



Global Christian Studies

Providing a theological education pathway for Churches of Christ around the world

January 2025 Newsletter

Updating our sponsors, informing our current students, and reaching out for others to partner with us.

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A New Way of Doing Global Missions?

Global Christian Studies (GCS) is transforming the future of theological education and ministry leadership across the globe. Established in 2018, GCS addresses a significant disparity within Churches of Christ: while the majority of church members reside outside the United States, advanced theological training remains largely concentrated within the U.S. With over 80% of Christians globally living in Europe or North America in 1900, that number dropped to just 38% by 2010. The torch of Christian leadership has shifted to Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania, yet access to ministry education has not followed suit.

GCS aims to empower church leaders in Botswana, Brazil, and Bolivia by providing a pathway to earn accredited master's degrees in Bible or ministry from U.S.-based institutions affiliated with Churches of Christ. Leaders remain in their home countries, balancing family responsibilities, jobs, and local church leadership while pursuing their degrees part-time online. This innovative model allows leaders to complete their Master of Arts in Christian Ministry (MACM) in six to eight years, equipping them to better serve their communities with advanced theological training.

This approach represents a fresh vision for global mission work. Rather than focusing solely on sending U.S. missionaries overseas, GCS enables donors—individuals, families, and congregations—to invest in developing local leaders who already possess cultural knowledge and linguistic fluency. These leaders, grounded in their native contexts, are positioned to make long-term influences within their

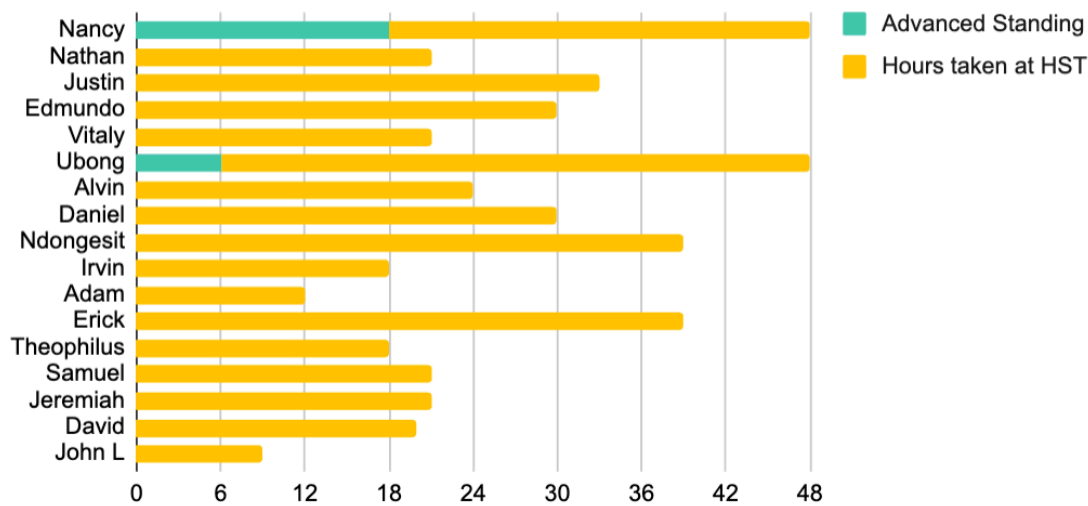
communities. By complementing the work of traditional missionaries, GCS equips local leaders to assume greater responsibility for the growth and sustainability of Churches of Christ worldwide.

Through prayer, funding, and academic support, GCS is bridging the gap in theological education, ensuring the torch of Christ continues to shine brightly in every corner of the world. To learn more, visit gcspathway.org.

– Dr. Harold Shank, Executive Director of GCS

This piece is a shortened version of an article in the Journal of Christian Studies. To read the full article, visit the Christian Studies [website](#) to purchase a digital subscription or the hard copy of Volume IV/1: Mission and the Global Church.

Student Progress



The graph shows each GCS student progressing toward completion of the 48 hour MACM degree.

We wish all of our students a prosperous semester. We are glad to be part of their journey as they are honing their Bible study and ministry skills!

