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New Public Health Programs: *A STRATEGIC VOCATION*

By Cynthia Norton and Gary David Stratton

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:35-38).

Dr. Gary David Stratton, new dean of the School of Arts and Sciences (see page 16), announces the new Public Health program scheduled to launch in the fall of 2015 on the Johnson University Tennessee campus. The Public Health major is consistent with the mission of Johnson University, which seeks to educate students for Christian ministries and other strategic vocations framed by the Great Commission in order to extend the Kingdom of God among nations. Johnson’s Public Health program was designed to meet the need of students who have a call to ministry and a desire to positively influence domestic and global community health. Grounded in a biblical worldview, the major offers a unique ministry-oriented public health program designed to broaden the scope of graduates seeking to share the gospel in word and deed.

Johnson’s Public Health program will offer students a strategic pathway for vocational service while

expanding Johnson University’s “intercultural missionary model.” The mission of Johnson’s Public Health major is to prepare graduates to enter domestic and global communities to help individuals and communities improve and maintain their overall health and wellness while sharing the love of Christ. Program director, Cynthia Norton (Ed.D., University of Tennessee), explains: “In contrast to the clinical approach doctors and other healthcare professionals take to cure diseases, public health professionals focus on preventive measures designed to minimize illness and promote long-term health and wellness.”

This intentional focus on disease prevention and health promotion is imperative and essential in establishing a healthier nation and global society. Most experts agree that major advances in the improvement of health over the next decade will not come from new medical findings or cures, but rather the broader development and application of population-based health prevention programs. The Association of Schools of Public Health affirms that an understanding of public health is a critical component of good citizenship and a prerequisite for taking responsibility for building healthy individuals and societies. Norton concurs. “Johnson’s Public Health major provides students with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to empower individuals and global communities to improve and maintain their health using a holistic approach.”

By addressing both physical and spiritual needs in communities, Christians uniquely demonstrate God's love and follow Christ's command: "Heal the sick...and tell them, 'The Kingdom of God is near you'" (Luke 10:9).

Public health professionals also work to prevent problems by working with the community to implement prevention programs and to identify and secure needed health services and resources. The Public Health major cultivates a critical understanding of disease prevention and health promotion in order to prepare graduates to thoughtfully, positively, and creatively engage the world in which they serve. To accomplish this objective, students learn the science of health through the study of nutrition, biology, disease prevention, anatomy and physiology, epidemiology, global and environmental health, substance abuse, health policy, and faith and ethics. This is combined with program planning for health promotion by learning how to assess, implement, and evaluate programs which effectively achieve the outcome of improved health.

Public health is not only a strategic vocation for Johnson students to extend the kingdom of God in a strategic vocation; it also provides strong employment opportunities. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13, employment of health educators is expected to grow by 37 percent from 2010 to 2020, much faster than the average for all occupations (14%). As healthcare costs continue to rise, insurance companies, employers, and governments are seeking ways to curb costs. Thus growth in the employment of health educators will be driven by efforts to reduce healthcare costs by teaching people about healthy habits and lifestyle behaviors. The current public health workforce is inadequate to meet the health needs of the United States and the global population. Experts believe worsening worker shortages will reach crisis proportions in

STRATEGIC PLACEMENTS

"After successful completion of required coursework, public health majors will complete a semester internship in a public health setting. The internship is a cumulative, integrative, and applied experience designed to assist students to transition from theory to practice, apply their academic preparation in professional work settings, develop competencies required for entry-level public health practice, and prepare for future employment and/or advanced education."

DR. CYNTHIA NORTON

the coming years. According to estimates for 2020, the nation will be faced with a shortfall of more than 250,000 public health workers. Johnson's new Public Health program will prepare a generation of students to meet this growing need.

Johnson Public Health graduates may pursue graduate studies in the field or choose from a variety of public health career paths, such as community health educator, public health environmentalist, worksite health promotion director, health and wellness educator, pharmaceutical sales representative, health and fitness instructor, or nursing home activities director. The Public Health major prepares students for entry-level positions in a variety of settings, such as religious organizations, missions agencies, state and local health departments, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, voluntary health agencies, fitness centers, youth centers, senior citizen centers, and community-based health programs. The major also prepares graduates to seek designation as a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) by the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc., if desired. •

Cynthia Norton brings 27 years of experience in public health education to Johnson, including teaching stints at the University of Tennessee and the University of the Cumberlands (Kentucky), where she received the Honored Professor Award in 2006-2007. She has served on various public health coalitions for violence prevention, elder abuse, child safety and cancer prevention, including project director for Appalachian Adolescent Health & Education Project, and on the Board of Directors for the Jellico Community Hospital. Dr. Norton is a member of the American Public Health Association, the Tennessee Public Health Association, and the American Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

President Gary Weedman states, "Dr. Norton's former employer, a long-time friend and mentor, called me to say she was moving back to her home near our campus. He described her as 'the best faculty member I ever hired in twenty-five years' and encouraged me to find a place for her on our faculty. Our experience with her to date makes his claim believable." Johnson's provost, Tommy Smith, affirms the great work Norton is doing already. "Dr. Norton brings many years of experience in academic administration as well as her expertise in the area of public health to this program. Her winsome personality has endeared her to our faculty and staff and will certainly have great appeal to our students."

As for Norton, she believes it is Johnson's reputation for academic excellence with a great commission heart that helped her attract the faculty who could make this program a reality. "Our faculty are experienced and committed to providing high quality, personalized, educational opportunities to prepare graduates with the skills necessary to address the future challenges facing our communities and nation."



The Public Health Major has been approved by the Johnson University faculty and administration and will launch fall 2015 pending approval by SACSCOC.

