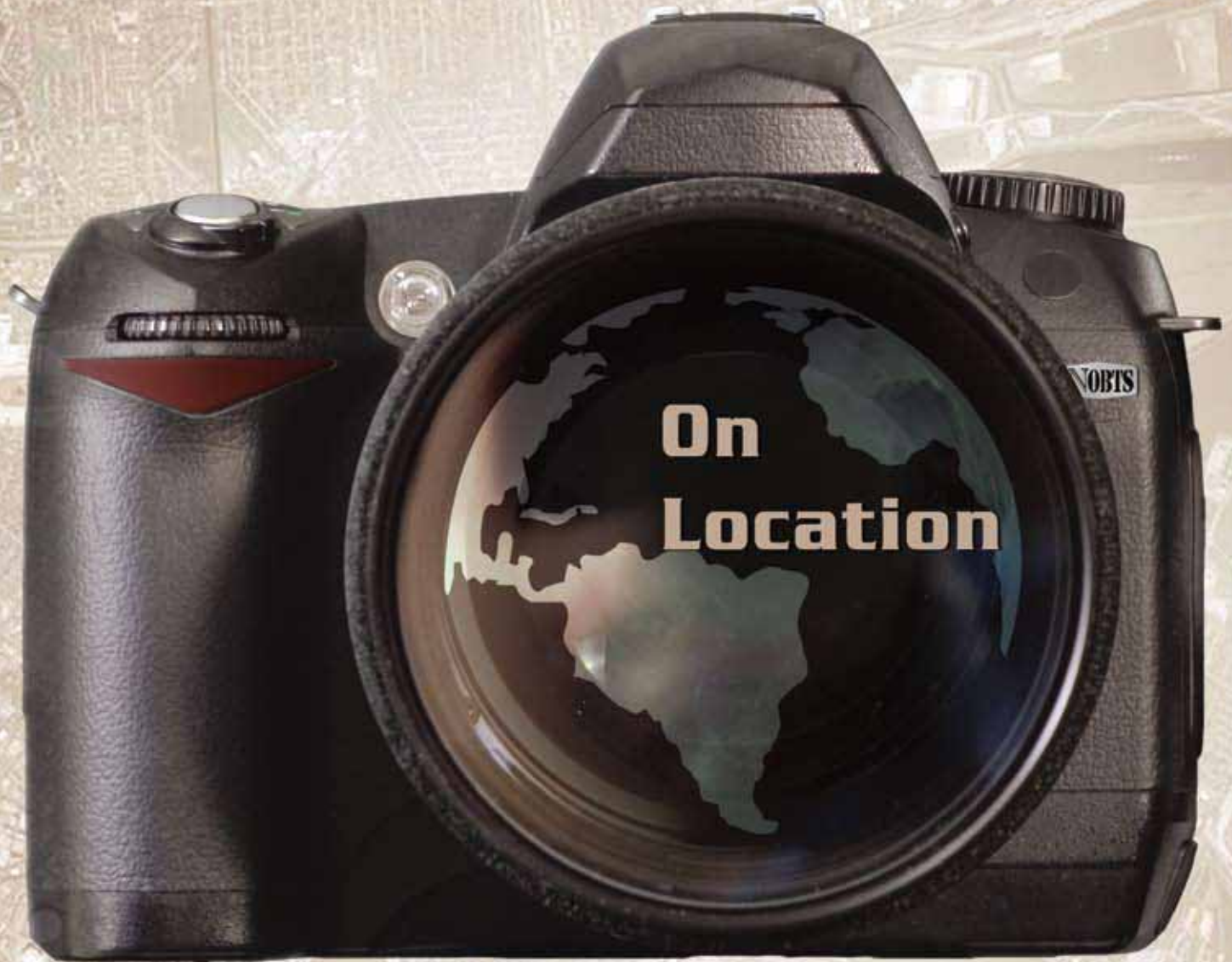


# VISION

SPRING / SUMMER 2007



**STUDENTS** WITH A **MISSION**

NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



Photo by The Portrait Gallery

**Dr. Chuck Kelley**  
NOBTS President

### Miracle on the Mississippi

Against impossible odds, God is fashioning a miracle on the Mississippi and we are a part of it. The question facing us is shifting from “Can we recover?” to “How much better can we get than we were before the storm?”

This has been a huge, costly battle. In many ways we are ahead of schedule. Much remains to be done. As the dust of battle clears a bit we are growing more confident that we are not simply coming back. We are getting better. All that has happened is a result of the intervention of God in this School of Providence and Prayer.

### Physical Recovery

We are more than 90 percent done with the basic restoration process. Primary projects underway now include recreational facilities, two faculty homes, Price Center expansion and Providence Guest House, along with odds and ends and various finishing touches. At every possible point we have attempted to improve as we repaired. The campus has never been more beautiful, and it is steadily becoming more functional and complete.

