



STEVE HULBERT

Cyrille S. Oguin, ambassador of Benin to the United States, tours the nation speaking out for global reconciliation.

From fractured past to future hope

The Ambassador of Benin invites students to join in global reconciliation

This spring, the School of Education and Social Sciences welcomed Cyrille S. Oguin, ambassador of the west-African republic of Benin, in a chapel exploring how Messiah College's mission intersects with global reconciliation efforts.

Oguin emphasized the need for reconciliation by describing Benin's turbulent past. Upon gaining independence in 1960, hostility and violence flared among the many cultural groups. This strife, rooted in internal and external divisions caused by slavery — with some nationals betraying one another to slave-traders — lingers today. "We needed to find a way . . . of coming back to friendship," Oguin says.

Benin's leaders eventually convened the International Leaders' Conference on Reconciliation and Development in 1999, a multinational congregation of slave descendants, slave traders, and Caribbean and African nationals, to work toward peace.

Joseph Jones, dean of the School of Education and Social Sciences, met numerous national leaders and was part of the planning team for the conference and a member of the U.S. delegation to the conference. His ongoing reconciliation efforts led Benin officials to contact him to arrange Oguin's visit. Benin leaders also expressed an interest in collaborating with Messiah College to afford their student leaders an opportunity to experience a Christian education in the United States.

Dressed in a traditional boubou, a flowing cotton robe, Oguin called for even the simplest reconciliation among individuals. "Peace can come only through reconciliation," he says. "We need to accept our responsibility for that. . . . Anywhere you are, you can bring peace in your community."

—Nate Heller '04

Professor testifies before Congress

Joseph Sheldon, professor of biology and environmental studies, responds to a congressional bill that would alter the Endangered Species Act.

In April, Joseph Sheldon, professor of biology and environmental studies, testified before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Resources as the only educator on a panel of 14 representing various backgrounds. The testimony was in response to a recently introduced bill that, he believes, would weaken the Endangered Species Act. The committee asked Sheldon to address this issue from a Christian perspective, recognizing that environmental studies is his area of scientific specialization.

Students in Sheldon's Conservation Biology class accompanied him to Capitol Hill and had the opportunity to observe environmental policymaking in action. Amber Wingert '05, who is majoring in environmental science, says, "Dr. Sheldon gave a very good argument to the committee for why Christians should be involved in conservation."

In Sheldon's argument, he contends that "The Critical Habitat Reform Act of 2003 weakens the Endangered Species Act by denying adequate habitat protection and by requiring a cost-benefit analysis [what is the value of the proposed project, e.g., a dam, versus the value of the species?]."

In response to his testimony, many committee members asked him follow-up questions and Representative Tom Udall, from New Mexico, spoke personally with him after the hearing, offering thanks and indicating that additional testimony might be requested of Sheldon in the future.

Jeffrey Moshier, dean of the School of Health and Natural Sciences, says, "This was a tremendous and well-deserved honor for Dr. Sheldon. More importantly, he has demonstrated how Christians engaged in science can serve the global community by sharing insights on how to care for creation that are both scientifically sound and faith affirming."



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOSEPH SHELDON

Joseph Sheldon (right), professor of biology and environmental studies, defends the Endangered Species Act before the U.S. Congress.