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FROM THE SEMINARIES: MBTS cancels graduation ceremony, in-person summer classes; Scarborough students preach during spring break

by SBC Seminary staff, posted Friday, March 27, 2020 (one month ago)

Midwestern Seminary cancels graduation ceremony, offers summer classes online

By T. Patrick Hudson

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP) -- In moves directly related to the safety of the Midwestern Seminary community amidst the coronavirus pandemic, President Jason Allen announced that the school's May 1 public graduation ceremony will be canceled, and that all summer classes will be offered in a synchronous technology format.

Allen described himself as having "a heavy heart" in canceling the spring commencement exercises, which had been scheduled for May 1.

"We know how hard our students have worked to accomplish their goals of earning college, graduate, and post-graduate degrees in preparation for ministry," he said, "but, again, we must yield to caution in defending against the effects of this deadly virus. This decision falls in line with our cancelling all other campus events for the semester."

MBTS had already moved classes online for the remainder of the spring semester.

"First, and foremost, on our minds right now is the safety of our students, faculty, staff, and their families during this most unprecedented time in our nation's history," Allen said. "It is with prudence that we feel the need to extend offering our courses via synchronous technology through the summer term."

As with many institutions of higher learning, Allen explained, Midwestern Seminary and Spurgeon College are continuing to prepare students for ministry via livestream and other online formats. He added, "Students can still continue to access learning from our incredible faculty even in these most difficult times.

"While we're currently not able to offer students our typical on-campus, in-class experience, I want to assure anyone desiring to pursue their theological education that Midwestern Seminary and Spurgeon College are both fully operational offering our full slate of summer classes."

Looking to the future, Allen said that, prayerfully, the institution will be fully up and running for the fall semester.

To register for summer courses, visit <https://www.mbts.edu/summer20>.

Regarding the cancellation of the public graduation ceremony, Allen noted that all degrees will be awarded in absentia, but graduates will have the option of crossing the stage to receive their diplomas in the December 2020 or May 2021 graduation services.

"We are extremely proud of what appears to be a record number of graduates at Midwestern Seminary this semester, and we want them to have the opportunity to receive their diplomas in person," Allen said, "So, if they desire to 'walk' in a future graduation ceremony, we'd love for them to join us," Allen said.

One other cancellation of note, associated with the recent news that the SBC Annual Meeting has been canceled, is that the SBC leadership class and the Crossover evangelism class will not be offered. Students needing information or details about those course cancellations should contact the Registrar's Office at registrar@mbts.edu.

Scarborough College students spend spring break preaching

By Alex Sibley



FORT WORTH, Texas (BP) -- Everything was new for David Lawm during this year's "Revive This Nation" (RTN) evangelism effort. A bachelor's student at Scarborough College, Lawm, a first-time RTN participant, had never taken a flight by himself, nor had he ever gone out to evangelize. But while preaching at a Burmese church in Kansas City, Kan., Lawm learned that God can use even first-timers like him to impact eternity.

Lawm was one of two dozen students to participate this year in RTN, an annual effort of The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary deploying preachers to churches across the country to lead revivals during spring break. This year, March 6-15, these preachers collectively saw numerous decisions made, including more than a dozen professions of faith.

RTN occurred before states began to implement various travel restrictions to attempt to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

"To my knowledge, no seminary or divinity school in the nation has a program like Southwestern's RTN, where students use their spring break to preach and lead churches in revival and revitalization," said Matt Queen, L.R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism at Southwestern Seminary. "This past Monday, students who participated in RTN met via Zoom to share how God worked through them. I only wish Southern Baptists could have been a part of that online meeting to hear the amazing ways that God used their evangelistic preaching and personal witness to see sinners saved, saints refreshed, and churches strengthened."

Lawm preached a total of four sermons, and following his second, two students tearfully gave their lives to Christ. Lawm spent much of his time in Kansas City with the church's students, many of whom believed in God but struggled too much with doubt to fully surrender their lives to Him.

The night before preaching his final sermon, Lawm felt especially burdened for those students who were still "in darkness," he said. So, he spent the entire night in prayer, pleading with God on behalf of these students, that God might do something miraculous in their lives.

The next morning, Lawm preached his fourth sermon, and though he extended an invitation, no one responded during the service. He did, however, invite people to speak to him after the service if they still wanted to make a decision. Following the service, 10 students came to him, and all 10 gave their lives to Christ.

"God is still saving people," Lawm reflects. "God is still saving sinners, and He could use people like me also, who is not very good at words, if we humble ourselves and follow Jesus, follow what He commanded us.

"If we do what we have to do, what we're told to do, I think that God can still use us."

Thomas White, a Master of Divinity student who preached in Green Bay, Wis., went nearly the entire week without seeing any response to his sermons.

"Every night, I felt like I preached my heart out; I felt like the Spirit was moving, but I wouldn't see any response," he said.

The night before the final service, White earnestly prayed that God would save at least one soul.

"And sure enough, that night, I preached on the parable of the talents and the importance of us needing to share our faith with others ... and that night, there were two people who came forward for prayer, and one person who came forward to accept Christ," White said. "It was just amazing to see the Lord answer my prayer in that regard."

Graham Griffin, a Master of Divinity student preaching in Kersey, Pa., did not see any professions of faith, but said the Lord blessed his ministry in other ways. The church's pastor's wife used to sing with her parents, with her mother playing the piano. Her mother now suffers from dementia and can no longer sing and play the piano simultaneously.

After Griffin played the piano in the first service of the revival, the pastor's wife realized that perhaps he could provide the accompaniment for her and her parents to perform later in the week. Griffin did so, and the pastor's wife and her parents sang together for the first time in years.

Afterward, the pastor's wife tearfully hugged Griffin. He recalls her words: "Thank you for doing that, because this may be the last time I get to sing with my parents."

Griffin said this was a "huge blessing."

"I definitely see it as God placing me there -- a pastor and musician at the same place, where I could bless them in that way," he said.