Running with the Message

By

Bruce A. Howell,

General Director of the Foreign Missions

2 Samuel 18 shares an embarrassing story where a runner aspired to run. One problem; he didn't have any message. But, he wanted to run so desperately. His leader cautioned, "Why would you run? You have no message ready." But finally he agreed, "What's the harm. Run!" The runner, exhausted, reached his destination. Still one problem; he was sent, but had no message. Pathetically, he stepped out-of-the-way to make space for the runner with the message. How sad; a willing heart, ready feet, sent, but coming up short with the Word.

The multi-faceted ministries of the Foreign Missions Division have one mission in mind. We want to see Jesus announced, and exalted in every tribe and nation. Therefore, we "send the message, train messengers, produce self-supporting, self-propagating, self-governing churches; establish fellowship in truth and holiness."

Training messengers has long been a primary focus in our global ministry. You have helped through building Bible schools, assisting with PIMs, and our Ladies Ministries have long been avidly supporting foreign students. Hundreds of thousands of men and women have been equipped to reach their world. We send the message and train the messengers. Every precaution is taken to preserve apostolic doctrine. Every runner races with a clear message!

One of the newest and most exciting ministries in our division is the work of the Global Education Committee, and is called the Global Association of Theological Studies (GATS) and the Global University of Theological Studies. Our desire is to meet the needs of an advancing global society and prepare runners for effective ministry in the 21st century. We are raising the standard of ministerial excellence throughout the world.

Our association potentially brings together over 160 Bible schools globally. Lynden Shalm, Regional Director of Asia, described GATS as: "the most important project to impact the Foreign Missions Bible schools in at least three decades." Our endeavor provides an everimproving, cutting-edge curriculum on several levels: certificate, diploma, associate degree, and bachelor degree. A partially standardized core curriculum is required. This allows us to maintain influence with Bible schools and national churches even when they become nationalized or no missionary is in the country. In the midst of global diversity GATS fosters uniformity through basic Bible curriculum. Nearly one hundred courses are to be developed and translated into major world languages.

An online and offline distance education program will reach and teach students in every nation of the world, speeding the spread of the Gospel. It allows us to run the distance. "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:9). I like *The Message* paraphrase: "The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive, a living knowledge of God oceandeep, and ocean-wide." My every waking hour is focused on achieving that—every prayer time pleads for it to come to pass—that the earth will be filled with people who know the Lord.

The purpose of GATS is to preserve the message, provide the methods, and produce the ministry needed to propagate the mission. A user-friendly web site has been created: http://www.gatsonline.org. The site allows our global friends, even outside our association, to download resources and faculty development materials free-of-charge. A secured portion of the site provides textbook resources for our schools. A replica site in Spanish is in the planning stages and will be uploaded as progress unfolds at http://www.agetenlinea.org. Translation of curriculum is presently done by GATS in Spanish, Portuguese, and French. Membership schools continue the translations in other national languages. A basic faculty development program called *Advance Educators Series* targets better training of our instructors. Lessons are being written almost every month and uploaded to our site. This global education program is under the direction of Lynden Shalm, our Acting Coordinator of Education and is coordinated by Jim Poitras (GATS@upci.org). Each of our six regions has a GATS regional representative who is a proven educational specialist.

Admittedly, this is a gigantic project. It will take years to accomplish. It is not an obstacle to climb, but an opportunity to advance.

We have not run the full course, but we are off to a great start. See you at the finish line. And, yes, we are running with the message!