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Keri Suarez
Andrews University

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The summer of 2010 marked the graduation of the first Doctor of Ministry students who received a degree from Andrews University’s Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, yet completed all of their studies while still in Africa. Not only was this a historical first for Andrews University, it is also a first for the Adventist Church on the continent of Africa.

It started in the summer of 2006 when the Andrews University Department of World Mission partnered with the West-Central Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists to launch a Doctor of Ministry cohort in Global Mission Leadership. In this cohort, which is a group who starts and finishes the program after four summer sessions together, were 34 students from that division who met for their first session at Babcock University in Nigeria. The students in this program represented church leaders from West Central Africa, a group who did not have to leave their homes and travel around the world to study. Instead, the Seminary found a way to meet their higher education needs while enabling these church leaders and ministers to continue their ministries in Africa.

From the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary’s Department of World Mission, Bruce Bauer, chair and professor of world mission, along with Rudi Maier, professor of mission; Gordon Doss, associate professor of world mission; and Jon Dybdahl, adjunct professor of spiritual formation and mission, ushered the students through this four-year process. Bauer and Maier were with the group at Babcock University for three of the four summers.

“The goal of the faculty,” says Maier, “is to provide a rigorous academic program which provides students with skills not only to analyze their own context of mission but also to apply relevant tools appropriately to various mission conditions.”

Along the way, this cohort made history time and again. On June 30, 2009, Boubakar Sanou became the first African student to defend his doctoral dissertation for Andrews University in Africa. On Tuesday, Mar. 9, a handful of Seminary professors signed dissertation approval pages for 33 of the 34 graduates of the 2006 Global Mission Leadership Concentration of the Doctor of Ministry program. The approval page for the 34th student was signed a few weeks later.

The research and dissertations offer a glimpse of the kind of work these graduates have been preparing for and are now set to launch in their own ministries. Ezekiel A. Adeleye, president of the Southwest Nigeria Conference, wrote, “How to Keep Adventist Young Adults in the Church in the South West Nigeria Conference: A Pilot Project.”

The impact of this cohort’s work reaches far and wide. Allah-Ridy Koné, one of the 34 students in the cohort whose dissertation was focused upon “A Contextual Approach to Present the Gospel to Muslims in the Republic of Chad,” says, “You made our dream to be a reality. ... God is doing [a] tremendous job through me here in Africa as I applied what I have acquired in the class.”

This is the Department of World Mission’s third overseas cohort in global mission leadership training. An earlier cohort with 24 students graduated in India in 1999. There, sessions were held at Spicer Memorial College. The second group came mainly from the Trans-European Division and met annually at Newbold College in England. From that cohort, 14 students graduated in 2005.