

Conversations

about the James River Center for Expository Preaching

President Byron D. Klaus, Academic Dean Joe Castleberry and Pastor John Lindell discuss the James River Center for Expository Preaching and its potential impact on the Assemblies of God.

What is the purpose of the James River Center for Expository Preaching?

Klaus: The purpose of the center is connected to the mission of AGTS—to shape servant leaders with knowledge, skill and passion to evangelize the world and revitalize the church in the power of the Spirit. We have witnessed the power of expository preaching in the pastoral ministries of Dr. George Wood (chairperson, AGTS Board of Directors) and Dr. Dick Dresselhaus (vice chairperson, AGTS Board of Directors). Dr. Doug Oss (the center's director) utilized expository preaching to plant a successful church against all odds in Salt Lake City, Utah. Most recently, we have witnessed it in the miraculous growth of James River Assembly under the leadership of Pastor John Lindell. This center will allow us to shape servant leaders as competent expositors of God's word, giving them a thorough knowledge necessary to interpret it, teaching skills to communicate it effectively, and instilling a Spirit-kindled passion to proclaim it.



Lindell: By partnering with AGTS to create the center, we wanted to help build a top-drawer, Pentecostal program that would fill the current and future pulpits of our local churches with expository preachers. There are only a few seminaries in the world that have made expositional preaching their focus. None of them are Pentecostal. So, the purpose of the center is to train current and future preachers in the art and science of expository preaching while maintaining our distinct Pentecostal emphasis and reliance upon the Spirit. And training is key. The center is not being created so that we can simply talk about preaching. It's being created so that students can learn to preach by actually preaching in class under



the watchful eye of the professor and fellow students. It is in-service training, and the end result will be students who know, from experience, how to preach.

Dr. Klaus, what is your vision of AGTS in regards to partnerships with local churches like James River?

Klaus: Unfortunately, history has painted a picture of local churches and their training institutions as ships passing in the night. I don't believe it has to be like that. This partnership is one that can foster a network of resources to serve the church that we all love. As our name illustrates, we have a responsibility to serve the Assemblies of God and its local churches by preparing men and women to minister in the local church context. Links between the seminary and local churches help us produce ministers who meet the needs of the local church. In this case, AGTS strongly agrees with James River on the issue of expository preaching. James River's deep commitment to expository preaching can fuel a re-emphasis on preaching here and make sure that graduates of AGTS are known as solid expository preachers. This partnership allows both James River and AGTS more long-term effectiveness in broader publics than either could have apart from each other. Pastor Lindell and I look forward to seeing other pastors and churches partner with AGTS.

Pastor Lindell, can you explain the role that expository preaching has played in the success and growth of James River Assembly?

Lindell: Expository preaching has been foundational to James River Assembly's growth and health. I am continually amazed at the power of God's Word to mature people in Christ. When people receive systematic, verse-by-verse teaching on a weekly basis, it produces a health that can't be attained any other way. I am convinced that people are hungry for the Word of God. They want to know what it means and how it applies to them on Monday morning. I am equally convinced that God loves it when we preach his Word line by line and precept by precept. We've done it for 13 years at James River Assembly and have stood back and watched God grow his church.

How will James River be involved in the program?

Klaus: James River Assembly is crucial to everything that will happen at the center. They are the case study—the place where the reality of expository preaching has built an effective and powerful church. The curriculum, coaching and mentoring will be done in cooperation with the James River preaching team.

What will the center offer to the church at large?

Lindell: The greatest thing it will offer to the church is men and women who are gifted and ready to preach.

Klaus: In addition to the for-credit programs, we will offer a cohort-based certificate program for people who simply want to enhance their preaching skills without earning a degree. We will have seminars in which key preachers will meet with the James River and AGTS staff to sharpen their skills. In the future, we will create a cohort just for younger leaders. Mentoring, coaching and networking will all be a part of a broader dimension for people who are already in ministry. Also, there will be conferences in the not-too-distant future that will highlight the work of the center.

Who is eligible to enter the degree program?

Castleberry: Any man or woman who is interested in earning a degree and meets the admissions requirements is eligible to enter an AGTS degree program. We will offer expository preaching courses in almost every program; however, the concentration will only be offered through the M.Div. program. Students who cannot move to Springfield to study may want to take modular courses as part of our Master of Arts in Christian Ministry cohort program.



What will the program offer students?

Castleberry: Students who study in this program will gain a set of skills that will guarantee a lifetime of preaching material. The very nature of expository preaching involves a method of research and planning that takes a lot of the stress out of figuring out what to preach. Students who take the M.Div. program with a concentration in expository preaching will get a solid foundation in Greek and Hebrew and thorough knowledge of Scripture. They will be thoroughly trained in how to preach through the different kinds of literature in the Old and New Testaments. They will learn how to pull the structure of their sermons out of the

Biblical text and how to plan a sermon series in advance. They will have the opportunity to practice preaching in our preaching lab and get feedback from both professors and fellow students. The program will also give students the opportunity to study with the finest biblical expositors in the Pentecostal movement and to benefit from their network of relationships. I believe that the graduates of the program will be in high demand in the future because of the confidence and skill they will develop.

There will be scholarship money available. How will those scholarships be distributed?

Castleberry: For the 2005-2006 academic year, there will be eight \$4000 scholarships available to resident students on a competitive basis. We are looking for additional partners who would be willing to provide additional scholarships. Any church that would like to offer a scholarship of \$2500 or more in its own name or to honor its pastor or retired pastor would be welcome to participate. ■

“Although spread out over seven years, James River Assembly’s financial commitment to this program equals the largest gift ever made to the seminary. We are incredibly grateful to Pastor Lindell and James River Assembly for their generosity and their desire to see the Kingdom of God grow. We look forward to a long and prosperous partnership.”

—President Byron D. Klaus