### Student Recovery

Most schools in town are running about 50 to 75 percent of their pre-Katrina numbers. We are doing better than that. A year ago this month we had 1,575 New Orleans based students. Today we have 1,590 New Orleans based students. To quote an ancient Hebrew expression: Wow! It looks like we will finish the year within 400 or so of our all time record enrollment! This is a pleasant surprise to us. God is calling out the called to come to New Orleans to prepare for ministry.

### Faculty Recovery

We lost 11 faculty members in the year following Katrina. This was one of our most difficult blows. However, I am delighted to tell you that Dr. Lemke and I have been and are in hiring mode. We started with some new professors this fall. This spring the Trustees elected four more people to our teaching team. They are:

**Dr. Mark Tolbert**, Associate Professor of Evangelism and Pastoral Ministry and Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program

**Dr. Dennis Phelps**, Professor of Preaching and Director of Alumni and Church-Minister Relations

**Dr. Tony Merida**, Assistant Professor of Preaching and Dean of the Chapel

**Dr. Rex Butler**, Associate Professor of Church History and Patristics

In addition to these, we are thrilled to have Dr. Mike Edens who recently joined us as a presidential appointee. He is serving as the Associate Dean of the Graduate Faculty and Professor of Theology and Islamic Studies, a new discipline we are adding to our curriculum. Dr. Edens comes to us from several years of living in the Middle East. Before that he lived in Egypt for many years. In addition to these we are in conversation with several other candidates who are likely to be here by the fall. When we are finished, this faculty will be larger and inclusive of more disciplines than we had before Katrina.

### Financial Recovery

We will never be tempted to endure a major disaster as a fund-raising event. Our eventual Katrina repair bill will be at least \$55 million. This does not include income lost and the special expenses necessary to

## **Against impossible odds, God is fashioning a miracle on the Mississippi and we are a part of it. The question facing us is shifting from “Can we recover?” to “How much better can we get than we were before the storm?”**

continue operations after the storm. With insurance, the gifts of Southern Baptists and others, and untold volunteer labor, we are down to looking for the last \$1.2 million of that amount. This is a miracle!

While we are facing some serious financial challenges, we are still standing on hallelujah ground. We are dealing with at least four different possible donors for endowed chairs. I cannot recall ever having that many possibilities in play at the same time. Scholarship money continues to come in without much promotion, both for spending now and for endowment for the future. To quote an ancient Hebrew expression: WOW!

### **Atlanta Property Sale**

Speaking of causes for rejoicing, by God's grace we have sold our Atlanta property for \$8.4 million! We think this is a very good price. We are going to finance it ourselves and make a little more interest money. This means we won't be receiving the bulk of the sale for a while, but we are rejoicing that the property sold so quickly and for such a good price! At least some of the funds will help us continue to get this campus in shape for the 21st century, but much of it we hope to put in an endowment to underwrite the costs of Atlanta and our whole extension center system. The Trustees will create the Columbia Drive Baptist Church Education Fund to honor forever the congregation who gave us this property. This sale makes that gift of property the largest gift in the history of the seminary. WOW!

### **New Library Planned**

I am thrilled to tell you the Trustees approved the building of the first great theological library of the 21st

century! Other new projects include the restoration of Providence Guest House and new apartments as funds become available.

### **Budget Plan**

Our next big challenge concerns our budget. We need to do more than recover. We need to kick it up a notch. For two or three years before Katrina, we had the largest number of students, but the third or fourth largest budget. How did we manage to keep a strong competitive edge with that kind of fiscal environment? We have been world-class experts at controlling costs, and we've proven the benefits of doing so. However, there are only so many costs you can control, and we now live in an environment in which a certain amount of spending is required.

The bottom line is that we must raise more money and increase our annual operating budget. All of us, beginning with me, must participate in the Annual Fund. Its purpose is to control the cost of theological education for our students. Our future depends on it.

### **In God's Grip**

I close by reminding you that each of us, and this school of Providence and Prayer, are in the hand of God. Nothing can pull us out of his grip! It was only a year and a half ago that the Trustees discussed whether or not to come back to New Orleans. We wondered if we could fix the campus. Look at it now! We wondered if students would come back. They are here!

The God who brought us this far will see us all the way home. But our destination is not getting back to the place we were before the storm. Our destination is a place we have never been before, a higher level of excellence, a more effective institution. For the hand gripping us is the hand of a redeemer. He doesn't simply repair our brokenness. He makes us stronger at the broken places than we were before the trouble came. As Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5:10:

“After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”

To quote that ancient Hebrew expression once more: WOW!

