



## Welcome to our new director!

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The HNGR Program is pleased to announce that Dr. Laura S Meitzner Yoder will be our new director. Dr. Yoder joins us from the Sustainability and Environmental Education Department (SEED) at Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana and describes herself as an environmental anthropologist and political ecologist. Here is Laura's explanation of her journey to these subjects:

"I am committed to initiatives that build people's fullness of life, combining thoughtful resource use and people's abilities to provide for basic needs. In my early studies in biology and tropical agriculture, this took shape with a focus on biodiversity and sustainable food production in marginal growing conditions.

"Living and working with forest dwellers and subsistence farmers piqued my interest in the circumstances that constrain their livelihoods. This led me to examine the social and political aspects of environmental choices and ecological change. My current interests in political ecology center on the policies and practices surrounding land and forest claims, ownership, and access.

"As a social ecologist and environmental anthropologist, I study human-environment interactions and the intersection of natural and cultural worlds. I am interested in resource access of people whose livelihoods are directly dependent on natural resources. Within this area, I focus on study of the commons, processes to claim rights to land and forests, and the relationships among state and customary authorities regarding forest oversight. My current regional specialization is Asia/Melanesia."



Laura explains the interaction of her academic interests with her faith. "My faith motivates my professional interests in how people relate to the environment we inhabit. Caring for God's people and caring for God's world – both to maintain its productive capacity and for its intrinsic value – are both divine mandates found throughout Scripture. Christ's followers are to express this care out of obedience, gratitude for God's good gifts, and love for God and for our neighbor. In bringing forth the Kingdom of God, God is changing lives, giving fullness of life, and reconciling all things. Glimpses of the Kingdom describe a situation in which people have enough (Isa. 25), and where there is sufficient food, access to water, adequate shelter, and where all are focused on the glory of God (Rev. 7). The Gospel is God's multi-dimensional good news – good news of God's dominion over all, of God's unfailing love, of God's

provision.

"God created humans out of topsoil, and tasked us with tending and keeping this beloved created world (Gen. 2). The central expression of God's love is in the incarnation: that God so loved the cosmos that He came, dwelling among hurting people and showing us how to serve each other. This love and this gospel is not disembodied, or theoretical; Christ's love is active in the world. God's love is anything but abstract – it is incarnational, it is self-sacrificial, it is embodied."

Dr. Yoder will be officially joining the HNGR Program later this summer after taking some time with her husband, Jeff, and seven year-old son, Micah, to visit their former home in East Timor.



# Paul: Welcome to HNGR, Laura!

Almost a year ago, when it became clear to us that we were being called to full-time engagement with transformation in the Democratic Republic of Congo through the Congo Initiative and the Christian Bilingual University of Congo, and that our sojourn in Wheaton was coming to an end, we began to pray for a director who would lead the HNGR Program into its own new season. I am delighted to share in announcing and welcoming Dr. Laura Meitzner Yoder as HNGR's new and fourth director!

Laura's tenure as HNGR Director begins at an exciting and opportune moment in the life of Wheaton College and in the history of HNGR. In his inaugural address in September 2010, incoming Wheaton College President Dr. Phil Ryken announced a new global initiative to deepen, strengthen, and broaden Wheaton's engagement with the world. Anchoring this vision has been the establishment of a Center for Global and Experiential Learning (GEL) under the leadership of Dean Laura Montgomery (herself an alumnus of HNGR). In 2011 the HNGR Program was the first of Wheaton's international programs to be located within this new initiative.

From its beginning in the mid 1970s, HNGR's emphasis has been on learning, formation, and integration through encounter, engagement, and immersion (learning *from*) in specific contexts in the Majority World that embody global inequalities and inequities and that display the multiple challenges faced by the world's poor and excluded people. These have been the lenses through which HNGR's students and faculty have explored theoretical (from multiple disciplinary perspectives), theological, and relational questions, as well as Christ-centered responses, to those challenges. Students have studied and learned through the matrixes of movements from encounter to engagement, engagement to immersion, and immersion to identification. This we have understood as a deeply biblical model.

During the past 38 years, the HNGR Program has continuously changed as successive generations of students and faculty have learned from and responded to what we have encountered and learned in specific contexts around the world. Because HNGR has been committed to learning from and with our host partners, our understanding about poverty, human need, and transformation have changed multiple times, reflecting changing theory and practice.

