

# How to Equip the Next Generation With the Power of the Spirit

As executive officer of the historic Azusa Street Centennial, Oral Roberts University (ORU) President William “Billy” Wilson came into an unexpected blessing.

“We found ourselves with the largest database of Pentecostal/charismatic leaders in the history of the movement,” Wilson said. “We had cellphone numbers and email addresses of people who came to the centennial literally from all over the world. Initially, we really didn’t know how to steward that forward.”

Pentecostals from around the globe marked the Azusa Street Centennial in 2006, drawing thousands April 25-29 to Los Angeles to commemorate the historic outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In 1906, black pastor William Seymour led the interdenominational revival that also crossed races, and 100 years later, Wilson led the charge to commemorate this special time in church history.

“We had about 50,000 people from 114 nations,” he said. “It was a monumental and profound homecoming for the entire Spirit-filled movement globally.”

Leaders, including T.D. Jakes, Kenneth Copeland, Reinhard Bonnke, Dr. David Yonggi Cho, Jack Hayford, Claudio Freidzon, Charles Blake, E.A. Adeboye, Rick Warren and Jim Reeve, and hundreds of others attended centennial events. Charisma House published a book of Azusa’s pictorial history by Dr. Eddie Hyatt and Joel Kirkpatrick.

Azusa and Oral Roberts University seemed to be inextricably linked, in part because of their leadership.

“In 2008, I became part of Oral Roberts University’s board of trustees, serving as vice chair,” said Wilson, who is now licensed under the Church of God but has also worked with the Church of God of Prophecy. “ORU was in a season of profound change, and the new board chair, Mart Green, wanted to show alumni of ORU that this university would continue to focus on the Holy Spirit.”

This opportunity led to what Wilson calls “a series of conversations around the world.”

“Our team traveled to five different continents and hosted 17 events asking about Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered Christianity in the 21st century. These gatherings culminated in a global gathering held in Tulsa at ORU in 2010 that ultimately became known as Empowered21.”

### **Birth of a New Movement**

At first, Wilson and ORU didn’t comprehend fully what had been birthed during the 2010 gathering.

“We thought the conclusion of this massive event would be the culmination of Empowered21, but instead we discovered it had become the launchpad for a powerful and fresh movement, empowering the nations through the power of the Holy Spirit. It was like nothing we had ever seen before!”

Although Empowered21 (E21) is for all Pentecostals and charismatics of all ages, the movement still had to appeal to younger generations and try to serve them well as the future of the church around the globe.

“We did extensive testing of words to determine how this new generation would self-identify, whether they would consider themselves to be Pentecostal, charismatic, evangelical, Spirit-led, Spirit-filled or Spirit-empowered,” Wilson said. “They embraced the term ‘Spirit-empowered’ by a wide margin. These college-age students also determined it would be highly

impactful to add '21' to remember this movement through history as the one that impacted the 21st century. Now we explore what it means to be Spirit-empowered believers in the 21st century."

President Wilson became global co-chair of Empowered21, at first sharing leadership with Pastor Jack Hayford and now with Dr. George O. Wood.

"Dr. Wood is the chair of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship and a wonderful friend and a great partner," Wilson said.

As for how Wilson was named global co-chair, he takes no credit.

"Dr. Wood and I didn't ask for this leadership position," he said. "We ended up providentially stumbling into this significant relational network that is the largest in the movement's history. I have extensive relationships all over the world and have been honored to preach in 98 nations personally. As a result of the Azusa centennial and our relationship-building over the years, I was blessed to earn trust among Spirit-empowered leaders. This trust has been a key factor in gathering people around the world to discuss the issues at hand within the Spirit-empowered movement and to offer to a hurting world the hope that only Jesus Christ can bring."

The international tapestry of the movement shines through in its broader leadership.

"Under the Global Council, we have 14 regional cabinets," Wilson said. "Most of these are populated by 15 to 30 leaders in that part of the world who are top denominational, independent, charismatic/Pentecostal leaders—all of them working on the same goals, purpose and mission as the Global Council.

“We also have several auxiliary groups such as Next-Gen Leaders, an Evangelist Alliance, a Scholars Consultation and a task force on discipleship.”

As executive director, Caleb Wehrli is leading the day-to-day operations of Empowered21 from the Oral Roberts University campus. He works with the network around the world.

“The network’s leadership continues to grow,” Wilson said. “Our research has told us that more than 600 leaders are serving Empowered21 around the world.”

### **Encompassing a Broad Vision**

Empowered21 has a less restrictive structure than a typical organization.

“We have a Global Council that gives inspirational oversight to the network,” Wilson said. “It’s a relational network without bylaws, a constitution or dues. It’s made up of people of great integrity who pay their own expenses to attend and who collect no speaking fees or honorariums—it’s a wonderful model that has worked exceptionally well.”

Along with integrity, the network also has a huge vision.

“In one of our Global Council meetings a few years ago, we asked a very important question: ‘What’s the one thing that is so big that no organization, no one network, no one ministry could possibly do it by themselves?’ The answer was profound: ‘That we would see every person on earth have an opportunity through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to know Jesus Christ by 2033—the 2,000-year anniversary of Acts, chapter 2.’ We don’t necessarily believe everyone is going to be saved, but we passionately believe everyone deserves the opportunity to know the Jesus we know. We believe the work of the Holy Spirit is going before us and in us and through us to give every person a realistic opportunity to know Jesus Christ—this is the big vision of Empowered21!”