From Our Students



Student Spotlight: Erick Rodriguez Sosa

Erick Rodriguez Sosa currently lives in Saltillo, Mexico, where he serves as the minister at the Iglesia de Cristo Praderas congregation. Erick is a great example of the blessings that flourish because of the opportunities that GCS and HST's partnership provides. He has been serving as the sole minister for two and a half years, but this is the congregation where he spent part of his childhood. In fact, his grandfather, Victor, was the preacher before him. Victor retired, and the circumstances worked out perfectly for Erick to step up in his place.

After graduating from high school, Erick had the strong desire to study the Bible and go into ministry. Like two other GCS students, David Lopez and Daniel Rodriguez, Erick moved to Honduras so he could study at the Baxter Institute. After graduating, he spent some time in Memphis with his parents when the opportunity presented itself for him to become the preacher at the church he grew up in. This coincided with his acceptance into the HST program, where he focused on taking ministry classes to be better equipped to serve the congregation during his transition into ministry. Erick has sailed through over half the MACM and he has his eyes set on continuing on to the MDiv afterward.

The Praderas congregation has been revitalized by Erick's energy and enthusiasm for joining God's mission in Saltillo. While numbers certainly do not paint the whole story, they still tell a story. Since Erick has arrived at Praderas, the congregation has doubled in regular attendance from 30-35 to about 60-70. A lot of this growth has come from young families with kids, young adults, and teenagers. The children's ministry has also grown significantly, and the congregation is going to renovate their space to better accommodate the bustling activities throughout the week. Erick made a concerted effort to reach young people and young families in an aging congregation, and the work has paid off. Not only have new people joined the church family, but the existing members welcomed them with open arms and embraced the new look of their spiritual family.

We can look at two more exciting developments in the Praderas congregation. First, the church has slowly been cultivating a presence in the neighborhood through different projects engaging the community. The congregation has created a hospital visitation program, a neighborhood recycling initiative, and began offering a few tutoring opportunities, including English classes. Not only has this brought the obvious benefit of new visitors to the church, but members who have been Christians for years have become reinvigorated by this missional attitude and outlook. Second, Erick has worked ardently to create a leadership team at his church. In many Latin American churches, the preacher frequently manages all aspects of the ministry. While there are several faithful and committed servants of Christ, often churches need more people who will step into roles of responsibility. HST has given Erick great tools for building up and nurturing church members, and, by God's grace, a leadership team has been created at Praderas. Consisting of five other people at the moment, Erick is praying God continues to nurture and bless this group as the church faces new challenges and opportunities.

Since graduating from Baxter, Erick has continued to be involved with that community. Besides their in-person Bachelor's degrees, the Baxter Institute has a variety of programs to help Christian leaders across Latin America. Part of their offerings include certificate programs for faithful servants at the local church level. Erick has been teaching a few of these courses for a couple of years. His heart for education was noted by Baxter, and, as of 2025, Erick is now an adjunct professor there. Now, GCS is supporting two Baxter professors, Daniel Rodriguez and Erick Sosa.

Erick finds it difficult to process the profound changes in his life over the last three years, from graduating from a Bible Institute with no concrete plans to becoming a minister, professor, and graduate student. All of this is possible because of opportunities granted to Erick that may have otherwise been impossible. Erick is an example of someone who makes sure the blessings headed his way overflow into those around him.

- John Campos, Associate Director for Student Affairs

Graduates: Ubong Okorie and Nancy Wu Won



Graduate Nancy Wu Won (left) smiles with her diploma at the HST campus in Memphis. Graduate Ubong Okorie (right) poses. Both graduates completed their MACM in December 2024.

Graduates

We extend a warm congratulations to our two newest graduates, Ubong Okorie and Nancy Wu Won!

Ubong Okorie

Ubong Okorie is from Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Before beginning his graduate degree, he worked full time as a tutor at the Nigerian Christian Bible College (NCBC) in Ukpom-Abak. Ubong initially began his studies at NCBC in 1996 before pursuing a medical degree at the University of Calabar, Nigeria. After graduating, he worked at a mission hospital and preached part time. Inspired to pursue advanced training in ministry to assist in training other ministers, Ubong returned to his theological studies.

Ubong graduated in December 2024 from Harding School of Theology, and his post-graduation plans include engaging in full-time missions and pursuing further theological studies.

