

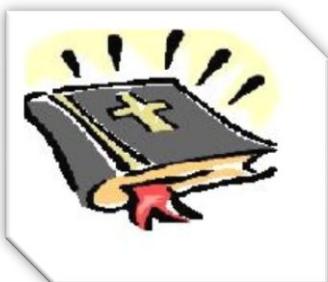
GMU Allows Students to 'Think Outside the Box'



We recently received a very positive testimonial from one of our graduating students who stated that what she most appreciated about her studies is that 'Global Ministries University encourages broad thinking.'

Typical methods of study require students to study and internalize specific information and are tested to measure what they have learned. Global Ministries University uses essay-type assignments, which allow students to 'think outside the box.' This is what is meant by GMU 'encourages broad thinking' and why so many of our students are extremely pleased with this approach. This [method of study](#) empowers students to express themselves and channel their learning process in a direction that will help them in their personal spiritual journey and ministry.

Contemporary Christianity Interest Increases



There has been a significant rise in the interest of what is referred to as contemporary or progressive Christianity. What does this term mean? Generally speaking, it could be defined as a look at Christianity in light of New

Testament documents and scientific information available in modern times.

A key study of the New Testament was conducted in the '80's by the [Jesus Seminar](#), using new technology unavailable in the past. The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar consist of gospel scholars that represent a wide array of Western religious traditions and academic institutions, scripture scholars trained in the best universities of North America and Europe. The study revealed a great deal of new information pertaining to how and why the books of the New Testament were written but because the material is controversial, there is reluctance on the part of traditional churches to promote it. As a result, it is taking years for this information to reach mainstream Christians. However, there has been more and more interest in this newly acquired knowledge in recent years.

This interest is evident within Global Ministries University by the increasing number of students that are selecting courses related to contemporary Christianity. GMU offers several thought-provoking courses on this topic, including *Exploring the Identity and Role of Jesus, Jewish Midrash and the Gospels*, *Progressive Christianity* on DVD, and *A Contemporary Study of the New Testament*. A [Certificate in Contemporary Christianity](#) is offered, as well as a [Master of Theology in Contemporary Christianity](#).

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



This past week I had the privilege to participate in an international Peace Builder's conference at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, sponsored by the Atlantic Institute. This conference featured many of the leading interfaith scholars in the United States and Canada.

During the conference I was able to share informally the interfaith projects that Global Ministries University has undertaken in Kenya. As I write this article, members of our GMU Kenya team led by Frank Pisciotta, GMU doctoral student, and Doctor Martin Orlando, GMU Instructor, have been meeting with our planning team in Nairobi and next week they will be in Mombasa for similar meetings with our partner there, Coast Council of Interfaith Clerics (CICC). Our goal for the work we are doing in Kenya is to draw from the latest interfaith scholarship for the benefit of the students we are training in Nairobi and Mombasa seminars and interfaith projects that our students undertake. The latest terrorist attack in Garissa, Kenya, in which over 150 Christian students were killed indicate the crisis situation facing the nation of Kenya. Through the partnerships that we have established with NGO's and other educational organizations, we have been able to organize a major interfaith conference in Nairobi from August 10 to 14, 2015, followed by a similar conference in Mombasa. In Nairobi we will bring together a group of Muslim and Christian teachers from troubled areas of Kenya where there is growing youth radicalization and marginalization. We will work with them to identify the latest knowledge and skills for expanding their interfaith competency and identify possible interfaith and intercultural projects in their local areas. Among the helpful connections that resulted from the Atlanta conference, three are most noteworthy. The Atlantic Institute based in Atlanta was the major sponsor of the Peace Builders conference that I attended and they work closely with Morehouse College and The Martin Luther King International Chapel which houses and supports the Ghandi Kingkeda Institute for Global Ethics and Reconciliation. Each year this Institute gives a major award to an individual who embodies the legacy of Ghandi, King and Ikeda. In 2014 the award went to Karen Armstrong and in 2015 it was given to Fethullah Gulen, the founder of the Hizment (service) Movement. Among the scholars presenting at the conference was FCM member, Doctor Richard Penaskovic. All of the videos and conference papers will eventually be made available to GMU as we continue to expand our interfaith course offerings to include the latest scholarship in this field. I am grateful for the opportunity to dialogue over several days with Doctor Penaskovic and his wife, Nancy, about the role that FCM and GMU are playing in the field of interfaith dialogue in diverse areas of the USA and now the larger world. Another important outcome of the conference was the opportunity that I had to dialogue with Professor Njabulo Ndebele, Chairperson of the Nelson Mandela Foundation in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Mandela Foundation shares similar ideals and goals with the GMU mission in Kenya. The Mandela Foundation states its mission is one of Dialogue and Advocacy: "the art of speaking and listening to others." We will be exploring possible areas of collaboration with this foundation which has projects in diverse areas of Africa, the Middle East and Europe. South Africa has itself become a model for peaceful reconciliation of divergent ideologies and world views that can be emulated in other parts of Africa and the world. The final and perhaps most important outcome of the conference that I attended was the realization that the Interfaith Movement, inspired by the leadership of Fethullah Gulen originally from Turkey but now residing in the US, can be part of a larger mission for peace and reconciliation in the world with interfaith dialogue as one of its key components. We are moving to a closer collaboration with The Hizmet Movement in regard to their interfaith mission and educational mission. Members of this movement are part of our interfaith faculty team in Kenya and their local Interfaith center here in Sunnyvale, CA sponsored my participation in the Atlanta Peace Building conference.

