? Am I listening when the Holy Spirit reminds me that many people in our congregation will come to church tomorrow carrying their unique and perhaps crushing realities? Am I praying for my pastor, who is overwhelmed by family concerns? Do I know how afraid my daughter was when she had her spin-out in the snow?

Father, grant us the favor of seeing, hearing and praying life through your senses.

Lon J. Allison

Would you prayerfully consider partnering with the Billy Graham Center in stimulating global evangelism? At the Center, we are committed to fulfilling the Great Commission and advancing the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. We do this through teaching and equipping Christian leaders, distributing evangelism and mission resources and organizing evangelistic efforts. Please consider joining us. To make a contribution fill out the enclosed response card.



Sixth Annual Ethnic Workers' Summit

He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Luke 10:2

The United States is one of the most ethnically-diverse nations in the world. Christians today are increasingly seeing their own backyards as mission fields. This year, hundreds of Christian leaders, pastors, teachers and students will attend the sixth annual Ethnic Workers' Summit April 27-29 in Atlanta, Georgia. The theme is "Welcome to My House: God's Invitation to Ethnic America," and the seminars will address topics such as: the biblical mandate for ethnic ministries, multicultural challenges among youth, the role of ethnic churches in world missions and more. The Summit is part of the Ethnic America Network, a coalition of over sixty evangelical denominations and agencies that minister to the growing ethnic diversity in America. The office of Ethnic Ministries at the Billy Graham Center serves as the nerve-center in organizing the Summit. For more information on the Summit, log onto www.ethnicamerica.com.

Internal BGC @ Work

Nearly thirty years ago, two important resources were launched which now hold unique roles in the world of evangelism and missions. The Billy Graham Center Museum and the Billy Graham Center Archives together tell the story of evangelism and missions by North American non-denominational Protestants.

Billy Graham Center Museum

Each year more than 38,000 visitors come to the Museum to learn about the story of evangelism in North America, explore the life and ministry of Billy Graham, view art exhibits and encounter the Christian message of salvation. By featuring the Museum's collection of artifacts and graphic art, the staff work to make the Museum a place where people (1) come to see the story of American evangelism and (2) bring friends, family and seekers to learn more about following Christ and the importance of evangelism and missions. According to Museum coordinator Christian Sawyer, "We want it to be more than just a history of evangelism. We want it to be actively stimulating evangelism."

The Museum consists of three parts: the permanent exhibit which tells the story of evangelism in North America, beginning with Christopher Columbus and going through the ministry of Billy Graham; the temporary gallery, featuring rotating exhibits of contemporary and historical artwork on Christian themes by artists such as Robert Doares, Timothy Botts, Joni Eareckson Tada and most recently, Ron DiCianni; and the invitation to follow Christ, including both Billy Graham's video appeal and a 3D walk through the gospel.

Visitors end their tour with an opportunity to fill out a decision card. Since 1982, nearly 8,100 people have made either first-time commitments to Christ or rededicated their lives to the Lord.

Visit the Museum's website at www.billygrahamcenter.org/museum.

Billy Graham Center Archives

With the only archival collection in the world to focus solely on missions and evangelism by North American non-denominational Protestants, the Graham Center Archives serves a vital function by keeping the memory of these activities and values



alive. The Archives collections contain hundreds of thousands of documents, audio tapes, films and videos, photographs and more, gathered from organizations like the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Africa Inland Mission and OMF International and from prominent figures like Billy Graham, R.A. Torrey, Jim Elliot and Chuck Colson. There is also an extensive collection of papers of lesser-known but faithful workers. Archivists arrange and describe collections so the hundreds of researchers (students, genealogists, scholars, journalists, authors, filmmakers, pastors and laypeople) visiting the Reading Room each year can use, learn from and be inspired by the stories they research.

The Archives' website (www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives)



edu/bgc/archives) allows researchers to do preliminary work before their visit, view sample documents, browse online exhibits or read oral history transcripts. As one website visitor said, "When I found this website, it brought back a flood of wonderful memories. Thank you for keeping the memory alive." New collections are regularly opened to be used by researchers. However, according to director of BGC resources Paul Erickson, no one collection tells the whole story, and the strength of any one collection is intensified by all the others. "Together they tell the multifaceted story of the evangelical passion to share the gospel in urban and rural, international or domestic settings, whether as part of crusade evangelism, church planting, community development or any other ministry," he said.

The Internal BGC @ Work allows readers to "step inside the Center" and read about the exciting things God is doing. Each issue will focus on one of our eleven departments.