In the current millennium, our understanding of the challenges of poverty have been increasingly centering on a realization of the interconnectedness and relationship of humanity to one another and our connectedness to the natural world. Conversations among global partners have been moving to themes of reconciliation, mutuality, and co-transformation, towards values-centered transformation that centers on *flourishing* rather than *development*. These conversations reflect a clear shift from *results orientation* to *process orientation*, and from *object relationship* to *mutuality relationship*. In biblical language, this reflects core concerns of the Gospel that include *sharing of the table* and concern for *neighbor* - the reality of a 21st century planet where we all have become neighbors to one another and where we all, in reality, share a common table.

Laura brings scholarship, passion, and life experience to these and other themes that have been so much a part of HNGR's journey. Her study at Messiah, Cornell, and Yale affirm her as a deep and critical thinker. Her life and work in multiple communities and cultures in Southeast Asia, the Pacific Rim and beyond confirm the connectedness of her scholarship to community and individual experience. Her teaching in the classroom and field contexts put her at the center of HNGR's pedagogical commitments. Her faith commitments ground her in the conversations HNGR students share as they wrestle with the paradoxes of brokenness and biblical hope.

Laura, welcome to HNGR!



~ Paul



## Add your name and contact information to the HNGR “Next Steps” Directory!

The HNGR class of 2012 (Wheaton 2013) is about to graduate and needs your help. Our students are looking for ways to continue their vocations through work, service and educational opportunities. As HNGR alumni, you have had the chance to explore these options and learn from your decisions. If you are interested in passing some of this wisdom to the next generation, email the HNGR Program ([hngr@wheaton.edu](mailto:hngr@wheaton.edu)) with your responses to the following:

1. Name of your company, organization, school etc. where you are working, studying or volunteering
2. A brief description of the work your organization does or the program in which you are studying (2-3 sentences)
3. Positions that could be filled by recent HNGR graduates beginning this summer or fall
4. Your name, internship year, and contact information
5. Any additional comments you might have

Our alumni are our most valuable resource for our graduating students. Thank you for your time and willingness to take a small step towards helping our students.

# The Big Task of Smallholder Farming

*A brief recap of the 2013 HNGR Symposium: “Small Plots, Big Change: The Role and Potential of Small Scale Farming to Feed the Hungry”*



Plenary speakers, Roger Thurow (left) and Dr. Gebisa Ejeta (right) during their keynote addresses on Thursday and Friday

The eighth annual HNGR symposium, “Small Plots, Big Change” was held Thursday February 28 and Friday March 1. The featured keynote speakers were Gebisa Ejeta and Roger Thurow, and were supported by a strong cast of presenters with backgrounds in agriculture, ecology, food policy, natural resource management, and local and international markets. This diversity of fields reflects the diversity of disciplines involved in small-scale agriculture, and the speakers drew upon their respective specialties to address the ways that science and technology can be used to help relieve the plight of small-scale farmers in the Majority World.

Roger Thurow, award-winning author of *The Last Hunger Season* and *Enough: Why the World's Poorest Starve in an Age of Plenty*, opened the symposium on Thursday night by explaining some of the opportunities and challenges facing the world's poorest farmers. His presentation – although characterized by a general hopefulness – raised a number of questions, many of which were engaged by the rest of the speakers.

Friday's events were launched by the HNGR intern chapel. The 2012 HNGR interns constructed a patchwork narrative composed of the variety of lives and stories into which they entered for their six-month internships. Although the stories were as varied as the contexts from which they came, they were knit together by the common thread of hope for healing, often in spite of the seeming scarcity of such hope.

With this theme of hope serving as a foundation, the symposium launched into the greater part of its scheduled lectures and panels, beginning with a joint session by Sri Spicka from the John Deere Foundation, Dr. Paul McNamara (HNGR '83) from the University of Illinois, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Economics, and Roger Thurow. Sri Spicka and Dr. McNamara spoke on the potential impacts that research, education, and communications capacity can make in increasing agricultural yields for small-scale farmers living on the margins in the information age. Roger Thurow followed these speakers and spoke on the benefits of the increased proliferation of information in helping farmers without access to existing infrastructure to make informed economic decisions.

