

'Empowered' for the 21st Century

Pentecostal-charismatic scholars are meeting this week in Tulsa, Okla., to discuss the movement's future as part of the Commission on Holy Spirit Empowerment in the 21st Century.

✖ **Feb. 17, 2009** – The Pentecostal-charismatic movement is the fastest growing segment of Christianity worldwide, with more than 600 million adherents. But its leaders are meeting this year to discuss the future of the movement, particularly how to introduce “Spirit-empowerment” to a new generation.

Dubbed the Commission on Holy Spirit Empowerment in the 21st Century, the series of meetings are being divided into leaders, scholars and next generation tracks, and will culminate with the Congress on Holy Spirit Empowerment in the 21st Century on April 8-10, 2010, at the Mabee Center in Tulsa, Okla.

The commission is being funded through a \$250,000 grant from Oral Roberts University (ORU) in Tulsa, where the scholars' track is meeting this week.

“With more than 100 years behind us since the Azusa Street Revival and a new century before us, the time is now for a serious conversation on the future of the movement,” said the Rev. Billy Wilson, commission chair and executive director of the International Center for Spiritual Renewal. “Our hope is that through the work of the commission new generations will experience the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Wilson, who is also vice chair of ORU's board of trustees, said each track will meet three times in the run-up to the 2010 congress.

The first leadership meeting took place in December in Newport

Beach, Calif., and was led by Jack Hayford, president of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. The gathering of 24 prominent Pentecostal-charismatic ministers also included Larry Stockstill, senior pastor of Bethany World Prayer Center in Baker, La.; Kenneth Ulmer, president of King's Seminary in Englewood, Calif.; David Shibley, founder of Global Advance in Rockwall, Texas; and Daniel de Leon, senior pastor of Templo Calvario in Santa Ana, Calif.

Vinson Synan, dean emeritus of Regent University School of Divinity, is leading the scholars' track this week, where participants are hoping to identify the top 10 theological questions facing the movement over the next several years. The group of roughly 20 scholars is from a cross-section of denominational backgrounds and reflects the racial diversity that flowed out of the Azusa Street Revival and still marks the Pentecostal-charismatic movement.

Among the attendees are Assemblies of God Theological Seminary President Byron Klaus, United Pentecostal theologian David Bernard, charismatic Catholic theologian Charles Whitehead, Church of God in Christ scholar David Daniels of McCormick Theological Seminary, and Church of God Theological Seminary President Steve Land.

The next generation track will begin meeting in February or March. Rob Hoskins, founder of Book of Hope in Pompano, Fla., and a member of the ORU Board of Trustees, will host those "conversations," which will include both new generation ministry leaders and students.

Commission organizers said their goals include fostering greater unity among Pentecostal-charismatic congregations and emerging churches, encouraging the growth of "Spirit-empowered" ministries and presenting new language for the movement.

"One thing we believe as we've moved into this new century [is

that] new vocabulary is going to arise in the kingdom,” Wilson said. “Somewhere back in the 1960s, somebody said this is the charismatic movement and it stuck. Pentecostalism dates back to [the 1906 Azusa Street Revival]. We think we’re going to hear from this next generation that those words carry a lot of baggage in their culture, and there may need to be new words that help them engage [the culture].”

Although the three tracks of meetings are closed to the public, the commission is planning to post summaries at a Web site and to develop a book based on the groups’ recommendations.

The vision for the commission came out of ORU’s own desire to connect with a new generation. But ORU board chairman Mart Green said the series of conversations are intended to serve the global Christian community.

“We’re trying to bring them all together and say: ‘What is it that the Holy Spirit is doing, and where is our commonality? How can we work together?’” said Green, who is also president of Mardel, Inc. in Oklahoma City, Okla. “So it will serve the kingdom. It’s bigger than just ORU.” **-Adrienne S. Gaines**