Day by Day at the Museum...

Lives are being changed at the Billy Graham Center Museum. The following is a testimony of what God is doing at the Museum.

Carol, a faithful follower of Christ, had watched for years as her teenage daughter slowly fell away from the Lord. While driving through Wheaton one day, Carol felt the Lord leading her to take her daughter to the BGC Museum. Carol turned her car toward the BGC and took her daughter into the Museum. The two stayed in the historical portion of the Museum where Carol asked her daughter to read aloud many highlights of evangelism in North America. After the two finished, Carol looked her daughter in the eye and asked, "Now can you tell me that all these great people of the faith, who have been around for centuries and have been declaring Christ's message, were wrong?" Carol's daughter began to weep. She rededicated her life to the Lord that day.

continued from page 1

ican culture and church life allow for the fleeting "Hello!" and the superficial greeting, "How are you today?" According to Oksnevad, this type of interaction does not transmit into friendship and acceptance for the MBB in the North American church. "We fail to understand that individuals are complex and have a history, a family," he said. "Instead, we approach MBBs like we approach marriage—as simply individuals without strong social ties. Sociologically, many MBBs are just hanging in limbo."

According to Dick Bailey, who has been working with Pakistani MBBs in the New York metro area for years, American Christians must understand the Islamic concept of *umnah*. For Muslims, *umnah* is a community of believers with strong social ties who develop deep and lasting relationships. "MBBs have left the Muslim *umnah* and are looking for a new *umnah*, people who will care for them, listen to them, receive them," Bailey said.

Oksnevad agrees. "MBBs look to those in the church as their surrogate family."

Understanding the MBB

Many MBBs, because of their cultural background, will not approach others in their church. They will wait until someone approaches them, and even then, many MBBs will see beyond superficial greetings and will be interested in seeing if the person truly does want to develop a friendship. And this, according to Bailey, will happen when Christians "aggressively approach MBBs and establish relationships with them." It will require patience and persistence. The best thing North American Christians can do to show MBBs they want to be friends is to either (1) invite them over to one's home or (2) invite oneself over to their home. This latter proposal is not seen as inappropriate, for the MBB may feel more comfortable in their own home. Above all, Bailey says, "Be persistent. Keep inviting them over. Keep calling them. If you invite them over, make sure you call them several times before the day arrives to make sure they are still coming."

MBBs Offer Blessings to the North American Church

The Church in North America would

do well, Oksnevad says, to reflect the Acts 2 Church, one where the church is the social center of a person's life. In the process of North American Christians reaching out to MBBs in their midst, these same Christians may be surprised at the blessings they will receive from the MBBs with whom they are fellowshiping. According to Stewart, MBBs offer two magnificent blessings to the North American Church.

First, since many are first generation Christians, MBBs have an incredible passion for God. "These MBBs will often have more heat than light," Stewart said. "They have a great zeal for prayer and know that prayers are answered."

Second, MBBs bring a window of the world to the church. "MBBs bring a global vision of the Church, a window to other cultures and a window to Islam," Stewart said. "They love to talk about their history and their country."

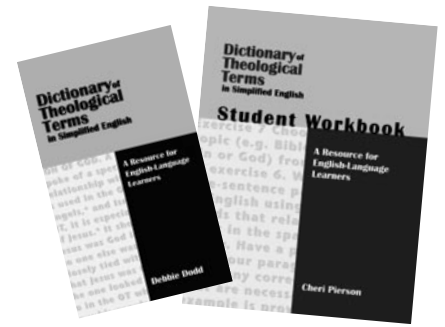
Reaching Out to MBBs in Our Churches

"Look around," Stewart says. "Focus on others, the strangers who are in your midst, the person who is different culturally. Ask them questions about themselves. Invite them over. American churches must invest relationally with them if we are going to make a home for them. You have to develop a heart connection."

As Jesus' hands and feet, we need to reach out to those in our midst who are from different backgrounds, culturally, ethnically and socially. With 39% of MBBs professing that their decision to trust in Christ caused terrible anger or grief to their families, we, as brothers and sisters in the Lord, need to come alongside them in true and genuine friendship. With the Holy Spirit in our midst and with great boldness and love, we can indeed resemble the Acts 2 Church.

Resources

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The Billy Graham Center stimulates global evangelism, partnering with Christian leaders to develop strategies and skills for communicating the gospel. The Center serves the church in evangelism and missions through leadership training, research, networking and strategic planning.

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