*“You can be critical and do all the right analysis, but don’t despair. Despair is the unforgivable sin.”*

*- Paul Robinson*

This session was immediately followed by a panel composed of professionals working in various fields dealing with the interaction of agriculture with the environment. Dr. Laura Yoder, a professor in the Sustainability and Environmental Education Department at Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College, presented a program of seed and information sharing in Southeast Asia that sought to educate and empower farmers – especially women farmers – in rural communities. She also shared a success story from a church-initiated tree-planting program that was forced to bypass governmental structures to aid in environmental restoration in the face of increasing soil and water degradation.

Stuart Dykstra, a vice president at the environmental organization V3 and cofounder of internationalwater.org, explained some of the water resource issues facing Majority World nations. Using Haiti as a case study, he emphasized sustainability and capacity-building as two important aspects of work in nations dealing with environmental degradation as a serious threat to human and ecological flourishing.

The third presenter of the panel was Stan Doerr, CEO of ECHO. Using a story-telling form, he presented many of the often-overlooked human concerns shared by many small-scale farmers. He spoke especially risk-averse behavior that guide many of the decisions these farmers make, and how that has enabled many of these farmers to survive, but also keeps scientific and technological innovations from having greater reach among this group.

Dr. Gebisa Ejeta, distinguished professor and 2009 World Food Prize Laureate in the School of Agronomy at Purdue University, assented to what the previous speakers had said, and provided a broad vision of the multitude of global issues such as climate change that face small-scale farmers throughout the world. A brief discussion by all the panel’s participants followed Dr. Ejeta’s presentation.

Breakout sessions followed this discussion on the topics of resource rights and access, water and irrigation, and nutritional security. More practical and informal in nature, these were led by professionals who are currently working in the field. They were engaging for participants, and facilitated productive discussions that

were important in processing the information presented in the previous panels and lectures.

After a short break, Dr. Ejeta synthesized the information presented in the symposium with a plenary lecture on the potential of science and technology to empower small-scale farmers. His conclusion – in harmony with the other presenters – suggested that while modern science and technology are indeed important tools that can be harnessed to effectively feed the hungry, they are insufficient without local capacity-building, a vibrant entrepreneurial spirit, public-private partnerships, and policy-makers who support innovation in the agricultural sector.

As a sort of epilogue to wrap up the conference, a panel made up of Dr. Ejeta, John Vendeland, Dr. Mwenda Ntarangwi, Dr. Kristen Page, and our very own Dr. Paul Robinson discussed all that had been presented and added their own final words and thoughts to those of the previous presenters. To close the symposium, Paul pleaded that the audience would “hope and not despair. You can be critical and do all the right analysis, but don’t despair. Despair is the unforgivable sin.” Just as the interns had opened with the symposium with a message of hope in the face of overwhelming challenges, Paul closed the symposium with a benediction of hope that was not naïve, but just as certainly not unfounded.

*~ Riley Balikian, HNGR 2011*



Paul with the 2012 HNGR Interns after their chapel



Paul's legacy at Wheaton is characterized by courageous engagement with new host partners across the Majority World, moving the HNGR Program forward in the 21st Century and a deep care and compassion for all the

students who came through the HNGR office.

## *Commissioning the Robinsons*

*After the symposium was over, students, alumni, faculty, staff and administrators gathered to send Paul and Margie off to continue God's work in Congo*

The HNGR community buffet lunch on the Saturday of Symposium weekend has become a staple in the weekend's events, but there has never been a lunch quite like this one. Several alumni joined the current HNGR students, Wheaton faculty and staff in saying farewell to Paul and Margie Robinson.

Through the Global Christian Perspectives course, Paul added depth to the reflection process that is now inherent to HNGR and provides opportunities for students to engage global issues on campus as well as outside North America. As a prophetic voice and spirit on Wheaton's campus, Paul challenged his colleagues to think more broadly about the future of Evangelicalism and Christianity as a whole.

Still, most of Paul's students will remember him for his warmth and hospitality, for his willingness to listen to their struggles and for the hope Paul carried with him wherever he went. Paul and Margie, you certainly will be (and already are) deeply missed.

## *Honor Paul by giving a gift to Congo Initiative*

If you would like another way to show your appreciation to Paul and Margie for their years of service to Wheaton and HNGR, please visit the Congo Initiative website - [www.congoinitiative.org](http://www.congoinitiative.org) - and follow the link on the left. There you can give a monetary gift in honor of Paul and in support of the work that he is doing.

