

August 9, 2010
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Indiana Wesleyan University Graduate Among Humanitarian Volunteers Executed by Taliban

Cheryl Marie Beckett, who graduated with honors from Indiana Wesleyan University in 2000, was among the 10 medical volunteers who were shot to death last week in Afghanistan by the Taliban. She was 32 years old.

“The entire Indiana Wesleyan University family is shocked and saddened to learn of the brutal death of this courageous young woman,” Dr. Henry Smith, IWU President, said.

“Those of us at IWU who are privileged to work with students such as Cheryl Beckett are overwhelmed and humbled by their desire to make our world a better place to live, whatever the personal costs may be,” he said.

A memorial service to celebrate Cheryl’s life will be held sometime in September after fall semester classes begin on IWU’s Marion campus. The University also will establish a Cheryl Beckett Endowed Scholarship.

The body of Cheryl and nine other volunteers – five Americans, two Afghans, a German and a Briton – were discovered on Friday. The volunteers were killed as they returned from a three-week medical mission to the Nuristan province, about 160 miles north of Kabul.

The medical mission was organized by the International Assistance Mission (IAM), an international charitable organization, which has served the people of Afghanistan for three decades.

Cheryl was reared near Cincinnati, where she graduated as the valedictorian of her high school class. She graduated summa cum laude from IWU with a degree in biology.

During her four years at IWU, Cheryl developed a global passion for justice and love while on her travels to Honduras, Mexico, Kenya and Zimbabwe. After college, she worked with AmeriCorps at the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park in Vermont.

Cheryl’s Christian faith and compassion for people led her to the Florida-based Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization (ECHO) where she spent three years preparing for overseas humanitarian projects. She spent the last six years serving the people of Afghanistan through community development, focusing on nutritional gardening and mother-child health.

Cheryl had a deep love for the Afghan people and immersed herself in the local culture, including learning Pashtun and studying the Dari languages.



Cheryl's parents, Charles and Mary Beckett, live in Knoxville, Tennessee, where her father is the senior pastor of Woodlawn Christian Church. The church supported Cheryl's work.

Memorial services are planned later at Woodlawn Christian Church in Knoxville and at Christian Fellowship Church in Evansville.

Memorials donations can be sent to:

Woodlawn Christian Church
Cheryl Beckett Memorial Fund
4339 Woodlawn Pike
Knoxville, TN 37920

The family of Cheryl Beckett released the following statement:

Cheryl loved and respected the Afghan people. She denied herself many freedoms in order to abide by Afghan law and custom. Her international co-workers and the Afghan Nationals with whom she served loved her. She was honored to be included in this most recent three-week medical journey to the remote populations of Northern Afghanistan.

The wickedness of terrorism is being conquered through daily acts of mercy. Peace in Afghanistan can be achieved by the establishment of just laws for all people and the continued sacrifice and selfless love of people working together.

Those who committed this act of terror should feel the utter shame and disgust that humanity feels for them. We share this pain with those who continue the difficult and dangerous work to which Cheryl committed her life.

We, as a family, will continue to love and pray for the Afghan people. We pray that Cheryl's life and work will inspire existing and future ministries of mercy to press on.