Reflecting on his time at Harding, Ubong shared how his training has shaped his ministry:

“My theological training at Harding has really been influential,” he said. “So far, I have organized two seminars for preachers and church leaders in Nigeria at the Nigerian Christian Bible College in 2023 and 2024. I have also delivered many keynote lectures and subtopics at different forums on adaptive changes for church growth. I have helped in reviewing the ministerial training curriculum at the Nigerian Christian Bible College. By God's grace, I hope to continue to lead preacher

training for the betterment of the church in Africa and beyond.”

Ubong expressed gratitude for the support he received through GCS and HST and looks forward to supporting GCS in the future, sharing their vision and mission.

Chad Wagner spoke about Ubong, saying, "Ubong Okorie is a native of the Ukpom area which is the homeplace of the Nigerian Christian Bible College. He is a dedicated teacher who is well-connected in his community. His commitment to Christian education for himself and his students only raises the bar for theological education in Nigeria. Now is the time to raise the standard in Nigeria and Ubong is well on his way to help us accomplish that."

Nancy Wu Won

Nancy Wu Won is from Australia and is an active member of the Belmore Road Church of Christ, one of GCS's overseeing congregations. While working full time as a physiotherapist at a rehab hospital, she simultaneously earned her Master of Arts in Christian Ministry (MACM).

Nancy plays an active role in her congregation's ministry, serving on camp committees, teaching children's classes, and organizing song-leading workshops. She recognized a need to take over the girls' classes and sought further training in ministry to be better equipped for leadership. Benny Tabalujan introduced her to GCS and HST, and she eagerly began her studies. Nancy graduated in December 2024 and plans to lead others to Christ and follow wherever the Lord guides her.

Nancy described her excitement about studying at HST: "Thinking deeply about God and being taught by professors who are invested in God is a privilege; a privilege that I did not want to pass up on," she said. "Just who has the time, energy, commitment, resources, and drive to engage with God in this way? I think when God calls, it is best to say, 'Here I am, send me.'"

She also reflected on her learning experience and future aspirations: "I wanted to do well, learn as much as I could, and give it my best shot. Yet at times, I fell short," she said. "I learned in a very real, sleep-deprived way to lean into the grace of God because that's all I had in the end. The gospel of peace which we carry within us is something I hope permeates my being and spills out around me. I know I am different post-study. Because we've identified my spiritual gifts, I'll be looking out for opportunities to encourage, teach, and serve."

We wish Ubong Okorie and Nancy Wu Won all the best in their future endeavors and look forward to seeing the positive difference they will make!

An update on GCS

January 2025 Financial Update

Twelve congregations and eight individuals helped sponsor students at GCS during 2024. The students come from Singapore, Australia, Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, Bolivia, Nigeria, Ghana, Switzerland and Ukraine.

In 2024, contributions totaled \$54,704, while expenditures were \$64,945.62. The year began with a balance that covered the negative cash flow.

During the year, GCS transitioned with HST in Memphis to Searcy, Arkansas. In Memphis, the cost of the degree to GCS was \$25,000, while in Arkansas the cost is \$10,000. The master's degrees pursued by GCS students require 48 hours of coursework.

Overhead costs at GCS are covered by Eastside, Belmore Road and Wynnum Churches of Christ. All funds from other donors go directly to student education costs.

- *Harold Shank, Executive Director of GCS*

Eastside Church of Christ appoints new elders

The elderships of the Eastside and Belmore Road churches of Christ play a crucial role in GCS operations. They oversee the GCS staff and strategic objectives, assist with student interviews and onboarding, and provide financial and prayerful support. The Eastside Church of Christ in Midwest City, Oklahoma, recently appointed three new elders. We are excited for their support and wish them success in their new roles!



Ryan McDonald



Michael Graham



David Holt

A Word from HST

HST Library Mockup



The latest artist's rendering shows the 18,000 square foot addition to the Brackett Library at Harding University in Searcy, AR. The addition will house HST's extensive theological collection. They expect to break ground in January 2025.

A Word from the Dean

“HST's Spring semester is underway! We have students attending courses from all over the globe – from every continent but Antarctica. Please pray God will bless these ministries, in the classroom and beyond.”

– Peter Rice, Dean of HST



Dr. Peter Rice, Dean of HST



Dr. Lance Hawley

Dr. Lance Hawley Publishes *Walking with Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs*

In August 2024, Dr. Lance Hawley released his latest book, *Walking with Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs*. Dr. Hawley is a professor of Old Testament and wisdom literature at HST. He originally wrote the book content as church curriculum before expanding and refining it into a comprehensive guide designed for both individual and group study.