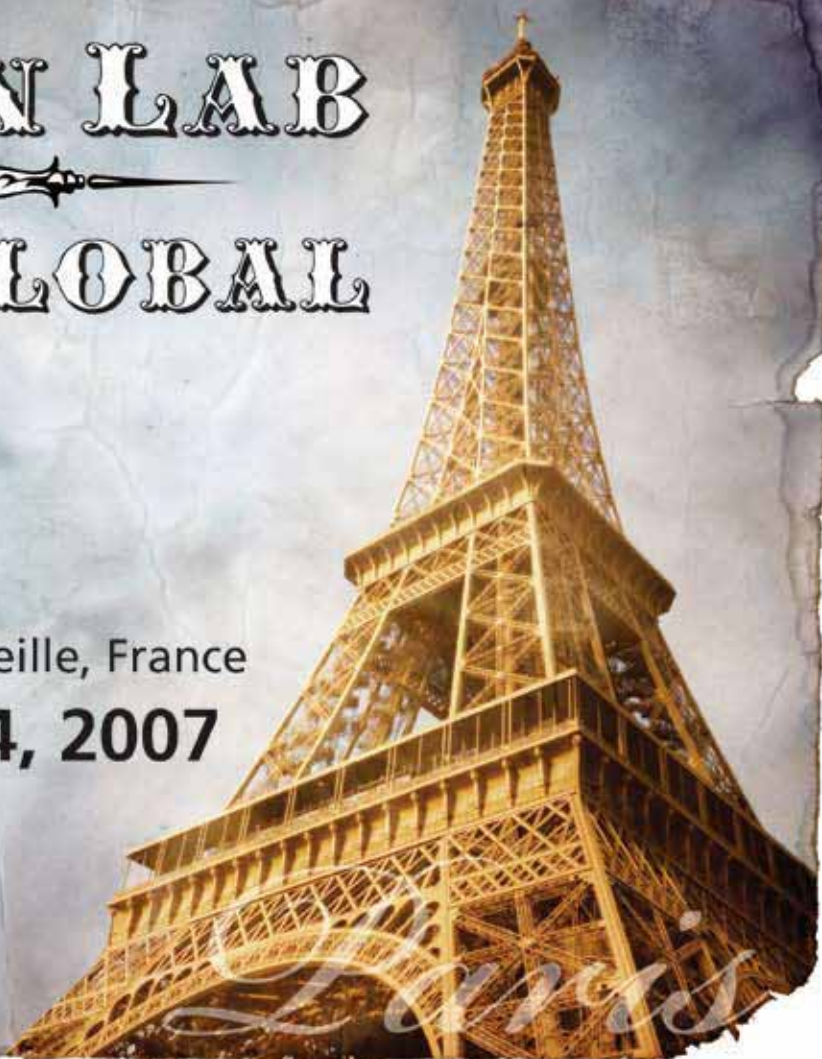


Dr. Chuck Kelley

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# VISION

MAGAZINE

SPRING/SUMMER 2007

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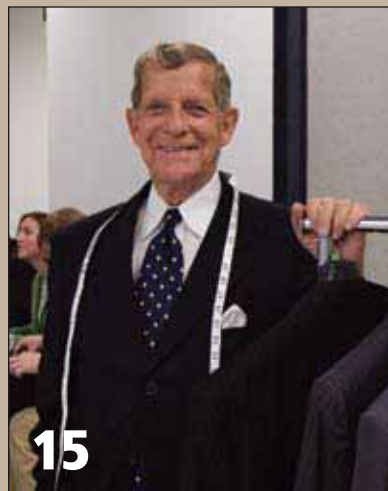
## On Location

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Passion for missions and ministry runs through the entire NOBTS family. Students are on mission and “On Location,” sharing the gospel as they go.



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After Katrina, the only light  
between downtown New Orleans  
and Slidell was this steeple.

May it ever be a...