Gerald Grudzen, PhD

MEET OUR FACULTY



Jim Lauder, D.Min., is the Mentor of the Funeral Services and Other Rites of Passage track of our Celebrant Training Program. We are featuring two of his students in this publication, who praised him for his celebrant expertise. He has a BA, BSW, and an MA, and has just recently earned a Doctor of Ministry degree through Global Ministries University. Jim has thirteen years experience as a Celebrant with his own company, www.lifescircle.com, which offers families' end of life ceremonies, and weddings as well. He conducts ceremonies for clients of all faiths and has celebrated hundreds of funeral, memorial and committal services to families. He brings to his work and teaching, a deep sense of compassion, sensitivity, spirituality, and a wealth of knowledge about the human condition. Jim resides in Victoria, Canada, with his wife, Janine.

STUDENT(S) IN THE SPOTLIGHT



This quarter we are featuring Mindy Moore and Della Plank, mother/daughter students, enrolled in the Celebrant Training Program. Why did they decide to take the program together? Mindy (mother) and Della (daughter) at one time went to school as a mother/daughter team to become certified massage therapists and it was a great experience. Consequently, after reading about the Celebrant Training Program at Global Ministries University, they decided to once again team up and become “study buddies,” as Della put it.

Mindy holds a master's degree in ministry and owns her own company called PalliPartners, LLC. PalliPartners focuses on the design and manufacture of comfort products for people managing serious illness at home and was inspired to launch her company by her mother who lived with cancer for many years. Mindy is now in the process of developing a division of her company called *My Last Impression*, which offers a line of “Remember Me Happy” end-of-life products. Mindy plans to use what she learns from the Celebrant Training Program to help her develop the funeral service products division of her company. Della Plank currently assists her mother, Mindy, with her business and also does sales research for a mobile device company. Della plans to use her training to build up a nursing/retirement home clientele and perform celebration of life ceremonies.

Mindy and Della asserted that the Celebrant Training Program has been an amazing experience for them and praised their mentor, Jim Lauder, claiming that he is an incredibly gifted celebrant and his examples, advice and suggestions have enriched their understanding of the depth and breadth of celebrancy.

They are both Christians and Mindy considers her business a ministry and enjoys reaching out to her customers. Della's passion has always been helping those who have muscle issues and ministers to people through therapeutic massage by praying over them while massaging the injured muscles. She is hopeful to combine her passion for massage with her celebration of life ceremonies.

Mindy is married and she and her husband, Tony, live on a farm in rural Wisconsin. Della is a single mom, has two sons, William and Anthony, and is living with her parents.

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offers courses to equip people from a variety of faith traditions to minister with integrity, competence, and professionalism. **Become a Friend of GMU Now!**

Send feedback, comments, and/or questions to Jean Conley, editor and Vice-President for Operations and Development, [Global Ministries University](#)