

ORU Reaches Out to Hispanic Pentecostals

✖ Oral Roberts University (ORU) today formed a strategic partnership with the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC) that both groups hope will make ORU the school of choice for Hispanic Pentecostal students.

During a press conference today, ORU President Mark Rutland and NHCLC President Samuel Rodriguez ceremonially signed copies of the agreement that both men described as “historic.”

“The Hispanic community is a vital piece of the fabric of this country and the world,” said Rutland, who occasionally spoke in Spanish during the media event held at the Tulsa, Okla., university. “This agreement shows ORU’s commitment to this community and will give the NHCLC churches a sensitive and energetic place to point Hispanic high school graduates.”

Rodriguez said the NHCLC, possibly the nation’s largest Hispanic Christian group, recognizes ORU as “the school of choice for the Hispanic Spirit-filled community” and endorses the university as “the premier learning institution for the over 20 million Hispanics that, according to Pew Research, embrace the charismatic, Spirit-filled Christian experience.”

Rodriguez said more than 80 percent of the NHCLC’s 25,000-plus affiliated churches are Pentecostal.

The exclusive partnership includes the formation of the Jesse Miranda Center at ORU. An Assemblies of God executive presbyter, Miranda is CEO of the NHCLC and founder of the Alianza de Ministerios Evangélicos Nacionales (AMEN), a

multidenominational association of Hispanic Protestant lay and clergy leaders in the United States, Puerto Rico, Canada and Mexico.

Rodriguez said the center eventually will serve as the NHCLC's research and development arm. But initially it will focus on recruitment and developing culturally contextualized programs and curriculum.

"The Jesse Miranda Center will also afford us the opportunity to make a statement in that Hispanic students are not just being sought out in terms of the numbers, but in terms of affirmation," Rutland said. "That there may be unique ways that they need encouragement, and we want to supply that."

The Jesse Miranda Center for Latino Leadership will remain at Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, Calif., Rodriguez added, noting that the NHCLC hopes to one day establish Jesse Miranda Centers at every major evangelical university.

The agreement also makes ORU a strategic partner for the NHCLC's overall educational program. Rodriguez said the university currently is providing resources to help the NHCLC train Pentecostal pastors to develop after-school and mentoring programs in their churches.

He noted that though the Hispanic Pentecostals are one of the fastest-growing religious demographics in the U.S., the high school dropout rate among Latinos is at 50 percent in some U.S. cities.

"We have this great emerging demographic of Hispanic Americans who are primarily charismatics [and] Pentecostals-even the Catholics are charismatics," said Rodriguez, who is an Assemblies of God minister. "But then there is this educational disconnect."

Describing ORU as "the flagship for Spirit-filled, charismatic Christian higher learning," Rodriguez said the university was

uniquely poised to lead in preparing the next generation of Hispanic Spirit-filled leaders.

He said Rutland's appointment as president of ORU created the tipping point for forming the alliance. "What he did at Southeastern was just incredible," Rodriguez said, pointing to Rutland's role in tripling enrollment at the Lakeland, Fla., institution and helping it transition to become a university during his 10-year tenure.

"He is the MVP, the leading university president in the evangelical, Spirit-filled, Pentecostal-charismatic world," Rodriguez said, describing himself and Jesse Miranda as "co-presidents of the Mark Rutland fan club."

But he said Rutland also has a passion to empower the Hispanic American community. "His heart for the Hispanic-American people, his commitment really drew us along and hence the relationship," Rodriguez said.

Rutland said the agreement is another step in the university's "aggressive" growth plan. After a high-profile financial scandal in 2007 that led the resignation of former President Richard Roberts, ORU has almost eliminated more than \$55 million of debt and is focused on increasing its enrollment.

Minorities make up roughly 22 percent of ORU's student body, and Rutland said he wants to see Hispanic student population rise to 25 percent in the next several years. But he stressed that the university is not focused on developing a multicultural campus, but on building "a multiethnic environment where a culture of faith is encouraged."

Rodriguez added that the partnership was "not some tokenistic exercise in political correctness" but an effort to engage young people with a biblical worldview so they could turn the nation and the world "upside down" for Christ.

Founded in 1963 by healing evangelist Oral Roberts, ORU

currently has more than 3,000 students from 60 nations.