*beacon*  
*of* **Hope**

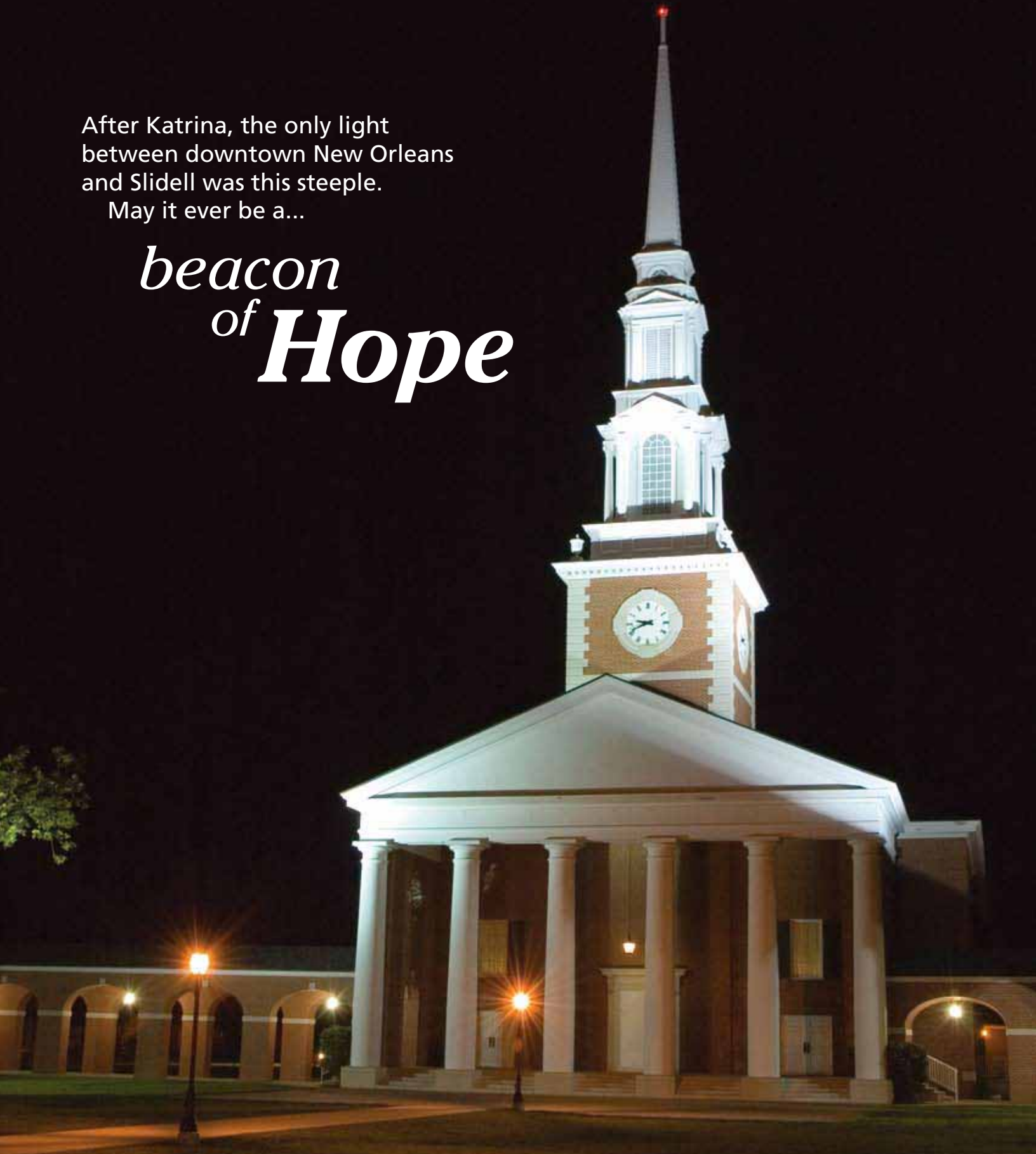


Photo by Jimmy Cole



The steeple that served as a beacon of hope in the city following Hurricane Katrina once again graces the top of the Seminary's Leavell Chapel. The original steeple, weakened during the storm, was removed in July 2006.

Workers completed the three-day installation of the new steeple on March 29 – 19 months to the day after Hurricane Katrina. A small crowd of seminary students, professors and staff members cheered as the crane operator gently eased the 46-foot spire section into place.

In the days following Hurricane Katrina, seminary officials worked diligently to restore power and illuminate the steeple. Their desire was to offer a symbol of hope in a hurting city. The illuminated steeple provided the lone point of light in a sea of darkness – the only light for miles.

“During the darkest hours in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the steeple shining in the night was a beacon of hope, a reminder that God had a future for us,” said NOBTS President Chuck Kelley. “To have that steeple back in place shining in the night once again is a reaffirmation that that future has started.”

Stretching 170 feet above the NOBTS campus and visible from points throughout the city, the steeple gives testimony that the city is slowly recovering. And for the seminary family, the steeple is an enduring witness of hope rooted in Jesus Christ.

The new steeple is an exact visual replica of the original steeple. The internal design, however, is much stronger than the original. It features an improved structure which meets Louisiana's post-Katrina wind load standards.



Visit [www.nobts.edu/Publications/News/NewSteeple.html](http://www.nobts.edu/Publications/News/NewSteeple.html) for more photos

## Location Location Location

**N**ew Orleans Seminary students have always participated in ministry – sometimes traditional, sometimes groundbreaking. As the Seminary has grown and expanded, the look of ministry has changed but the focus has not. A passion for missions and ministry runs through the entire NOBTS family.

Whether studying on the main campus or at one of the Seminary's 17 extension centers, students are busy about Kingdom work. The stories and photos that follow highlight a few of the ways our students are serving as they learn and learning as they serve.

In many ways these are typical students. They are living out the Great Commission. They are sharing the gospel. They are strengthening the church. They are on mission and "On Location."



## On Location New Orleans

By Christi Gibson

**R**ob and Greg Wilton have a passion for Tabasco sauce, the Saints football team, and God's call on their lives to make disciples of all nations. They are two brothers with one mission. That's why, once a month, they throw a party for Jesus at the Prytania Theater in New Orleans.

