

How Billy Wilson Will Continue Oral Roberts' Legacy as ORU President

For nearly six months, Billy Wilson has been looking forward to starting a new chapter of his life as president of Oral Roberts University. During a busy first day, Wilson granted Charisma News a one-on-one interview and talked about his adjustment to his new surroundings, his and his wife's recent 35th anniversary and the continuance of Oral Roberts' legacy.

Charisma News: How has the first day on the job gone? Have there been any surprises?

Wilson: No real surprises, but it certainly has been very busy around here. It's been an exciting day. We had an alumni luncheon, some local television station interviews, a lot of media things and, of course, I'm trying to get settled into my office.

CN: It's been a busy couple of days for you. What did you and your wife, Lisa, do to celebrate your 35th anniversary yesterday?

Wilson: We did get to celebrate a little bit at a Mexican restaurant in Tulsa last night, but we'll celebrate a little more fully at another time. Of course, we're continuing the transition here to ORU, and we worked a little more than usual yesterday. So, I certainly owe my wife for that.

CN: How has the adjustment to Oklahoma gone so far, especially in lieu of the rough weather the state has endured lately?

Wilson: We were here on Friday afternoon, and we saw the storms coming through on Friday night. Of course, we're heartbroken over the tragic loss of life, and we're certainly praying for the Oklahoma City area. We're coming from Cleveland, Tenn., and we've seen some storms there in recent years, so it's not really a distant thing for us. But after 29 years in Cleveland, we're excited to move to Tulsa. It's a great community, and we're really looking forward to serving

the Lord here.

CN: What led you to take this position, and how much different will this role be for you personally?

Wilson: This was not something that I necessarily sought. When I was asked about serving as president, I committed this opportunity to prayer, and I discovered that this was where God wanted me to spend this season of my life, pouring into this next generation. We have a real heart for new generations. Empowered21, of course, helps the older generations turn toward younger generations, and that's another reason why this opportunity appealed to me. It gives us an opportunity to equip new generations of leaders that will impact the world.

CN: What are some of the biggest challenges you will face in your new role as ORU president?

Wilson: The challenges are good challenges. ORU has emerged from a season of storms. But it has stabilized, and we're grateful for that. We appreciate the four years of Dr. Mark Rutland's leadership, and now we're in a position to do what God wants ORU to do globally. There is a global platform for ORU to help this generation of students reach the world for the gospel. It's an exciting challenge.

CN: Do you have any major initiatives planned over the summer or for the fall semester for ORU?

Wilson: One of the first things we announced today was the formation of a presidential task force for the globalization of ORU—a creative think tank of internal and external thought leaders. We have a dream of what ORU will be in the 21st century and that there will be a global harvest, equipping new generations of leaders around the world. The board of trustees will launch those directions early next year. We're looking forward to a very exciting fall semester and the continuation of summer classes here now. We're excited to see what God will do at ORU this fall.

CN: Empowered21 has had a tremendous impact worldwide. How is that project going right now?

Wilson: It's going great. We just finished a large congress in Asia in May, consisting of 43 nations. I was personally

impacted spiritually. We believe there will be dramatic repercussions in Asia in the days to come. Pentecost Sunday was a huge hit this year for us, with thousands of churches around the world standing with us to proclaim the power of the Holy Spirit. We appreciate *Charisma* and Steve Strang standing with us over this past month and promoting it. We had reports where in one church, 200 to 300 people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It's an exciting season for us with Empowered21, too, because it is coming back here to Tulsa with us at ORU.

CN: A reliable source has told us that some Pentecostal colleges are attracting more mainline (non-Spirit-filled) Christians. How does a Pentecostal school stay true to its roots with the rising student population that isn't Spirit-filled?

Wilson: ORU has traditionally been called a charismatic institution. These days, it's a different language, and we've moved to the phrase "Spirit-empowered institution." It's very unusual because in Oral's vision, this university was founded on God's authority and the Holy Spirit. We are the only university and only school in the world that was founded on the Holy Spirit. We've been given a wonderful opportunity to invite new generations to meet the power of the Holy Spirit. We're honest with potential students up front here, in that we tell them they're going to have ample opportunity in their time here to meet the Person of the Holy Spirit.

CN: Is this a broader trend that we should be looking at?

Wilson: We really hope so. We've had some discussions with college presidents over the years and with my colleagues in presidential offices all over the country, and we're finding a real heart among them to say this generation needs to experience the Holy Spirit. We cannot relinquish this ground that God has given to us. We need to empower a new generation that is hungry to know God, one that is not afraid to experience God at the greatest depths and the highest heights. ... We believe it is a trend and that young people are getting more serious about their faith.

CN: You've been quoted as saying, "We will continue to 'make no little plans here.'" That's something Oral Roberts himself said, isn't it? What can you do to continue that legacy?

Wilson: I'm sitting at my new desk as president of ORU. Oral Roberts had a sign on his desk that said, "Make no little plans here." My staff, on my last day of my previous position, gave me a set of bookends that said the same thing. Now, every day when I come in this office, I will see this motto. The man that built this university was a great man of faith, and he was the father of this movement. This university was built on raw determination and faith, and I believe that's what the future of this university will be run on: faith. I'm praying every day, "God, are what your plans for this university? You are the God of the entire universe, so what do we do to honor You?"