

**Outgoing BCM Director Andy Weems Applauds Work of**

**CMBA Churches with College Students**

As Andy Weems concludes five years of Baptist Collegiate Ministry (BCM) service with Columbia colleges and universities, he quickly applauds the support of the Columbia Metro Baptist Association and the involvement of its churches with students.

Andy is leaving the South Carolina Baptist Convention staff to pursue Clinical Pastoral Education through Palmetto Health Baptist, in Columbia, as a means to open the door to chaplaincy in what he calls “a wide variety of settings.”

“I came to South Carolina in January 2013 to work with Columbia campus ministry,” Andy says. “The Kingdom growth through our campuses would not have been possible without the support of the Columbia Metro association, especially regarding administrative and programming assistance. A huge part of our programming expenses were funded by the association. Even through the leadership transition of (associational directors of mission) Bill Dieckmann to George Bullard, these men bent over backward to be supportive of me and collegiate ministry.”

Looking back on the past five years, Andy says more churches have gotten involved with students; students are understanding that their personal mission field is wherever God has them at the moment, and there is Kingdom growth occurring through relationships with international students.

“When I came on board, most of our BCM students attended only 2-3 churches in Columbia,” Andy says. “Now, our students are attending and serving within 12-15 of our Columbia area churches. They aren’t just sitting in a pew in a big church setting. Many of the students are involved with smaller membership churches serving as worship leaders, in music ministry, and in student ministry. I’m so pleased to see young people get plugged into a church for service rather than sitting in a pew. We have 3-4 students looking at career ministry, seminary, and future ministerial roles. I credit that to involvement with local Columbia churches, and the churches encouraging the potential in these students.”

Andy says the main thrust of collegiate ministry is to reach students with the gospel, with understanding the family of God, and missions.

“Every student that comes to campus – our desire is to meet them, bring them into the family of God, disciple them, and send them out to mission,” Andy says. “I tell them that their mission field is the campus – that their field is wherever God has them – right now it’s this campus.”

Still, there’s cause for concern.

“We are meeting more and more students who have no faith background – not every student grew up with Vacation Bible School and with a church home. Many others know a lot about Christ, can tell you the Bible stories and know Scripture but don’t have a relationship with Christ.

“When you talk with them about faith, you hear a self-centered approach to faith,” Andy says. “They will say, ‘I didn’t feel comfortable at church,’ or I didn’t like that style of worship’ and so they’ve made faith about themselves. I hope that we have been successful in reaching students with the gospel and getting them out of the pew and into service to others.”

Talking to Andy Weems almost always leads to his passion for international students, and he is quick to celebrate what’s happening in partnerships between Columbia churches and international students.

“We started a weekly luncheon for international students,” Andy says. “Attendance during the traditional school year has grown to about 175 per week, and a third of those stay after the lunch for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. During the summer, we continue the lunches and attendance remains at about 75 per week.” ESL classes occur on other days of the week; Shandon Baptist has been instrumental in a Sunday class for students.

Those luncheons, held at the University of South Carolina (USC) BCM location, begin relationships with international students that often lead to gospel conversations, and none of it would be possible without churches that provide the lunch. Andy specifically thanked Beulah Baptist Church, Spears Creek, and Pineview Baptist Church – smaller membership churches – whose members bring and supply food.

“I support churches sending people on international mission trips, but BCM’s ministry to internationals is a way to reach the world with minimal investment,” Andy says. “Many of the lunchtime students are from the Middle East, India, China, and Indonesia, where 99 percent of the population is Muslim. Once they complete their education, these students return home where they will be in positions of leadership and government. They take the gospel with them and make a change in their country.

Though the luncheons are at USC, students from Benedict College and Columbia College come over each Thursday to participate and help. The relationships built often lead to internationals participating in BCM’s Tuesday night worship.

“We had a student from Iran accept Christ, and that’s huge for someone from Iran,” Andy says. “This student knew the consequences and price they will pay back home for the decision.”

Churches have also gotten involved with internationals by helping them find transportation, and as church members invite students to join in family celebrations of Thanksgiving and Christmas.

“There’s a statistic that says 85 percent of international students come to the U.S. and never get invited to visit an American home,” Andy says. “What’s interesting is that most students will say ‘yes’ to an invitation because they want to learn more about our culture. I’m thankful that we’ve seen church members – from many different churches – step up and building one-on-one relationships with students – relationships that go beyond a student’s graduation.”

Whether it’s serving South Carolina, North America, or international students through BCM, Andy Weems has been around this ministry for 33 years. He’s also served in church planting and on church staff.

“I cannot think of another ministry where believers have more potential to impact lives for eternity,” he says. “Baptist Collegiate Ministry is so valuable to the work of churches and the Kingdom.”

The Columbia BCM serves USC, Benedict College, Columbia College, Allen University, Columbia International University, and Midlands Tech. Andy Weems is a Georgia native. He and his wife, Lisa, have five children and attend Crossroads Church in Columbia.