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Jamie Efird '16 Has Worked to Bring Hope to People in Sudan

The people of South Sudan flee their war-torn country looking for refuge in Uganda. Mostly women and children, they experience the trauma of losing husbands, fathers, siblings and their own self-worth. Jamie Elizabeth Efird '16 has worked with mission groups to bring them a message of hope. “My heart breaks for the people of South Sudan,” Efird asserted. “They have experienced more years of war than peace since their independence from (Northern) Sudan in 2011. There are more than one million South Sudanese citizens displaced internally and more than one million South Sudanese refugees living outside of their country.”

Before enrolling in the School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb University, Efird lived and ministered in South Sudan for two years through the International Mission Board (IMB). Affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, the IMB partners with churches to train and send mission teams to unreached people and places. When Efird came home to Cherryville, N.C., she took her time to discern the call on her life. She decided a Master of Divinity in Intercultural Studies could prepare her for ministry. “I chose to attend Gardner-Webb after speaking with Admissions Director Kheresa Harmon,” she reflected. “She was my first clue that Gardner-Webb Divinity School has a more personal atmosphere, and the faculty and staff really care about students. This was not my experience at other schools I had considered. Gardner-Webb also offered a lot of scholarship opportunities.”

Efird’s classes gave her practical experience, and her professors offered additional

Jamie Efird sews with the locals

opportunities for academic growth. The most memorable was Professor of Missiology Dr. Terry Casiño, who taught students the questions to ask and ideas to consider when seeking to understand a culture, society or worldview. “I valued the investment that professors made in my education and their genuine concern for me as a person,” she observed. “Many of them encouraged me and shared with me in ministry opportunities outside of required class time. In my field of study, we were required to take a practicum travel course and travelled to five different countries in Asia. We met with local church leaders and missionaries in each country and learned about their work and unique challenges. We had cultural immersion tasks, which involved us not being able to have a local guide or translator with us.”

On a recent mission trip to refugee camps in Northern Uganda, Efird helped lead a conference for South Sudanese church leaders, who were all female. She assisted with presentations on trauma counseling and biblical teaching. “The majority of South Sudanese women are illiterate, so we focused on equipping them for oral storytelling of major Biblical narratives,” described Efird, who now lives in Kings Mountain, N.C. “I want to see a change from the cycle of violence that has been repeating itself in Sudan. I dare to dream that perhaps a need for revenge can be replaced by forgiveness, that blessing could be extended to those who have spewed curses, that a view of equality and brotherhood could overcome deep animosity and embedded thoughts of tribal superiority. I dare to dream that hate could be replaced by love. This is the message of hope we proclaim through the gospel of Jesus Christ, a message of transformation, not just for individuals but for communities and societies.”