



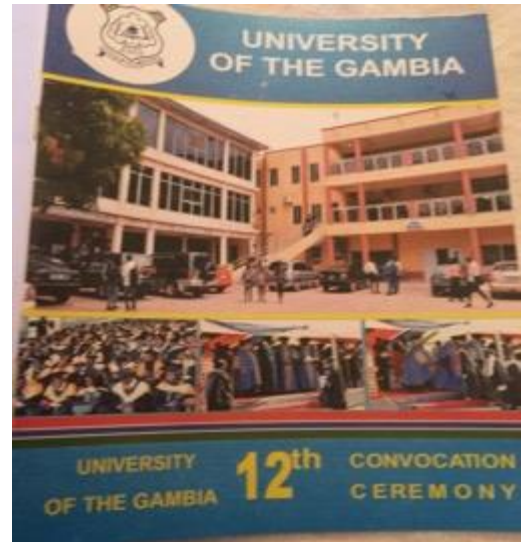
Special News Update on the Christian Studies Program at the University of the Gambia

Adrian and Wendy Helleman, Global Scholars Canada

“A dream come true!” “Amazing!” “Prayers fulfilled!” Those were the words of the graduates who celebrated the completion of the four-year program in Christian Studies at the University of the Gambia this past Saturday,

February 8. It is indeed amazing, what the Lord accomplished in their lives and in the life of the university, since the program was introduced in 2015.

The date for the university convocation/ graduation had been shifted twice, but the event itself was well organized. The day began hot and dry with clear sunny skies. The ceremonies, held in an open field, began on time, at 9.30. a.m. After all the graduates and faculty/staff had taken their seats, we were treated to a number of lengthy introductory speeches, beginning with the university registrar, who *noted Christian Studies among programs new to the university*. The chair of the university governing council (who is almost certainly a Christian), warned eloquently that graduates are approved for good character as well as academic accomplishments; they must rise above the despicable “yes-man” behaviour of former president Jammeh’s cronies!



After another lecture by the Vice-Chancellor, and then by the Chancellor, Pres. Barrow himself, it was 11.30, time for presentation of the graduates. *Our ten Christian Studies graduates were among the very first of the Arts and Sciences graduates to be recognized for studies accomplished. And we had a respectable number of first graduates, ten of the fifteen who were eligible (the other five had problems establishing their grades, and have to wait for subsequent convocation).*

LIST OF GRADUANDS FEBRUARY 2020	
UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES	
SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES	
1. Darboe Saatu (Magna Cum Laude)	21. Saingang Jarrieta
2. Samba Omar (Cum Laude)	22. Tattah Niny
3. Sujanj Antaboo (Cum Laude)	23. Nyoni Amadou
4. Jatta Jaha Henry (Cum Laude)	24. Anteh Leno
5. Jalloh Murtari (Hons)	25. Ceready Abubakar
6. Jaha Fatou Buleh (Hons)	26. Jalloh Yatta
7. Cally Abussanney (Hons)	27. Njara Adina
8. Tawaddy Jinnaka (Hons)	28. Sawa Madya-Musa
9. Mandy hach (Hons)	29. Gattama Babary
10. Darboe AbdouCarim (Hons)	30. Wandeh Deaka
11. Samba Landing	31. Darboe Lany L.L
12. Dumbuya Balucarr	32. Ceready Abubakar
13. Saily Lamin M	33. Davis Adyina DD Laha
14. Saily Ousman	34. Jaha Modu
15. Saneeth Isma	35. Camara Abubakar
16. Gata Omar	36. Sanghwa Abdoula
17. Hamneh Binta O	37. Saneeth Naha
18. Kora Bakary	38. Saingang Sakhoo
19. Nja Ousman	39. Saingang Elmina
20. Jatta Basim	40. Saingang Elmina
21. Duffah Baba	41. Saingang Elmina
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES	
DIVISION OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES:	
CHRISTIAN STUDIES	
Mandy Christopher Tennis (Magna Cum Laude)	6. Oluwarinse Levenza A.
Sambou Bebian (Hons)	7. Gomez Anna Mandy
Mandy Peter O (Hons)	8. Mandy Madeline L.
Nyabeh David (Hons)	9. Mandy Paul O
Mandy Anna Fatow (Hons)	10. Ibaeye Emmanuel Mandit
BACHELOR OF ARTS DEVELOPMENT STUDIES	
1. Jaha Jaha (Cumma Cum Laude)	16. Fawani Aja Sanyasa
2. Jatta Muna (Cumma Cum Laude)	17. Darboe Madiata
3. Jatta Amama (Magna Cum Laude)	18. Nja Lamin
4. Jatta Samba (Magna Cum Laude)	19. Saily Fatou
5. Jalloh SaadJalloh (Magna Cum Laude)	20. Sany Sany
6. Jatta Binta (Magna Cum Laude)	21. Sany Sany
7. Jatta Madiata L. (Magna Cum Laude)	22. Sany Sany
8. Jatta Jaha (Cum Laude)	23. Saingang Kamelina
9. Jatta Amama (Cum Laude)	24. Sany Sany
10. Jatta Samba (Cum Laude)	25. Sany Sany
11. Jatta Samba (Cum Laude)	26. Sany Sany
12. Jatta Samba (Cum Laude)	27. Sany Sany
13. Jatta Samba (Cum Laude)	28. Sany Sany
14. Jatta Samba (Cum Laude)	29. Sany Sany
15. Jatta Samba (Cum Laude)	30. Sany Sany
BACHELOR OF ARTS ENGLISH LANGUAGE	
1. Babah Elmina (Hons)	4. Mandy Mandy
2. Sany Sany (Hons)	5. Sany Sany
3. Sany Sany (Hons)	
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE POLITICAL SCIENCE	
1. Babah Elmina (Cumma Cum Laude)	8. Tattah Niny
2. Fawani Aja Sanyasa (Magna Cum Laude)	9. Sany Sany
3. Saingang Kamelina (Cum Laude)	10. Sany Sany
4. Saingang Kamelina (Cum Laude)	11. Sany Sany
5. Saingang Kamelina (Cum Laude)	12. Sany Sany
6. Saingang Kamelina (Cum Laude)	13. Sany Sany
7. Saingang Kamelina (Cum Laude)	14. Sany Sany
BACHELOR OF ARTS ISLAMIC STUDIES	
1. Camara Ousman A.N	

