

Dear friend in Christ:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. May the living hope in the kingdom of God empower us in these challenging times. May the Spirit of God enable us to live as Jesus' witnesses and be faithful to him.

We are in the process of finishing the first cohort of UBF members who are studying in the cross-cultural ministry program at Wheaton College. We call this the "Wheaton Cohort." Why do we promote this cohort? To better understand and communicate with people from different cultures than our own. It is in the spirit of St. Paul, who said, *"I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings"* (1Cor 9:22b-23). It is also in the spirit of our founders, Dr. Samuel Lee, and Mother Sarah Barry, who humbly became like people in their respective mission fields in order to be good shepherds for them.

Over the past 37 years of ministry as a full-time staff member in Chicago UBF, I have seen a series of events that is repeated again and again. A disciple maker serves someone with the word of God, giving all their heart, and that person begins to grow as Jesus' disciple. But when a challenging issue arises that calls for deeper commitment to Christ, the disciple maker will not understand or be able to communicate with the growing disciple. Feeling misunderstood, the growing disciple decides to join another Christian ministry which is culturally more compatible. At that point, we tend to judge the Bible student for failing to follow Jesus. It may indeed be their problem. But have we done everything we can to remove any obstacle that might have hindered them? Could we have understood them more deeply and communicated more effectively? Have we done our best to become all things to all people to win them over to Christ? I believe that we should consider how to improve. For this reason, the courses that Wheaton offers can be helpful to disciple makers in our ministry.

Our General Director and the members of the North American Board of Elders have supported this program wholeheartedly and given scholarships for those who committed to the cohort. In return, those who joined the cohort studied hard and all received all A's and will share what they have learned in their respective chapters and spheres of influence. The point is that UBF leadership in North America will do everything we can to make these course offerings affordable for UBF members. We understand that lay missionaries and shepherds

have limited time and financial resources. If anyone really wants to take these courses, we will make it possible for that person.

I would like to share the comments of some of those who participated in the Wheaton cohort for the last one year:

*“This program has been rich and enlightening. The content has helped me broaden my understanding of and heart for other people in other cultures and is teaching me valuable cross-cultural communication tools. It has been particularly helpful to understand the Korean culture that has shaped UBF and ask questions about how we can create a truly American UBF ministry. The instructors are some of the finest Christians I've met, and I was blessed to learn from their expertise and years of experience in cross-cultural studies.” (Liz Hembekides)*

*“The cohort program helped me to open my eyes on contextualization of the gospel to a different mission field. Naturally, I tried to apply what I learned to the UBF context, but it would require much more time and effort to have a meaningful connection. At least, I am aware of the importance of cross-cultural contextualization.” (Luke Hong)*

*“It is an eye-opening experience to learn from very excellent and godly Christian professors who love God and his word. It has also given me deeper insight into the struggles we have in our ministry due to some cultural clashes, and I've had several a-ha moments, and moments of affirmation of things I had concluded on my own in the course of struggling to serve God's work in UBF. By the same token, it has also made me realize that I've received solid Bible training in UBF.” (Annie Lee)*

*“It was perhaps one of the most enlightening, encouraging, and formation-oriented courses I've taken in seminary--which I will be completing this summer semester with a Masters in Practical Theology with concentration in pastoral ministry--with my classes at Wheaton being counted as elective credit.” (Greg Lewis)*

*“Taking the Intercultural Communications Cohort has been incredibly enriching for me. It has helped me build a framework and a vocabulary to better understand the influence of Korean culture on UBF's methodologies and values. This has proved to be personally healing and restorative. It has*

*also equipped me with a deeper and richer appreciation for God's word and how to contextualize the gospel to reach people of all nations and cultures.” (Sam Toh)*

*“The classes are wonderful, so that much that I wish that I had taken these classes when I started my life as a missionary. I could have reduced my mistakes in raising disciples of Jesus, knowing the differences between my Korean cultural values and American cultural values.” (Gideon Bahn)*

*“I would highly recommend cross-cultural studies to anyone wanting to relate well to people from different areas of the world, and especially to those who want to influence them, such as Bible teachers. Values, social habits, and other aspects of culture significantly affect interpretation of the Bible and the practice of its teaching. We learned of factors that are opposite in Korean and American worldviews, and ways to understand and improve relations. I learned practically through case studies that my Western mindset would cause problems in places like Africa or Latin America. We need to communicate in a way that natives relate to and use indigenous methods and cultural forms when not in opposition to Scripture. A rich diversity in expression glorifies God and builds up and expands his kingdom.” (Dervilla Ward)*

We are in the process of forming a new cohort for the coming academic year. The instruction will be online. The invitation to participate is open to any UBF member who is recommended by his local chapter director and can meet the entrance requirements for the Wheaton College Graduate School. Scholarships are given without bias to any qualified applicant. If you or someone in your chapter is interested in joining this cohort, please let me know as soon as possible by sending me an email to [pastorronw@gmail.com](mailto:pastorronw@gmail.com).

May God bless our prayer for the gospel of Jesus Christ to spread throughout the colleges and universities of North America and for the raising of Jesus' disciples for the advance of his kingdom until he comes again.

In Christ,  
P. Ron Ward,  
HQ Education Department Chairman