

Empire State Building Becomes New Home for Christian College

Campus Crusade for Christ's The King's College is focused on training leaders in the heart of New York City

It's the tallest building in one of the world's best-known cities—and that makes the Empire State Building a fitting place to house a small liberal arts Christian school, says one college administrator.

"We are a leadership school," said J. Stanley Oakes Jr., president of The King's College in New York City. "We want to produce Supreme Court justices and leaders in business and education. ... If you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere."

Fulfilling a dream of the late Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ International (CCCI), The King's College is a Christian liberal arts college that Oakes believes will one day compete with prestigious secular schools. "Dr. Bright told me that God wanted him to develop a university on the level of an Oxford," he said.

Bright tapped Oakes, a senior CCCI staffer, to explore his idea of launching a new school. Through a friend Oakes learned that The King's College, founded by radio evangelist Percy Crawford in 1938, had closed in 1994. Realizing the value of the school's charter and 11,000 alumni, Oakes persuaded Bright to leverage the defunct college as a basis for building his dream. "We just started out as a faith venture," Oakes said.

Stepping out on a limb in 1996, Oakes and his wife personally borrowed \$100,000 for the initial legal work. Next came the mammoth task of raising \$1 million, which took a year to accomplish. Yet much more money was needed.

Then heavy-duty praying yielded a miracle when a Christian businessman offered \$5 million. The only hitch was that Oakes had to raise the same amount in matching funds within four months. Miraculously, \$7.7 million poured in.

Occupying two floors and 35,000 square feet in the Empire State Building, The King's College reopened in 1999 with 17 students. Enrollment has reached 228 full- and part-time students, with 400 students expected in the fall semester. "Applications are up about 300 percent from last year," Oakes said. He forecasts 2,000 students by 2014 and university status soon after that.

Although The King's College owns land for a suburban campus, officials opted for a Manhattan beachhead because of its strategic location and proximity to the halls of power—the media, United Nations headquarters and the New York Stock Exchange.

At King's the curriculum covers three majors: business, education and the Oxford program (politics, philosophy and economics). Prospective students are evaluated for leadership potential and not just SAT scores. "This year we will turn down 50 percent of the applicants," Oakes said.

The student body represents many denominations. About 75 percent receive scholarships. Many are Pentecostal such as Daniel Sanabria, 22, who attends Bay Ridge Christian Center in

Brooklyn. For the last three summers he has led missions trips to Turkey, Ethiopia and Peru.

One of 160 students living in nearby dormitory apartments, Sanabria is majoring in business/marketing. "I believe that if I am a business owner and I make money I'm going to take myself around the world and do evangelism," he told Charisma.

Amy Weaver, a 21-year-old from Lancaster, Pa., discovered King's on the Internet () after a stint with Youth With A Mission. "It was not on my radar at all," she said.

But she said she loves the school and looks forward to a career in international journalism. "I'm learning to depend on Christ more and more every day," she said, "and realizing how intrinsically He weaves the story of my life, and how he ties everything together."

Instead of traditional chapel services, students are mentored in small groups and join evangelism outreaches aimed at New York City high school students. In August, 40 teenagers made decisions for Christ in one day, Oakes reported.

Faculty members stay close to King's College students through prayer times, social activities and discipleship groups. "I've taken students camping in the Adirondack Mountains," said Robert Carle, professor of theology. "I have found the faculty to be deeply caring."

Critics have condemned King's costly urban home and elitist mind-set, which Oakes denies. He sees graduates modeling the apostle Paul.

“You take Paul, an educated man under the power of the Holy Spirit, and you can change the world,” he said. “We want to train leaders, but we want them to serve and to give.

Peter K. Johnson in New York City