

OUR CHURCH IN THE UKRAINE

In the summer of 2009, I traveled with Mary Splawn, Debbie Hix, and Sara Hix Cunliffe on a mission trip to the country of Ukraine. Our goal was to explore future partnership opportunities for our church. For the majority of our 10-day trip, we assisted at a children's camp that was set up at the shore of the Black Sea. Mountain Brook Baptist Church helped to fund construction of the camp, and it was under development. The camp was in the rural town of Yuzhne, located about 45 minutes outside of Odessa. It was operated by Alexander Logvinenko. Alexander's father, Vasily, had been president of the Russian Baptist Union, and he was a personal friend of Dr. Moebes.

We had the honor of attending church in the larger city of Odessa where Alexander is preacher, the Golgotha House of Prayer. We also had the privilege of being accompanied by Oleg Turlac as translator. At the time, he lived in the bordering country of Moldova. He continues to be a Mountain Brook Baptist Church missions partner. Except for Oleg and one other person, nobody at the camp spoke much English.

One of my favorite memories of the trip was playing volleyball with the children at the camp. I learned Russian games and songs while on the beach at the Black Sea with the kids. It brought our small group great joy to help prepare meals with the church ladies in the camp. What a wonderful opportunity to come together as brothers and sisters in Christ, not only to serve those in need, but also to become a family with the people whom we were serving. Even though most children and adults at the camp spoke only Russian, it was almost as if there were no language barriers, because we were all there doing the same thing: showing God's love for us by sharing it with others. We played, laughed, and smiled with each other. The adults and children alike were so loving toward us that we knew what they were saying despite not knowing the exact words they were using.

A large portion of my personality lies in being as efficient as possible—finishing items on my to-do list, often being in a rush, getting easily frustrated with setbacks. This trip was a joyful reminder to me to slow down and experience the peace of simply witnessing the Lord's work all around us. We couldn't help but pause to thank God for His love frequently throughout the day. This trip to Ukraine was a very rewarding time of fellowship and servanthood.

Allison Rice



Above: Mary Splawn (leader) Allison Rice, Sara Hix Cunliffe, and Debbie Hix, with interpreter Oleg Turlac.

Left: The group is pictured with pastor Alexander Logvinenko, pastor of Golgotha Baptist Church in Odessa. This church was a partner for our mission effort in Ukraine.



AUGUST 18, 2019

WE'VE A STORY TO TELL
75th Anniversary Memories of Mountain Brook Baptist Church

A HEART FOR THE WORLD

Many churches claim to be globally-focused, but their commitment to the advance of God's kingdom only extends to the dollars they designate for a denominational missions program. I know this from my experience in other churches. But there are congregations who give money and also give time and talents to make an impact for Christ in places where Christians are in the minority. Mountain Brook Baptist Church is one of those congregations. Our global focus has been embedded in our DNA from many years of missions-engagement. I experienced this heart for the world on three occasions.

The first came as a result of my representing Mountain Brook Baptist Church at the trustee meeting of the Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary (ABGTS). This "seminary" is a consortium of Baptist institutions around the Asia Pacific Rim. Started some 50 years ago by the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, the schools chose to be self-determining starting in the 1990s. Many of my former seminary classmates began their teaching ministries as International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries at these institutions. When the IMB withdrew, these schools had to stand on their own feet, and Mountain Brook Baptist Church was the one church that stepped in to assist. Our church understood the need for supporting the advanced degree training of Asian students so that they might in turn train others from their cultures. At my trustee meeting of the ABGT board, I saw firsthand the impact our efforts have upon candidates for ministry from Korea to Thailand, and points in between.

A year later, I journeyed to Baguio City in the Philippines, to offer the Lide-Walker Lectures at the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary. I had assumed there might be a hundred or so attendees, so you can imagine my surprise when over five hundred came to participate. As I heard about the bold vision of the seminary from Dr. Armand Canoy and his staff, I was happy to hear that our church had made a significant investment to equip the campus to offer online courses that would reach students throughout the Philippines and beyond. (In 2018, Dr. Canoy visited Mountain Brook Baptist Church along with a faculty member, Dr. Michael Janapin. Dr. Canoy returned in June 2019. These visitors were able to stay in our White Missionary House.)



Above: Dr. Dortch with officials of Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary meeting in Taiwan in June 2012.



Left: Dr. Dortch, wearing a traditional Philippine shirt made of pineapple cloth, stands with leadership of Philippine Baptist Seminary and Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary.

Right: Dr. Dortch preaches at the Pingdu Christian Church on June 3, 2016. His translator is Ron Winstead, former missionary from Missouri who has assisted in all Mountain Brook Baptist Church connections with Shandong Province.



A couple of years later, I got yet another opportunity to travel with a small group of Mountain Brook Baptist Church folk to attend the 10th anniversary of the new sanctuary of the MengEn Church in Pingdu, China, a church that traces its roots back to the Southern Baptist Convention missions pioneer Lottie Moon. Mountain Brook Baptist Church had given significant financial support toward the new building's construction and so the church invited us to share in the celebration. Not only did I witness a day-long gathering of its members, most of them younger than 40, I also participated in a ground-breaking ceremony for a new church the MengEn Church was establishing in another part of the city. My perception prior to the trip was that China was a wasteland for the gospel, that the reigning Communist party was adamantly opposed to any form of public religious observance. Consequently, I was shocked when the Party official for that district of China not only attended the anniversary and groundbreaking, but spoke in front of the crowd about his deep gratitude for the positive difference the church was making in the city. Visits to other churches in the northeast part of China confirmed the same. The Holy Spirit is up to something that bodes so well for the cause of Christ in that strategic country and Mountain Brook Baptist Church gets to be a part of it!

I had read about the explosion of Christianity in the Third World, particularly Asia, Africa, and South America. Now, I had seen for myself what can happen when a body of believers takes seriously the Spirit's call—in places like Pingdu, Taipei, Baguio City, and Mountain Brook. Trust me when I say that our church loses nothing when we invest ourselves in these places and more. We only gain from our investment, and, more importantly, so does the cause of Christ.

Doug Dortch



Above: Doral Atkins, Mountain Brook Baptist Church treasurer, and senior minister Dr. Dortch deliver a cash gift to Pastor Wang Xia of Pingdu Christian Church. The money was to assist with building a new congregation in the city. Ron Winstead (right) is the missionary translator who has worked with Mountain Brook Baptist Church since the 1990s.