The World Religions and Global Cultures Center Issue 3, July 2014

CONNECTIONS

A Word from the Director

The ministry of the World Religions and Global Cultures Center has progressed beyond its founding six years ago. The Center has focused primarily on relating theological education to the mission of local churches, and some 125 students have earned certification in teaching world religions—a requirement of which has been to teach two sessions in a church.

The Center has also held on-campus workshops on topics such as Islam, Mormonism, and Scientology. In addition, the Center has coordinated visits to Hindu and Buddhist temples, Islamic mosques, Mormon churches, and a whole host of other worship spaces.

During the last several months the Center has sponsored four events. In Buies Creek, the Center hosted a discussion with one of the Mormon Church's highest-ranking officials, as well as a luncheon for Saudi Arabian educators to compare different methods of teaching religion. In Raleigh, the Center facilitated a visit to the Buddhist temple and also held a lecture on Sharia law at Campbell University's Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law.

I want to thank the many church members who have made visits with us, invited us into your churches, and contributed financially to the Center's work.

Please continue praying for us, and if you have not yet invited a staff member to present in your church, please consider doing so. Various religious groups are growing all around us, and the Center offers presentations to help churches both understand and reach out to these neighbors.

—Dr. George W. Braswell, Jr., Senior Professor of World Religions and Director of the World Religions and Global Cultures Center

Voices Needing to be Heard

Anyone familiar with the modern religious landscape of America knows that Christians today frequently encounter diverse religious groups, different worship expressions, and unfamiliar faith language in our society. If such has been your experience, take heart! There is a superb ministry organization at work every day to build bridges of dialogue and understanding between the various and growing religious cultures of our time—and this is the World Religions and Global Cultures Center of Campbell Divinity School.

The Center has been a leader in stepping forward to promote knowledge and understanding among the many faith groups in our region. Through its many efforts, the World Religions and Global Cultures Center is fulfilling a great role in the education of ministry students and the mission of the church in our age. The world is made better by this ministry.

Join us in this mission through your prayer support, financial undergirding, or better yet—your active participation in the work of the Center!

—Dr. Michael G. Cogdill, Founding Dean and Professor of Christian Ministry

Partnership with the Beckett Center

Imagine a Christian woman with her head covered while visiting a mosque for Friday prayer for the first time. She is a student in a course offered by the World Religions and Global Cultures Center through The Beckett Center for Christian Understanding of Islam in Richmond, VA. Not totally comfortable in this setting, she is surrounded by Muslims who fill the women's separate prayer room. Suddenly, "Ouch!" She registers a sharp tug on a portion of her hair that has escaped her *hijab*. "*Haram*! *Haram*! [Forbidden!]," reprimands a female Muslim teenager, dressed in a "properly adjusted" head covering.

The Beckett Center expresses appreciation to Dr. George W. Braswell, Jr., and his staff for making this educational opportunity available in the Richmond area and for granting teacher-trainer certificates. Nine students have enrolled in the program, and they hail from as far away as western Virginia and come from many different backgrounds. Teachers, accountants, ministers, and students are represented among the group.

Each student will respond to his or her experiences differently, but each experience offers the opportunity for Christian growth. Students earning the teacher-trainer certificate are preparing to become leaders who will help their churches both discern the spiritual challenge of Islam and respond in Christ's love.

—Julia Killian, Director of The Beckett Center for Christian Understanding of Islam, Richmond, VA

A Pastor's Appreciation for the Center

The world has come to our back door and we find ourselves in a global neighborhood as never before. Never has there been a time when the ministry of the World Religions and Global Cultures Center is more needed and appreciated. Founded by the vision and passion of Dr. George W. Braswell, Jr., whose energy and wisdom is unbounded, the Center is an uncommon offering to meet the landscape of our increasingly pluralistic society.

Through the leadership and teachings of Dr. Braswell,

Dr. George Braswell (left) and Dr. Bill Slater (right)

Wake Forest Baptist Church has benefited greatly in gaining a better understanding of this religious plurality. His gift for teaching, along with the many interns trained by the Center, is an invaluable gift to any church seeking to broaden its understanding of its neighbors of many faiths. The Center is a truly unique entity among the many divinity schools in our area and one which sets Campbell University Divinity School apart as being on the cutting edge of the world in which we now find ourselves.

—Dr. Bill Slater, Senior Pastor of Wake Forest Baptist Church, Wake Forest, NC

A Layperson's Appreciation for the Center

After growing up in a small town in Nash County, I moved to Raleigh and came in contact with many people of different faiths. Some years ago, Dr. George W. Braswell, Jr. spoke on Islam at my church, Hayes Barton Baptist, and I have been a dedicated follower of his ever since.

