

Mark Rutland Tapped to Lead ORU

The president of Southeastern University in Florida was chosen today to succeed former Oral Roberts University leader Richard Roberts.

✖ **Jan. 28, 2009** – The president of a once-struggling Assemblies of God college that tripled its enrollment and transitioned to become a university has been named the new president of Oral Roberts University (ORU).

Mark Rutland, Ph.D., who also helped a Florida megachurch reduce a \$15 million debt, will succeed former President Richard Roberts, who resigned in November 2007. The announcement was made Wednesday at a press conference in Tulsa, Okla., after a vote by the ORU Board of Trustees. Rutland is currently president of Southeastern University, an AG college in Lakeland, Fla.

“We are excited about the future under the leadership of Dr. Rutland,” ORU board chairman Mart Green said in a statement. “He has been selected as the result of a careful process and we are confident that he will take the university to new heights while continuing to uphold the mission and vision of Oral Roberts University.”

Rutland’s selection comes more than a year after ORU was rocked by a financial scandal that led to Roberts’ resignation amid a wrongful termination lawsuit brought against him and the school by three former professors. One professor has since been reinstated, and the school reached a settlement agreement with the two others in October.

Days after Roberts stepped down, Green, founder of the Christian supply store chain Mardel, pledged \$70 million to help the debt-ridden school. The donation also involved

wealthy members of Green's family, who founded the multibillion-dollar chain Hobby Lobby.

Green gave the school an initial \$8 million to meet immediate debts and payroll needs and gifted the remaining \$62 million after ORU complied with several accountability measures. "ORU must restore its broken trust, its battered reputation and its beaten spirit," Green said at the time. "Now begins a time of healing."

In the year since then, Green said ORU has reduced its debt from \$55 million to \$15 million with support from some 12,000 donors. Numerous buildings have gotten new carpeting, wiring, paint and furniture, and the university is working to upgrade its academic programs and increase enrollment.

Roberts continues to lead the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, which is now separate from the university, and is being paid an annual salary of \$223,600 through November as part of a severance agreement reached last fall.

Despite the challenges ORU has faced, Rutland said he believes the best is yet to come for the university. "I'm energized by challenges rather than intimidated," Rutland told *Charisma*. "But it's not because I think I'm some great leader, it's that I just am a leader who believes I have a great God."

The Rev. Karl Strader, a longtime friend of ORU founder Oral Roberts who served on the university's board of trustees for about 25 years until 2008, told the *Lakeland Ledger* that Rutland's new appointment was "wonderful for Oral Roberts University, but a tragedy for Southeastern."

"I'm very happy about the choice of Mark Rutland," Strader told *Charisma*. "I think he'll do great. Everything I know about Mark Rutland is good."

A native of Texas, Rutland holds degrees from the University of Maryland and the Candler School of Theology at Emory

University in Atlanta, and he earned a Ph.D. from the California Graduate School of Theology.

He was a Methodist minister when he was baptized in the Holy Spirit in the 1970s, and later became a traveling evangelist and missionary. In 1988 he founded Global Servants, a worldwide missions organization that has planted ministries in Ghana and Thailand. **(Read more about Rutland in *Charisma's* 2004 cover story, "Renaissance Man.")**

Before becoming president of Southeastern in 1999, Rutland was pastor of Mount Paran Church of God in Atlanta and later at Calvary Assembly of God in Orlando, Fla., once one of the largest AG congregations in the nation. Close to bankruptcy when he arrived, Calvary reduced a \$15 million debt by \$4 million within the five years he served as pastor.

During Rutland's tenure as president, Southeastern College transitioned to become a university and grew from roughly 1,000 students to more than 3,000 today. It has invested \$50 million in renovation and campus building projects, and its athletic program has participated in 29 NCCAA II National Tournaments, captured 22 South region titles and won 12 NCCAA II National Championships.

"Southeastern University has experienced unprecedented growth over the past 10 years with Dr. Rutland as the catalyst," said Charles Kelly, chairman of the board of Southeastern University. "His extraordinary leadership and vision have transformed Southeastern into one of the leading Christian universities in the United States.

Rutland said he doesn't think of himself as a "turnaround man," but he hopes to help ORU puts its energy in the right direction. "The academic environment at ORU has always been very well thought of. ... and I think the current board and board chair, they're on the track of dealing with deferred maintenance that has to go forward," he said. "I believe

there's a lot of pent-up goodwill for ORU, and I just believe that we can tap into that."

Rutland is to begin as ORU president in July. A presidential search committee is being established at Southeastern.