RLRI Mideast 2027 Program Summary – University of Tennessee

Friday Evening — February 5

CVM Hosts — **Dr. Lauren Charles & Dr. Johanna Choate**

Evening Challenge — **Dr. Paul Plummer & Dr. Keith Carver**

Worship/Prayer

Saturday — February 6

Devotional and Worship — 8:30am

"Beyond the Medicine: Building a Healthy Practice" – Dr. Meggan Graves
Technical skills are essential to veterinary medicine, but they are only part of becoming a successful veterinarian. This interactive session will explore how personal core values, giving and receiving feedback, effective communication, and everyday interactions shape the culture of a veterinary team. Students will learn to recognize the characteristics of a healthy practice, navigate challenging conversations, and identify ways to contribute to a supportive workplace—even before they hold leadership positions. Through practical scenarios and reflection, participants will discover how small, intentional actions can help build a veterinary profession where people and patients thrive.

Session One — 9:30am
***"Hurry or Love, You Choose"* – Dr. Lauren Charles**
If hurry and love are incompatible, it's up to us to decide how we'll live. Obviously easier said than done, but if God moves at the speed of love, then we should as well. In this session, we will assess the way we use our time so that we can find a healthier, holier lifestyle.

"Onward: Encourage, Love, Do" – Jessica Konzer Birdwell
Onward: Encourage, Love, Do invites veterinary professionals to discover how their faith can shape every aspect of their calling in veterinary medicine. Inspired by our theme from Hebrews 10:24, this session challenges attendees to live for Christ through encouragement, compassion, servant leadership, and meaningful relationships within their teams, clinics, and communities. Through practical examples from veterinary team members, participants will be empowered to lead and love from wherever they are in their careers, embrace faith-centered daily practices, and view their profession not merely as a career, but as a mission field for advancing God's Kingdom.

***"TBD Long Term Missions"*– Dr. J**

Session Two 10:30am

***"God Is In The Waiting Room"* – Dr. Danielle Mzyk**

Waiting is an inescapable part of veterinary medicine. From sitting with a client as diagnostic results are pending, to managing cases with uncertain prognoses, to navigating the long and often unpredictable journey of training and career development, veterinarians and veterinary students frequently find themselves in "waiting rooms" of their own. These moments can feel heavy, filled with anxiety, emotional fatigue, and the pressure to have answers that are not yet available. This presentation reframes waiting not as a pause in purpose, but as an active space where growth, meaning, and even God's work are unfolding. Integrating faith with the realities of veterinary practice, this session explores how seasons of uncertainty, whether in patient outcomes, client communication, or personal trials, can shape resilience, deepen compassion, and strengthen one's sense of calling.

***"Title TBD"* – Dr. Paul Evans**

***"Be Available, God is Able: Evangelism"*– Dr. Nancy Moore**

How do I start a gospel conversation? How do I share the gospel: At school? In the marketplace? With friends or family when they are encountering "life" situations. Practice in this participatory session, discuss common challenges encountered to sharing the gospel, yet embrace how the Lord leads us thought it

Session Three 11:30am

***"Keeping Balance – When Good Things Get Out of Place"* – Bliss Steele**

Can you have too much of a good thing? Absolutely! Work, money, food, technology, and even hobbies are gifts that can become burdens when they take the wrong place in our lives. Through biblical wisdom and practical, everyday examples, we'll discover how to recognize when enough is enough, refuse to be controlled by our appetites, and find lasting contentment in Christ. Because the secret to a balanced life isn't doing everything equally—it's keeping first things first!

"Practical tips for veterinary practice as well as marriage/family/ and daily living"
- Dr. Lew Stickland

Come join Dr. Lew Strickland as he shares practical tips for veterinary practice as well as marriage, family, and daily living.

***"What do you mean there is no gas?"* – Dr. Sara Phipps**

How do you run a surgery clinic on the mission field where their resources are limited and still do high-quality medicine? This talk explores dynamics and balance between "using what you have" and setting high but realistic standards.

Lunch, CVF Updates, and Open Mic 12:30pm

Session Four 2:30pm

"Why Work?" - Dr. Jessica Bianco
Veterinarians do kingdom-building work in all corners of the globe… even right here at home! In this session, we'll cover some highlights learned during a year-long faith and work fellowship designed by Tim Keller's team at the Center for Faith & Work in NYC. Every job is designed by God to serve a purpose in bringing about His creative work, healing power, and restorative grace in our world. Veterinarians have a unique mission opportunity no matter where or what field in which you practice. Come explore ways that you can advance the kingdom of God with any career path.

***"Mentorship"* – Page Wages**
How to mentor new graduates and help them to be successful and grow without burning out. And what to look for as a Mentee…making the Mentor/Mentee relationship successful.

"The Ones Who Jesus Loves" – Dr. Elizabeth Mendoza
Many of us chose the veterinary profession because we love animals. Any day enjoying the company of animals alongside us (dog, cow, giraffe, you pick!) is a great day, right!? Animals are one of God's most wonderful creations and our profession is tasked with caring for them. As Christ followers, our work doesn't end there. How can we show Christ's love to the people on the opposite side of the exam table, or to those whom we cross paths with everyday in our schools and practices?

Session Five 3:30pm

New Grad Panel
Join a group of recent graduates to ask questions and hear from them about what has surprised them since starting out in the real world.

***"Called Together: Building a Marriage that Survives Veterinary Life"* – Drs. Victoria & Preston Morris**
"Called Together: Building a Marriage that Survives Veterinary Life" explores the unique challenges that veterinary careers place on marital relationships while grounding participants in a Christ-centered understanding of covenant commitment. Through biblical principles, attendees will learn to reframe career demands as a shared calling, strengthening unity rather than creating division. The session will highlight common stressors and emphasize the importance of intentional countermeasures to protect marriage relationships. Participants will also identify and commit to practical habits that foster connection, communication, and resilience during demanding seasons of veterinary life.

Short Term Missions Panel
Join a group of short-term missionaries to ask questions and hear their stories from times in the field.

Vet School Tours/Study Break
Fellowship Time 4:30pm

Dinner 6:30pm

Evening Challenge 8:00pm

"Need to be Near" - **Dr. Johanna Choate**
As believers, we're called to abide in Christ, but what does that actually mean? As we wrap up our RLRI weekend, join in as we explore what it means to "be near" and why it's vital that we do so!

Worship and Prayer 9:00pm

Sunday February 7

Breakfast at the hotel and Visit Area Churches

Christian Veterinary Mission