Global Council members look to Jesus' prayer for unity in the Gospel of John for direction.

"When you look at John 17, there are three components to the prayer Jesus prayed," Wilson said. "The first is relational unity, that we would be one as He and the Father are one, in relationship together. Empowered21 calls Spirit-empowered believers all over the world to be in relational unity.

"The second is a missional purpose, which we see when Jesus says, 'I'm praying this will happen so that the world may believe.' In fact, we've learned over the years that bringing people together simply for the sake of being together is not a sustainable model. If we want something that will stand the test of time, then we need a shared purpose—a shared mission. When we can share a mission in relational unity, we can help the world believe."

Wilson notes the third element in John 17 that he says some people forget.

"Jesus says, 'I've given them the glory, Father, that you've given me that they may be one.' The glory is the rest of the story. E21 provides a platform that allows diverse believers in the Spirit-empowered movement to come together, to share together, to love one another, to get to know one another and to be in relational unity, all bound together by God's presence. We then champion this united vision, a vision so large that it demands we all work together in order to reach every person on earth."

That vision leads to events that bring together the Spirit-filled community around the globe. Every five years, E21 holds a Global Congress, and there's a special location for the next gathering.

"In 2020, May 31 through June 3, coinciding with Pentecost Sunday and the few days after, we'll be in Jerusalem at the Pais Arena for our third-ever Global Congress," Wilson said.

These large E21 gatherings are supported by smaller regional gatherings.

“In the five-year interim, our regional cabinets organize diverse kinds of events to meet the needs of their region,” Wilson said. “For the most part, those are done at the regional level, and the Global Council does not necessarily dictate to the regional cabinet what events they should do.”

Wilson believes events are part of a significant process.

“We’re after a bigger process, an intergenerational process, helping a new generation connect with the power of the Holy Spirit and bringing Christian unity for world evangelization. We encourage the regional cabinets to do what works in their part of the world,” he said. “And then we also ask that one region volunteer each year to host a congress or conference immediately before Pentecost Sunday. Our América Latina cabinet graciously agreed to host this year’s event in Bogota, Colombia, in early June, for an incredible time with some of the best Spirit-empowered speakers, anointed music, powerful moments of prayer and opportunities to connect with men and women seeking a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”

## **Influencing Next Generations**

E21 is also tuned in to young voices with its Next Gen Youth Leaders Network.

“We just hosted an event in Dubai in January, called ‘40 Under 40,’ where 40 of the top leaders in Spirit-empowered Christianity under the age of 40 came together to encourage each other, build relationships and prepare themselves to support each other when the full mantle of leadership is passed to them. We have young people in all of our meetings, and we encourage them to have older people in their meetings—we are intentionally intergenerational. We believe there’s a blessing released from heaven when generations come together, honor one another and bless one another, as

indicated in Malachi 4.”

As president of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Wilson is occupied with young people in the heartland of America as well. He is completing his sixth year leading the university and has witnessed some real successes.

“ORU has had 10 consecutive years of enrollment growth; we have zero debt; we have 108 nations represented in our student body this year and are serving more than 7,500 students each year—4,500 in for-credit classes, and 3,000 in certificate programs. These are amazing days at Oral Roberts University,” President Wilson said.

Not only is ORU growing in its global reach but also in its educational offerings.

“We’ve added a number of new programs here at ORU,” Wilson said. “We’ve opened a Global Learning Center, enabling the world to come to ORU and ORU to go to the world through Zoom technology, along with virtual and augmented reality. We’re building our first new dorm—an apartment-style residence—since the mid-1970s, and we now have a new home for nursing and engineering on campus and a great new sports complex. Additionally, we now offer a Ph.D. in theology. We also have extensive and exciting plans as we go into the future and launch a 10-year vision called Impact 2030.”

Color Wilson “grateful” for God’s blessings in his purposeful and significant work at ORU and Empowered21. He’s serving the global movement of Pentecostal and charismatic believers into the future and influencing young people in the Spirit-led way. Wilson said he sees this new generation as “one of the great generations in the history of the world.”

“I’ve always had a heart for next generations,” Wilson said. “I believe God calls us to ensure that His work continues in generations beyond ourselves. Christianity is always only one generation away from extinction, so next generations are vital

to the gospel. That's one of the reasons I'm involved both at ORU and in Empowered21. I am called to give back to this movement that helped birth me and my leadership. I was touched by the power of the Holy Spirit as a teenager. It revolutionized my life in a very dramatic way, and I want to see people all over the world know this same Jesus and same Holy Spirit that changed my life—I'm passionate about world evangelization, and I'm passionate about the Spirit-empowered movement, to see it continue to grow into the future. Recent stats indicate that Spirit-empowered Christianity is not just the fastest-growing Christian movement on earth but also the fastest-growing *religious* movement in the world. It is growing at least twice as fast as world population. I'm excited about what God has done over the last century, but I'm also really excited about what He's going to do in the future through new generations. I want to give myself to that. There's a Scripture that says, 'When I'm old and gray, don't forsake me, Lord, till I show your power to a new generation.' I want this new generation to see and know the power of God." {eoa}

**Christine D. Johnson** is editor of Charisma Leader. Email her to share your thoughts on this article and issue at @.

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