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Lawrenceville's World Thrust International has global focus

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Special Photo
Bill Boerop is the president of World Thrust International, which aims to bring the Christian faith to every corner of the world.

Bill Boerop is a well-traveled man, to say the least. Born in Rotterdam, Netherlands, raised in Belgium, having lived in Paris as a young student and traveling almost every continent as an adult, Boerop knows a thing or two about different cultures. This missionary has a global vision, and that's to bring the Christian faith to every corner of the world. As president of World Thrust International, that is exactly what he plans to do. All he needs is the help of local churches, which is the reason he founded the organization in the first place.

Q: Tell me about World Thrust International. What is its purpose?

A: I founded it in 1984, because in the previous 20 years, I had discovered that very few local churches know the joy of being a part of what God is doing around the world. I was doing a lot of church relations work for a missionary organization for 20 years. I recruited missionaries, spoke to young Christians at universities, things like that.

My job was to find local churches that do the sending and provide prayer support, financial, moral and emotional support. During this time, I saw that not many churches knew this joy. The pastor is the key, so I started concentrating on contacting pastors. Right away, I saw there was a communication problem. I may speak English a little differently than most people here, but the real problem was conceptual. The world is bigger than just the local community.

I thought since I had a hard time communicating that, the best way was to show it. So I said, "Why don't we do a seminar for pastors and church leaders - the Biblical basis of making the gospel available around the world?" The first time we tried it, we only had one person attend. We sent out 1,000 invitations. I always say we conduct the most unpopular seminar. We ask churches to give their most valuable sons and daughters to mission work, and then support them.

We have found a tremendous demand overseas. We do this overseas, and to be honest, we have found a better receptiveness to this overseas.

Q: Why do you think that is?

A: Consumerism. We here in the States are absorbed by getting, getting, getting.

Q: You were born in Rotterdam, Netherlands, and your parents were missionaries in Belgium. How did you end up headquartering WTI in Lawrenceville?

A: My family went through the second World War. We lost everything we had in Rotterdam. We moved to Belgium when I was a teenager. I worked with my parents (missionaries) for three years and saw that I needed further training.

I went to Paris, and I met my wife, Joy, who was from China. We came to the States for further study, and we both finished college with intent to return to Europe. But doors there had closed. There was a hesitancy to take me back, feeling that I would bring too much American methodology with me. I went to graduate school to go into teaching. I became an area director here, in recruitment. That was wonderful, because I was now working in 10 to 13 European countries, not just one.

With Joy being born in China and me in Holland, it was great to have a country in common. I am very proud to be an American citizen. We were starving before the Americans came during the war. God stepped into history and into our lives personally. In the mid-'60s, Atlanta became more international as far as travel was concerned, so there was never a reason to leave. Atlanta is very conducive for the work we're now doing.

Q: I see you have offices in Lawrenceville and South Africa. Do people from the States live in South Africa and work over there?

A: No. Those offices are run by Africans. We also have African offices, and there is a distinction. The area director there is from Nigeria. We relocated him to Johannesburg, because traveling is easier from there. He is also working among the black churches in South Africa. We have a Caribbean coordinator, as well.

Q: Have recent political developments in that area made WTI's work there more difficult?

A: At first, I would say it has not, because we're not too active in Kenya. We are in areas where there is religious unrest. We've had to change itineraries sometimes. It's a deep-seated problem, and we always rely on the host in the country we're visiting. We have done some work in El Salvador during their unrest and have been very successful there.

Q: Do you find that you have more luck getting megachurches to understand and back the need for missionaries than you do with the smaller churches?

A: The bigger the church, the tougher it is to convince them of their responsibility to the world. They are so consumed with running their own church. They also want to duplicate what they do here over there, and that simply does not work.

Small churches seem to recognize they need help and therefore are more open to it. There is a corporate approach to things in a big church. It's very hard to reach the CEO, so to speak. The pastor is the key - not the whole answer, but the key to the beginning.

Q: In what capacity could WTI really use some help?

A: Of course, financial. We help our Africa director, and the travel costs alone are very high.

Q: How is success measured at World Thrust International?

A: Well, it takes time to evaluate it. It takes about a year to implement what we teach. We look at the number of members that have gone cross-cultural, and we look at financial support and prayer concentration in a church. We look at historical data years down the road, and we use surveys.

Q: Tell me where you've seen the greatest accomplishments, or the greatest measure of success.

A: Oh, in South Africa, we've seen an enormous response. We've reached about 4,000 churches. We went from 260 missionaries to about 3,000 today from South Africa alone. The timing was just right. Apartheid and sanctions ended, so it was easier for the South African people to move about. They were ready. Success here (in the U.S.) has, I feel, tapered off with the influx of megachurches. They do their own thing,

For more information about World Thrust International, call 770-923-5215.

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