Guided by Dr. Braswell, I have visited Buddhist, Hindu, and Hare Krishna temples; synagogues; a Christian Science church; and have met followers of these and many other religious groups. Dr. Braswell's dedicated and knowledgeable leadership at the World Religions and Global Cultures Center is so important since our world is becoming smaller and there is a need for Christians to understand and respect those who hold different beliefs.

Dr. Braswell is my dear friend and I admire his dedicated leadership at the Center. I also hold a strong belief in his vision for the continual spread of knowledge and understanding of the many religious groups in this area.

—Liz Bradshaw, Member of Hayes Barton Baptist Church, Raleigh, NC

Divinity School and World Religions Center Host Saudi Arabian Delegation

In January, Campbell University Divinity School, along with the World Religions and Global Cultures Center, hosted a group of Saudi Arabian educators. Participating in the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program, the cohort visited selected American universities to learn more about educational policies in both public and private post-secondary institutions.

Dr. George W. Braswell, Jr. facilitated a discussion between the Saudi educators, Campbell University Provost Dr. Mark Hammond, and representatives from the Divinity School and the Religion Department. The dialogue provided a unique opportunity to discuss interfaith education and instruction in their respective academic arenas.

Following the meeting, a luncheon was provided so participants could continue their dialogue and exchange of interfaith ideas and understanding.

—Lisa Grissom, M.Div. '14, Co-Editor

Mormon Apostle Visits the Center

Dr. George Braswell (left) and Dr. Jerry Wallace (right), President of Campbell University, stand with Elder Cook (center), one of 12 elders who are eligible to be the next leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Islamic Cleric Lectures in World Religions Class

The Islamic Association of Raleigh

In October 2013, Dr. George W. Braswell, Jr., his World Religions class, and various friends from local churches hosted a discussion on Sharia law with Imam Sameh Asal and Fiaz Fareek, representatives from the Islamic Association of Raleigh.

Imam Asal explained that in Arabic "Sharia" means "the path, the way, or the road." He noted that Sharia law is a way of life that determines Muslims' relationship with God, dictates their conduct with others, and provides directives for their moral behavior.

Following a question-and-answer session, graciously provided by Imam Asal, the class expressed appreciation for their guests by hosting a reception, which allotted time for informal conversation regarding Islam and Sharia law.

—Lisa Grissom, Co-Editor, M.Div. '14

World Religions Class Visits Buddhist Temple

On November 9, 2013, nearly seventy-five people toured the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Temple in Raleigh. Led by Dr. George W. Braswell, Jr., the group included approximately ten Campbell University Divinity School students, forty members of local churches who were taking Dr. Braswell's World Religions course, and twenty-five other members of Triangle-area churches.

After first meeting the temple hostess and two venerable nuns, our group took a tour of the facility, which included an introduction to Buddhism and a history of the Fo Guang Shan Temple. The temple chef and staff then treated us to a buffet lunch featuring various Chinese vegetarian dishes, including lo mein, spring rolls, stir-fried vegetables, and pumpkin soup. Afterwards, the venerable nuns led us through a sacred tea ceremony and explained the significance of each of the ritual's components.

Reading and studying world religions is a valuable exercise, but it cannot compare with experiencing firsthand a religion's worship center and talking to both leaders and laity. It was truly a day that will be treasured by all participants.

—Chris Allen, M.Div. Student

Visiting Scholar Reflections

During the 2012–2013 academic year, I served as the first visiting scholar of the World Religions and Global Cultures Center. I was not entirely sure what this position would entail when Dr. George Braswell first offered it to me, but I was sure it would be an adventure.

From August to May, I collaborated with Dr. Braswell and the Center staff both to maintain and to expand the Center's work. Although I devoted most of my energy to crafting newsletters, I also had the

opportunity to assist with several projects, including a Mormonism seminar and an appreciation luncheon for leaders of various Triangle-area faith groups.

In addition, I spent many hours visiting with adherents of different religions in their respective worship spaces, where I learned about their convictions and shared some of mine as well.

As expected, my experience at the Center was nothing short of an adventure. The more I reflect on my tenure as visiting scholar, the more I realize it prepared me to take new adventures, to cross all kinds of boundaries in Christ's name—and for that I am extremely grateful.

—Jonathan Altman, Co-Editor, M.Div. '11

Earning a Teacher-Trainer Certificate

Dr. George Braswell presents Amy McPherson (left) and Libby Johnson (right) with teacher-trainer certificates.

What a blessing it has been to earn a teacher-trainer certificate through the World Religions and Global Cultures Center! I could not have imagined how much I would gain from such an experience. By studying Islam, I have been able to teach what I learned to my church family.

Understanding Islam and Muslims is so beneficial for ministry today. Completing the teacher-trainer certificate has allowed me to have a better understanding of how to minister respectfully to those of different faiths. In understanding their beliefs, I am able to share with them who Jesus is and who he is to me.

—Libby Johnson, M.Div. Student

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