Their love for New Orleans started when they were children. Their father, Don, earned his master's and doctoral degrees at NOBTS and served as an evangelism professor (1989-1993) before becoming the pastor of First Baptist Church, Spartanburg, S.C.

Rob returned to New Orleans in 2004 with his wife Annabeth, to pursue a Master of Divinity degree specializing in Expository Preaching. That first year he knew he was called to the seminary and to be a missionary in the city, but not much beyond that. He spent many weekends speaking in churches around the country as the local Upward Basketball™ representative. In his spare time, he and Annabeth explored their new home. God had already given them a burden for the people of New Orleans, but it was not until Hurricane Katrina forced them away that they began to see exactly what that burden meant.

Greg visited Rob and Annabeth in that first year, joining their exploration – and renewing his own love for the city. He was serving as a summer missionary in Malaysia, when he began to experience his own burden for the young adults of New Orleans. When Hurricane Katrina forced Rob and Annabeth to South Carolina, and Greg returned there to work in the local church, they were reunited. They soon formed Ignite Mission, a speaking ministry which now supports their work in New Orleans. Both brothers are now studying at NOBTS, working for the seminary's MissionLab, and speaking at churches, retreats and camps.

In the summer of 2006, they became involved in leading a weekly worship service for all of the volunteers coming to the city to work in clean-up and construction. As they witnessed the excitement of believers coming together from all over the United States, they sought a way to generate this sort of excitement for Jesus year round among the young adults who live and work in New Orleans.







Photo by Boyd Guy

**Rob Wilton**

In September 2006, Ignite Mission launched HIMnI, a monthly worship gathering for young adults in the New Orleans area. On the second Thursday night of every month, they take over the Prytania Theater and, in their own words, “get together with a bunch of people and throw a party for Jesus.”

It is a party with a purpose – connection. Connection to other Christians. Connection to the local church. Connection to Christ. Rob and Greg do the speaking, while Annabeth is in the



praise band with Andrew Ogea, another NOBTS student. God has brought other equally gifted and passionate young adults to serve on the team as well.

The HIMnI team has not been called to start another local church in New Orleans, but to strengthen all of the local churches. And Rob recognizes the limitations of HIMnI. “If a movement of God is going to happen in New Orleans, it’s going to happen through the local church,” he said. “HIMnI can’t save New Orleans.”


When a disconnected young adult comes to the HIMnI party, he or she connects with another young adult from a local church and, through this relationship, becomes connected to the church, and is drawn to Christ. When this happens, HIMnI is successful. As long as it achieves this success, the Wiltons will work with their team to keep it alive. But they pray a “prayer of destruction” over their ministry regularly, begging God to destroy it the minute it fails to fulfill its purpose.



Photo by Boyd Guy

The HIMnI worship experience is cutting edge – employing media and the arts to proclaim Jesus. The Wilton brothers have called for a different approach to reach young adults in New Orleans, one that employs the city’s unique culture to draw them to Christ – rather than trying to put them in a “box.”

Greg likes creating visuals and meeting people, so he took a box to the park and area universities. He didn’t succeed in putting many strangers into his box, but he did make a few friends. The resulting video, *ILike to Put People in a Box*, is now available at [www.himni.org](http://www.himni.org). It illustrates the underlying concept of HIMnI: no one responds well to being forced into anyone else’s mold. But people are looking for relationships. They do want to connect. They will come to a party – even one for Jesus.

The Wiltons do recognize that the name of their ministry is ungrammatical. The word is a sort of colloquialism which expresses an intimate, two-become-one relationship with Jesus Christ. It perfectly expresses the HIMnI team’s desire for the young adults of New Orleans. 



# On Location

## Florida

By Michael McCormack

**W**hat do you do with an unemployed politician? In America where politics is a source of both reform and comic relief, some would simply make a joke about it.

With hindsight, Tim Ireland realizes that God can do much with an unemployed politician. In Ireland's case, God led him to begin the Christian Leadership Council (CLC), a Christian organization that exists to impact Florida's Legislature with the gospel.

In November 1998, though, being an unemployed politician was no laughing matter for Ireland. After eight years as a state representative in Florida and four as the state's treasurer, Ireland suddenly found himself without a job. The rush of political life screeched to a halt.

"November 3, 1998, was the day Tim Ireland entered a desert," Ireland said. "That day marked the beginning of change in my life."



Tim Ireland



The next three years were like a personal wilderness wandering for Ireland. God placed people in his life who pointed him toward Jesus Christ. A friend gave him a Bible, and he read it feverishly.

"I thirsted for it. I hungered for it," Ireland recalled. "It was like a memo from God to Tim Ireland. Subject: Your life."

Ireland wrestled with the implications of following God. Through losing the election and suffering the loss of his mother just nine months later, Ireland learned to fully rely on God. Through these hard times, Ireland also began to sense God's call on his life.

