

Missionary Trainers Take the Next Step

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Richmond, VA

One hundred forty-five missionary trainers from around the world met for three days in early January, at the International Missionary Board of the Southern Baptist's Missionary Learning Center (MLC) outside Richmond (VA) for their annual conference. Sponsored by The Next Step Partnership In Missionary Training (NEXT Step) and hosted by the MLC, participants from three cooperating groups—local churches (the *Assembly*), mission *Agencies*, and training institutions (the *Academy*), met to show, listen and demonstrate the latest programs and practices in effective missionary training.

The purpose of the NEXT STEP partnership is to provide a forum for partner organizations to explore and develop ways for improved cooperative training efforts. Its vision statement seeks to inspire kingdom cooperation:

The Next Step Partnership envisions a quality of training and development that promotes and contributes to an emerging movement of spiritually alert and mature cross-cultural workers who effectively facilitate the birth and

growth of authentic churches in every people group.

Dr. Richard Lewis, director of training for United World Mission (UWM), has served as the President of the NEXT STEP for the last three years.

This year's conference was designed to help participants "make contacts" and broaden existing relational networks among trainers. Following a Pre-Forum Workshop, "A Leadership Encounter with Jesus," participants enjoyed hearing the personal spiritual journey of Dr. Ken Blanchard, noted author of the blockbuster business best-seller, *The One-Minute Manager*, this year's keynote speaker. Participants spent the remainder of the conference attending interactive workshops led by key practitioners in four interest tracks: Basic Training, Cross-Cultural Training, Spiritual Formation, and Leader Development.

One direct impact of The Next Step Partnership has been in catalyzing several working partnerships in pre-field training. Dr. George Schultz, director of UWM's Center for Intercultural Training (CIT), a cooperative training center in Union Mills, NC, presented an update on the benefits emerging from such a cooperative program that allows multiple agencies to send their pre-field candidates to their year-round program. Dr. Steve Hoke, director of People Development for CRM, reported on another of the Next Step spawned joint programs—the EFMA-IFMA LeaderLink missions leadership training program, which since 1996 has sponsored week-long workshops for over 600 field missionaries in Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and North America.

Participant evaluation was overwhelmingly positive to this year's conference. First-time attendee, Dr.

Steve Wilkes, professor of Missions at Mid-America Baptist Seminary observed: "I was pleasantly surprised at the emphasis placed on character in today's missionary training."

Furloughing IMB missionaries from Brazil, David and Ramona Hodges, were enthused with their experience at Next Step: "The world of Christian missions needs the cross-pollination provided by this meeting's stimulating content and inspiration. A must for all Christian missions trainers!"

Dr. Steve Sweatman, new president of Missionary Training International, commented: "The value of a group of missionary trainers meeting together to challenge, stimulate and encourage each other cannot be overstated. This conference was such a wonderful blend of relationship building, networking and professional development."

Jim Lauer, director of Training and Development for Wycliffe Bible Translators, responded: "Because this was my first time to attend NEXT STEP, I didn't want to set my hopes too high. However, I found that being able to rub shoulders with so many colleagues who are also trainers of missionaries proved to be much more valuable than I could ever have expected. This conference will be a 'must' on my annual conference of events from now on."

The Next Missionary Training Forum will again be held at the IMB in 2004, though the dates have not yet been nailed down. The planning committee will be sending out dates soon so you can mark it down on your calendar.

For information on The Next Step Partnership feel free to contact:

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