

Christian College Unveils 'Pulpit Simulator' to Sharpen Pastors' Preaching Skills

A small Christian college in rural Indiana has big goals for its latest initiative – a program designed to be a “flight simulator” of sorts for pastors wanting to hone their skills behind the pulpit.

“If you think about a pilot who’s getting trained to crawl up into the cockpit of a plane, they get into a digital flight simulator,” Dr. Timothy McConnell, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs, said on a recent episode of CBN News’ “Quick Start” podcast. “We’ve created kind of a pulpit simulator, climbing into the pulpit with cameras, confidence monitors, lights, sound systems – all the things you would expect to need to have some acumen and some awareness of to step into the pulpit in our times, and we’ve put it into a lab space.”

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McConnell, the program’s director, was describing PREACH Labs, launched this month in Upland, Indiana, by Taylor University, one of the oldest Christian universities in the country. The program’s name is an acronym for “Preparing, Resourcing, Equipping, and Coaching for Homiletic Excellence.”

As it turns out, there seems to be some merit to initiatives like this.

Surveys have found many pastors and ministry leaders feel ill-equipped to adequately and compellingly address issues from the pulpit, especially when the topics center on matters of politics and civic engagement. In 2023, the Barna Group released data showing only one-in-five pastors (20%) felt equipped to lead their congregations on those subjects in particular.

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Data published by Lifeway Research in 2021 found more than half of pastors (54%) were frequently overwhelmed by their ministries and 48% felt the demands before them – potentially including preaching – amounted to more than they could handle. But even with these statistics, very few evangelical ministers stepped away from their pulpits.

There are a lot of pastors, McConnell said, “whacking away” at preaching – because it’s a duty many of them, especially in less-populous areas, took on without any real training – who could benefit from a resource like PREACH Labs.

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