"I knew that he'd called me, and I knew that if I showed up, he'd open a door," he said. "It wasn't about me – it was about him. It wasn't about my weakness – it was about his strength."

That desire to serve God faithfully led Ireland to enroll in seminary in the summer of 2001. Ireland knew he wanted to receive ministry training, and New Orleans Seminary's Graceville, Fla., extension center was a perfect fit.

"I could not have gotten a seminary education had it not been for an extension center," he said.

The journey was exciting for him. He was walking in obedience, and it was good. The only thing he hadn't bargained for was that God would call him back to the Florida Capitol in Tallahassee.

"I'll go anywhere you send me, just don't send me back to Nineveh," Ireland recalled saying. "Nineveh was the state capitol."

For Ireland, the state capitol reminded him of his old self. How could he serve there in such a different capacity? God used a capitol prayer rally in 2001 and a supervised ministry class project to calm Ireland's fears. Soon, Ireland began to look at the capitol in a different way.

"What if we in the church would look at the capitol differently? That's a lost village filled with an unreached people group," he said. "If we would view it as a lost village, we'd know exactly what to do. We'd

Photo by Boyd Guy



**Florida Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp at Capitol Fellowship Breakfast**

send some missionaries there.”

That’s exactly what Ireland did when he founded the Christian Leadership Council.

In the Council’s first ministry effort, Ireland simply offered members of the Legislature a Bible – much like his friend did when he had just lost the election. And with the legislators who accepted the Bible, Ireland shared his testimony.

“God used that credibility of past experience,” Ireland recalled. “I could relate to them.”

Since that first effort in 2002, the Christian Leadership Council has grown into a year-round ministry to Florida’s legislature. The CLC organizes a biannual, large-scale event that brings nationally renowned Christians to speak to the legislature. Past speakers include apologist Ravi Zacharaeus, Richard Blackaby, Miami Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga and Rick Warren.

The Council also leads weekly Bible studies for House and Senate members. The Bible study times offer legislators a venue where they can let down their guard and truly fellowship.

“Vulnerability is key to spiritual growth, but vulnerability in politics is a death nail,” Ireland said. “We don’t pray about legislation. We pray about things that really matter.”

Ireland said that about half of the Florida Senate attends the Bible studies, along with about a third of House members.

Ultimately, he desires for other states to start ministries to their capitols similar the Christian Leadership Council. In several states, such initiatives are already taking shape.

What’s more, representatives from Haiti’s legislature recently contacted Ireland and asked him to help them launch a similar ministry to their own legislators. Ireland said that partnership will develop in the coming months.

Whatever the case, Ireland insists that ministry is no more complicated than just being available.

“If you just show up there on a regular basis, God will bring hurting lambs in need of his love and saving grace,” he said. 📷

**For more information on the Christian Leadership Council, go online to [www.christianleadershipcouncil.org](http://www.christianleadershipcouncil.org)**



**Tim Ireland meets with Haitian leaders.**



**Tim Ireland, right, with Ravi Zacharias and Florida Reps. Baxely and Stargel.**



# On Location

## Missouri, Mississippi, Louisiana



Photo by Boyd Guy

By Christi Gibson

**K**im Bunton Googled her way into a seminary certificate program.

She had entered the “empty nest” season of life, and knew that she wanted to become better equipped to minister to women in her Rock Port, Mo., community. She held a bachelor’s degree in education, but was somewhat intimidated by the prospect of going back to school after 28 years. After testing the waters with a computer course at a local community college, she searched the Internet for “Women’s Ministry Programs” and found NOBTS. She is taking advantage of both academic and online opportunities to take classes.

Julie Stewart is a minister’s wife, who serves in Olive Branch, Miss. as a part of the women’s ministry at Longview Heights Baptist Church. She desired to finish the education she began when her husband was a student at Southeastern Seminary, but the choices open to a busy mother of young children, actively serving in her church, were few. Then she found out about NOBTS, and the combination of online and workshop opportunities brought her dream into reach. She has completed the work for her Basic and Advanced Women’s Ministry Certificates and hopes to continue working toward a Bachelor’s degree in the future.

Deb Douglas had a hunger to know how to more effectively reach and equip women to serve the Lord. She completed both women’s ministry certificate programs, and through academic workshops, extension center work and directed study, she eventually earned her Master of Arts in Christian Education. Deb is currently enrolled in the Professional Doctoral program at NOBTS and is serving as Women’s Ministry Strategist at The Life Journey Church in Bossier City, La., a NAMB-sponsored church plant.

Three women – with locations in Missouri, Mississippi and Louisiana – all found a way to pursue a seminary education because New Orleans Seminary is not limited by its location. All three have been challenged and have grown in their ministries through the opportunities offered by the program.

Kim has realized that she has something to offer to

others for Kingdom Growth and is actively serving God through women’s ministry in her community. “My confidence has been restored following a depressing season of hurt and conflict in the church,” she said.

