

Spring Hill Baptist distributes nets and hope in Ghana

BY BRIAN MELLOTT
Record Correspondent

Five Spring Hill Baptist Church members went to western Africa last month to distribute nets and work on church planting in and around Yendi, Ghana.

Steve Hess, Dana Hodges, Steve Nethery, Robbie Talbert and Brian Mellott traveled more than 5,700 miles by car, plane and bus from Ruckersville to Ghana on Feb. 7. The group teamed up with churches from Portsmouth and Tappahannock to form an 11-person international mission team supporting the Baptist General Association of Virginia's (BGAV) "More Than Nets" program.

"More Than Nets" is an agreement between the BGAV and the Ghana Baptist Convention to help reduce occurrences of malaria in the northern Ghana town of Yendi and surrounding areas. The goal of the program is to distribute 100,000 Long Lasting Insecticide Nets (LLINs) in the area, as well as educating the population as to proper use of the nets and overall prevention of malaria.

"The people in the villages really appreciate the LLINs that are given to them in the name of Jesus Christ," Nethery, Spring Hill's senior pastor, said. "I appreciate followers of Christ giving sacrificially so the nets can be given to help prevent malaria."

In addition to distributing nets, the teams go out to other, often remote, locations to plant new churches, encourage established churches, train leaders and help share the Christian faith throughout Northern Ghana.

The team often traveled for hours by truck over washed-out roads to reach villages that, in some

cases, were literally at the end of the road. The team gathered members of the villages together and a team member would share a message and a church would be formed.

"It was just amazing to me how these leaders would step forward to start this church, sometimes after having been saved only a month or two earlier," Hess said.

Revelations like these encouraged the team despite long days with little relief from the nearly 100-degree temperatures. The team was also encouraged by regular phone calls, texts, social media interactions and, of course, prayers from family and members of Spring Hill Baptist.

Bill Fekishazy, a deacon at Spring Hill, said he believes that "when the church sends people out on mission, the entire church goes with them through prayer, monetary contributions and any other support they may need. Through today's social media and communication networks we were able to stay in touch with them throughout their entire journey. What a blessing!"

Christine Alley, Spring Hill's youth ministry lead, agreed.

"As these five ventured out, they had a community of prayer support going out with them," she said.

During the 10 days of ministry work in Ghana, the team distributed nearly 1,000 LLINs, most of them to a large Muslim town west of Yendi, where the team built a strong relationship with members of the community.

"The people of Ghana are so warm and welcoming," Talbert said. "It was a blessing to be able to work alongside them to spread the word of God



PHOTO BY BRIAN MELLOTT/FOR THE GREENE COUNTY RECORD

In Ghana's village culture it's not uncommon for men to take more than one wife. When women accept Jesus Christ and begin to practice Christianity they often leave their homes and struggle to make ends meet. A woman above is working at a sewing shop. These are often started by women themselves and become a way to make money for the women.

while also helping to curtail the spread of malaria through the mosquito net program."

During the time, there were more than 700 adult confessions of faith, dozens of baptisms and dozens more leaders trained and encouraged. To top it all off, the team helped to plant 13 churches and Spring Hill's mission offerings enabled the team to arrange for all of these new churches to be given a set of drums as part of Rev. Emmanuel "Muss" Mustapha's new initiative, Vision 2029, to raise 2,000 new churches in the next 10 years. The drums are a big part of this, helping villages to engage in their own style of worship, an experience which defies explanation.

At the end of the day, the team discovered that people are generally the same the world around.

"It makes no differ-



PHOTO BY BRIAN MELLOTT/FOR THE GREENE COUNTY RECORD

Above, Spring Hill Baptist Church member Dana Hodges visits with village members in Ghana.

ence what color our skin is, which race we are, or what class we are labeled," Hodges said. "We all need to be loved and forgiven."

More information on Spring Hill Baptist Church is at springhillbaptist.org.



PHOTOS BY BRIAN MELLOTT/FOR THE GREENE COUNTY RECORD.

Top, the children in Ghana love the camera. This boy hammed it up while his village gathered to hear testimonies and start a new church. Bottom, Spring Hill Baptist member Steve Hess gives his testimony to a village in Ghana.

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