It was indeed gratifying to witness this, the actual university ceremony. *There is every indication that the program in Christian Studies now has a solid foundation at the university.* As ceremonies were drawing to a close, we - the faculty in full academic colours! - also crossed the field for picture-taking with the proud graduates.



A graduation luncheon, although planned originally for the Sunday after convocation, had already been held the week before, on Feb. 2. Changing the restaurant reservation for Gida's Garden and the invitations for immediate family members, university staff and representatives of major Christian groups, proved too difficult. But that occasion, ably organized by the Christian Studies coordinator Benjamin Michael, gave a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the significance of this moment in the lives of the students, faculty and university. It was soon evident that ***our group of graduating students was special both in terms of***

the average age and ministry experience represented. Theirs was the task of ground-breaking for the program in the majority Muslim context. And they had clearly bonded as a group, helping each other in times of sickness, grief or financial difficulties. These were bonds forged across lines of denominations and charismatic groups. We also noted the sacrifices required of their spouses and (extended) families, so that they could finish – and they all did! To God be the glory!

Glen Taylor had prepared a history of the program from its inception; but he had changed his tickets to attend the graduation itself, so Adrian presented the account on his behalf. This was marvellously complimented by Dean Pierre Gomez who shared eloquently his own struggles to overcome ***roadblocks at the university in getting a program in Christian Studies established*** - even though, as he knew, such a program had been envisioned for the university curriculum from the beginning (1999). And as Glen acknowledged, it took some time for the Bishops' Council to recognize university prerogatives in administering the program.





These accounts highlighted the importance of the breakthrough when Layne Turner began teaching this group in 2015. And the students gave eloquent testimony to his initiative, forging ahead in what was then quite uncharted territory! ***Until Manhee Yoon joined him early in 2017, Layne taught all the basic courses***, while Gambian Bannie Manga took on the courses in Bible and Christian History meant for all university students. The graduates noted especially what these expat professors taught them about punctuality (as respect for the other), strictures on copying (or getting a little help from neighbours) and avoiding plagiarism!

But this occasion was geared not only to



students and professors; special invitations had gone out to leaders of all the Christian groups represented by the students, a significant array. Most had had no idea of the nature of the program that, much like a Bachelor of Divinity degree, prepares students to minister in their Christian communities as pastors, evangelists and teachers of Christian education. And ***the latter represents an enormous need in the national school system, where Christian Religious Knowledge is a requirement*** at every level (alongside Islamic Studies). We were all blessed by the powerful prayer of anointing –

praying as we have seldom experienced outside of Africa – asking God to bless the graduates, to protect them from the temptations which can so easily derail ministries, and commit them to faithful service for God, the church and the nation.



The final prayer and challenge, given by Anglican bishop Odico (also Chair of Gambia Christian Council), used biblical examples of David and Gideon, to remind the graduates that they may consider themselves small (as indeed Gambian Christians are in their context), but ***God can save his people equally by means small or large*** and impressive. That message, while directed at the graduates, was not lost on the body of Christian leaders gathered in the midst of political challenges to the nation’s laws and its secular constitution. Truly, the Lord moved among us that afternoon.

Good news must be shared! We dare not keep it to ourselves! Our final group photo – these leaders all stayed to the end! - gives a precious testimony to the Gambian Christian communities coming together in the face of powerful political pressure to sideline them with imposition of shariah law. It was gratifying indeed, to note the Christian Studies program as a potential means of fostering much-needed cooperation of the Christian community in this African context.

On behalf of the students, staff and faculty ***we express a warm note of thanks*** for all of you who have prayed and in other ways supported the program, to make this first graduation celebration possible. For such a wonderful moment we give God all the glory!

In his service,

*Adrian and Wendy
Helleman*

(February 14, 2020)