She has also encountered a bonus she did not expect. “My ministry in the community has expanded greatly as my school enrollment seemed to be news in our small town.”

Julie has been strengthened in her gifts of leadership and administration by the program, but has particularly appreciated the instruction in interpersonal relationship skills and lay counseling, which she put to use immediately in her ministry.

Both Kim and Julie appreciate the balance of online classes and workshops. The online classes allow for a longer period of time for processing and responding to the class material, while the fellowship and networking with like-minded women and immediate feedback from instructors available in the workshops is invaluable.

Deb loves the intensity of the workshops. “They are perfectly designed for the away student,” she said. “I love being prepared when I come, getting my mind full to overflowing, and then going home to analyze and sort through what I have learned so that I can apply it in my church setting.”

“Not only has the program equipped me to serve, sharpened my skills, and encouraged me along the way, but the professors have ignited in me a deeper passion for service,” Deb added.

She has been particularly inspired by Dr. Rhonda Kelley’s grace and wisdom, Chris Adams’ commitment to service and energy for service, and Dr. Jeanine Bozeman’s personal challenge and investment in her life and ministry.

NOBTS has long had a reputation of providing an opportunity to pursue academic excellence in the atmosphere of familial warmth and acceptance. But according to these three women, the essence of the NOBTS experience has spread to its branches – academic workshops, extension centers, and online education. ■



Julie Stewart and Kim Bunton

Photo by Boyd Guy



# On Location

## NIGER

By Katie Nalls

**G**reg and Laura Sharpe are a typical seminary family. They spend their days studying the languages and their afternoons and weekends getting to know people in their community in hopes of sharing the Gospel. However, the languages they are studying are French and Hausa and the community where they minister is a dusty Hausa village in Niger.

Greg is a part of the “2 + 3 program” at NOBTS. This Master of Divinity track gives missions students the opportunity to finish their degree plan while serving overseas with the International Mission Board. Students take 62 hours of course work on campus in New Orleans and 30 field-based hours in conjunction with their IMB term.

NOBTS currently has nine 2 + 3 students serving with the IMB. The couple and their 10-month-old son, Noah, work among the Hausa people of West Africa where Greg is a business facilitator and church planter.



“In the 2 + 3 program, you learn by doing, and everything is designed to help you put your book learning into practice right away. You learn quickly that the Christian faith cannot be static, and that the story of the Bible, the story of God making His glory known in Christ in every nation, is a

story that you can be a part of,” Greg explained.

During their term, the Sharpes will live in several areas of West Africa to work with the Hausa and help other IMB missionaries obtain visas, housing, vehicles, etc.

“This frees up a lot of time for the other missionaries to be able to completely focus on their ministry,” Laura said.

Building relationships in the community is a major part of their work.

“We go out and walk around and greet people – just looking for opportunities to share,” Laura said.

Greg spends much of his time developing relationships with Hausa men and Laura recently started a Bible study



with a new Hausa believer. Young Noah has helped Laura get to know the older women in the village. These women love Noah and call him “husband,” the same name affectionately used for their own grandsons.

The Sharpes are encouraged by the increasing prayer support for the Hausa. They believe that because of these prayers the Hausa “are becoming more and more open and expressing a desire to learn of God’s truth,” Laura said.

The Hausa are the largest ethnic group in West Africa. They are predominantly Muslim and many also follow African traditional religion. They are an influential people, both politically and religiously. Reaching them with the gospel could be key to reaching other West African Muslim peoples.

“Our favorite thing about our work among the Hausa people comes when we have plunged into our Bibles and into their culture and then God gives us some truth about Jesus Christ that really connects with them. It may be after we’ve attended a traditional Hausa wedding and we can share about Christ’s love for his bride, the church, or it may be the way Christ taught us to pray, which is very different from the way that they pray in the mosques,” Greg said. 📖





# On Location

## IRAQ



By Michael McCormack

**F**or many seminary students, graduation is a commissioning service. It marks a deployment from ministry training to on-site ministry-in-action. For U.S. Army Chaplain Rick Brunson (D.Min 2006), though, deployment came long before graduation – with stops in Germany, Kuwait and Iraq.

Brunson's path to the doctor of ministry program at New Orleans Seminary was fairly typical. He'd already earned a Master of Divinity degree in 1993. For the next six years, Brunson served as a local church pastor. In 1999, he began ministering as a chaplain in the U.S. Army Reserve along with his pastoral duties. And that same year, he entered the Doctor of Ministry program at NOBTS.

The way Brunson finished his degree, though, is remarkable.

"My plan was to do 'mission' work with soldiers on a reserve basis while continuing to pastor full-time," Brunson said. "September 11, 2001, changed the scope of my ministry."

When the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks took place, Brunson was actually sitting in his final seminar class at NOBTS. That moment changed the direction of Brunson's ministry from the reserves to active duty.