The book includes 12 lessons that walk readers through the Proverbs in a linear fashion, encouraging them to pursue wisdom with all their hearts. Dr. Hawley hopes the study will transform readers' lives by offering practical ways to apply the wisdom of Proverbs in their daily routines. The book incorporates discipleship prompts and spiritual disciplines to help readers connect the teachings of Proverbs with practical steps. One suggestion Dr. Hawley offers is to reach out to individuals who exemplify wisdom and learn from their experiences.

Dr. Hawley believes that the key to growing in wisdom is learning to ask yourself the right questions. Wisdom is earned by framing your life through the window of understanding who God is and what actions we take in response.

Q&A with Dr. Hawley

What proverb resonates with you most?

“I value so many of the proverbial sayings. One of my favorites is Proverb 15:17: ‘Better is a portion of herbs where love is, than a fatted ox and hatred with it.’ I like it because it expresses the value of love over wealth. Wealth is not bad in Proverbs, but it is not the highest good. Some mischaracterize Proverbs as a book where people simply get what they deserve, but it is more nuanced than that. This proverb acknowledges that there are people who lack rich or expensive foods but still have

peace around their tables.”

What piece of advice would you offer to someone who wants to learn how to ask good questions?

“I think the goal should be to generate productive conversation. It's hard to do and I'm still working on it! One should avoid asking purely objective questions if the goal is to create dialogue. Sometimes simply asking a group studying the Bible, ‘What do you see or question in this text?’ is good enough to generate study. One good way to get people talking is by asking them to share a story or a memory related to the topic.”

“Another way is to ask what people observe in their everyday experiences. For example, one of the discussion questions in my book is, ‘It may be easy to identify folly in the public square (e.g., Facebook, X, news stations), but where do you see wisdom in public spaces?’ This is in the chapter on Proverbs 8 where Wisdom is personified and she calls out to people in the public square. I am definitely still learning to craft good questions!”

Invitation to be a Sponsor

"I have been involved with GCS since the initial idea was shaped into what it is. I was convinced then and now that GCS can have as much of an impact on the global church as in the last hundred years of our missionary work."

- a sponsoring elder from Virginia

"Our missionary felt a need to increase his Biblical knowledge as well as his ministry skills. We were delighted to partner with GSC to help him become a more effective church leader."

- a sponsoring elder from Tennessee

"Helping train leaders around the world gives us a sense of satisfaction that we are making a difference."

- a donor from Oklahoma

GCS is deeply committed to ensuring that each sponsored student successfully completes their graduate program. A key part of our support system is securing a sponsoring church or donor for every student. Additionally, we encourage those connected to GCS to pray for the students and their specific concerns.

We are actively seeking sponsors to support our students through prayer, encouragement, financial aid, and meaningful connections. Would you consider assisting us in identifying potential sponsors? If you can help in any way, please contact Harold Shank.

GCS Overseeing Congregations

Eastside Church of Christ, 916 South Douglas Blvd, Midwest City, OK 73130
(www.eastsidechurchofchrist.org).

Their elders include Sam Brandon, David Walton, Ryan McDonald, David Holt, Ron Cannefax, Ricky Burger, and Michael Graham.

Belmore Road Church of Christ, 100 Rostrevor Parade, Mont Albert North, Victoria 3150, Australia (www.belmoreroadchurch.org.au).

Their elders are Charles Hooi, Benny Tabalujan, David Tabe, and James Chan.

GCS is actively seeking additional students and sponsors. Students are urged to consult the GCS website (gcspathway.org) for how to engage with GCS. Prospective students can also reach the team by emailing gcspathwayinfo@harding.edu. Potential sponsors should write Harold Shank (drharoldshank@gmail.com) or Caleb Dillinger (calebjdillinger@gmail.com).

Message to Potential Students

GCS seeks students from around the globe who live outside the US, have an accredited bachelor's degree, and have the full recommendation of their local congregation. The process of being accepted by GCS and enrolling in a US school takes about four months. Students who attend HST can do all their work online (high speed internet is required) can take the course Advanced Theological Research on site in Searcy, Arkansas. GCS pays the student's expenses for this Memphis trip.

For more information: visit www.gcspathway.org or email us at gcspathwayinfo@gmail.com

Find out more

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