"I believe God was preparing me for active duty Army chaplaincy for the three years leading to 9/11," he said. "I just didn't know it at the time."

Shortly thereafter, Brunson stepped back from his studies to become an active duty Army chaplain. Stationed first at Fort Benning, Ga., and then in Kaiserslautern, Germany. His work there, which included training soldiers to lead effective worship services, served as the basis for his ministry project.

Two years later, in May 2005, he was transferred to the 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment in Baumholder, Germany.

While stationed in Germany, Brunson patiently worked on his D. Min. ministry project. By the time Brunson was transferred to Baumholder, his project was almost complete. In July 2005, he finished and submitted it for review.

"With four copies safe and sound at the Doctor of Ministry office, I knew I could focus on my pending deployment and family," he said.

One month later, when Hurricane Katrina came ashore, nothing in New Orleans was "safe and sound." Brunson feared his ministry project was lost in the storm. Thanks to Dr. Reggie Ogea, Brunson's project was retrieved from New Orleans and reviewed by the committee.

"By the time I was informed that my report had passed and I could graduate in December, my bags were packed and I was on my way to Kuwait," Brunson recalled.

Brunson's commanding officer was sensitive to his desire to walk in the December 2005 graduation, but it was impossible. Graduation had to wait. Brunson was on his way to the front lines.

His brigade was stationed at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, and was instructed to be ready to deploy anywhere in the Middle East at a moment's notice. Brunson and the other chaplains worked hard to ensure the soldiers were spiritually ready for such a deployment.

"I assumed the pastoral leadership of a contemporary worship service and attendance soon grew beyond our facility's seating capacity of 230 people," he said. "Before leaving Kuwait, the chaplains in our camp were conducting 12 weekend worship services and six evening Bible studies each week."

"The Lord blessed the ministry and the one greatest personal experience was baptizing eight soldiers in Kuwait," he continued.

Brunson also took it upon himself to arrange for morale gifts to be sent from organizations in America to soldiers in his brigade. As gifts began pouring in, Brunson anticipated





**Chaplain Rick Brunson**



**“The Lord blessed the ministry and the one greatest personal experience was baptizing eight soldiers in Kuwait.”**

**– Chaplain Rick Brunson**

around \$10,000-worth of morale items. He was wrong.

“I underestimated the generosity of Americans,” he said. “Over the next year I received more than \$105,000 in morale items for my soldiers.”

Fast forward to May 2006, and Brunson was ready for some rest and relaxation. First on his list was graduation, so six months into his deployment, Brunson and his wife, Donna, flew to New Orleans to participate in the first graduation ceremony at the main campus since Hurricane Katrina.

After some time with his wife and three children, Brunson was rested and ready for the final six months of his deployment. Little did he know his brigade was now deployed to Iraq’s Al Anbar province and not Kuwait.

“I served as the only chaplain on my Forward Operating Base, taking care of more than 750 soldiers, two companies of Marines, and hundreds of Department of Defense contracted civilians,” Brunson said. “In all, I was the pastor for more than 2,000 people.”

Once again, Brunson received an abundance of morale-boosting gifts from the States. But this time, the gifts were even more significant.

“Our area of Iraq was remote and dangerous. Our small PX would often go weeks without basic necessities and supplies for the soldiers,” he recalled. “I appealed to more organizations and in time had better-stocked shelves of basic necessities and little luxuries than the PX.

“We called my stash of free morale ‘Chappy’s Company Store.’”

Besides being a pastor to soldiers at the base, Brunson would go to “Operation Points” in the region to minister there as well. Brunson said his ministry could not be confined to just “inside the wire” when so many soldiers were scattered across the region risking their lives. To show his support and concern, he would often go on patrols.

“When I made the spiritual and morale runs, I would usually spend the night and go on a patrol or two with my guys,” he said. “That involved putting on 50 pounds of body armor; walking along the Euphrates River, through villages, across flooded fields; and fording waste-deep irrigation ditches in extreme heat.”

Being there with the soldiers was incredibly dangerous, but his presence had a powerful impact. In all, Brunson baptized three soldiers in Iraq.

A final component of Brunson’s service in Iraq involved three humanitarian medical missions in the Al Anbar region. During the medical missions, his group provided health screenings, treatment and medicine for more than 1,000 children and adults. Again, his morale sources stepped up to provide more than \$6,000 in toys, shoes and school supplies for the Iraqi children.

“By the end of the year, I was physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausted,” Brunson said.

Brunson expects to be deployed to Iraq again before his service overseas is finished. Until then, he and his family remain in Baumholder, Germany, ministering to the 1-6 Infantry. Though ministering in a combat situation is difficult, Brunson remains committed to pastoring his flock, his brigade, wherever they go.

“Without a doubt, this deployment will rank among the most difficult 12 months of my life,” he said. “And the ministry was the most significant and rewarding I will ever have – until the next deployment.”

