

# ORAL ROBERTS UNIVERSITY DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM

HISTORICAL BEGINNINGS AND THE EMERGENT FUTURE

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## Abstract

The Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program approaches forty-two years as a leader in the Spirit-empowered community. The approach of the DMin program from its inception in 1981 was to develop a Spirit-centered approach to impact the world as the only Spirit-empowered university. Since it began in 1982 with eleven students, the program has seen more than 430 graduates from 150 nations and all fifty of the United States have crossed the commencement platform. In addition, the Korean Language Doctor of Ministry Program, operating from 1992–2012, resulted in 136 graduates. More recently, the establishment of the Oral Roberts University (ORU) PhD program helped the DMin program to transition to a better ministry project model and to provide courses to allow the opportunity to enhance effectiveness and theological growth of church and para-church ministers, chaplains, and counselors in a post-modern society.

## Introduction

The Doctor of Ministry (DMin) is a professional degree program designed especially for qualified men and women engaged in pastoral and related ministries. Candidates are challenged to develop their full potential to achieve personal academic excellence, and to enhance ministerial skills in an ever-changing world while they remain in full-time ministry. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) accrediting body standards state: “The degree culminates with a written project that explores an area of ministry related to the student’s vocational calling, utilizes appropriate research methodologies and resources, and generates new knowledge regarding the practice of ministry.”<sup>1</sup> James

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<sup>1</sup> Association of Theological Schools. *Commission on Accrediting, 2020 Standards of Accreditation*. (Pittsburg, PA: ATS), 2020, 7.

Buskirk, the first dean of the Oral Roberts University (ORU) School of Theology, stated it this way: “Theological education is a lifetime endeavor. In the unique atmosphere of Oral Roberts University, guided by the scholarly faculty of the school of Theology, Doctor of Ministry candidates can enrich their theological growth and pyramid points of strength in professional ministry.”<sup>2</sup> The DMin program is accredited with the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS), and the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

## Founding

In 1975, ORU re-established the Graduate School of Theology as a Methodist endorsed seminary. Its signature degree was the Master of Divinity, which trained students for professional ministry. James Buskirk, the dean who restarted the seminary, had a goal of starting both a PhD and DMin program during his tenure. On July 1, 1980, ATS director, Marvin J. Taylor, congratulated James Buskirk and Carl Hamilton for ATS approval for the graduate seminary. This milestone allowed graduates to fully utilize their degrees for entrance into the finest schools across the globe for further graduate work.<sup>3</sup> In 1981, with a generous contribution from William and Grace McKinney, the DMin program welcomed the first cohort of eleven students. The program was led by noted United Methodist bishop Mack Stokes.<sup>4</sup> Stokes was a well-known and loved United Methodist pastor and educator who published several books on the Holy Spirit in the Methodist tradition.<sup>5</sup> He was most noted for his courageous work integrating the White and African American Conferences in Mississippi in 1972.<sup>6</sup> Stokes was very instrumental in getting the program off the ground and recruiting professional ministers into the program. Stokes, who served 1981–1984, helped the program achieve ATS accreditation before his departure to lead Emory University’s Candler School of Theology for over thirty years.

The DMin Program was designed to facilitate deeper theological education for professional ministers. Because it focused on full-time ministers, the program required forty-two hours of course credit where students participated in modular meetings two

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<sup>2</sup> Doctor of Ministry Brochure, Oral Roberts University, n.d.

<sup>3</sup> Larry Hart. *The Seminary: A History of Graduate Theological Education at Oral Roberts University*, Oral Roberts University, 2016, 12–13.

<sup>4</sup> *Doctor of Ministry Program Handbook*, Oral Roberts University, 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Heather Hahn, “Known as a Reconciler, Bishop Mack Stokes Dies at Age 100,” *United Methodist Insight*, 28 November 2012, <https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/bishop-mack-stokes-dies-at-age-100/>, accessed 26 September 2023.

<sup>6</sup> “Former ORU Professor and Noted Methodist Bishop Marion B. Stokes Dies,” Oral Roberts University, [https://oru.edu/news/oru\\_news/20121203\\_former\\_oru\\_professor\\_and\\_noted\\_methodist\\_bishop\\_marion\\_b\\_stokes\\_dies\\_.php?locale=en](https://oru.edu/news/oru_news/20121203_former_oru_professor_and_noted_methodist_bishop_marion_b_stokes_dies_.php?locale=en), accessed 26 September 2023.

weeks during the fall, spring, and summer for both the first and second years. The curriculum focused on developing skills and competencies that are required in practical ministry. The capstone of the degree was a completed Doctoral Field Project. Completion of the program was expected within three years with a maximum of five years.

The years under the leadership of James Buskirk would result in growth of student enrollment, a developing curriculum, and the blossoming of a God-given vision to send fully educated and empowered ministers to the farthest reaches of the globe. The seminary emerged as a key theological training center for the burgeoning worldwide Spirit-empowered Movement that would become the leading edge of global Christianity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The seminary also continued to serve substantially denominational Christianity in all its diversity.

In 1987, academic dean Paul G. Chappell reported that the seminary's clear identity as a Charismatic Bible-believing/teaching institution with a Charismatic faculty had grown to become the thirty-fourth largest seminary in North America, and the fastest growing seminary in North America while other schools in the nation suffered declines in enrollment.<sup>7</sup> Dean Larry Lea reported in 1988 that the seminary's distinctive philosophy participated in the larger gathered Christian community and flowed in the charismatic empowerment of the Spirit.<sup>8</sup> Dean Paul Chappell reported to the ORU Board of Regents that by the end of the 1990–91 school year “there was a strong and unifying sense of purpose and mission permeating the School of Theology and Missions” and that the seminary was “preparing Spirit-empowered, professionally equipped ministers and Christian leaders.” The “Signs and Wonders” seminary had become the twenty-fourth largest accredited seminary in North America by 1991.<sup>9</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, the theology school was called the School of Theology and Missions (STM). It had a graduate seminary and an undergraduate department of theology. During the early 1990s, the name was changed to School of Theology and Ministry. When Mark Rutland became president in 2009, the name changed to the College of Theology and Ministry (COTM) with a Department of Theology (undergraduate) and a Graduate School of Theology and Ministry (seminary).<sup>10</sup> Both the Doctor of Ministry and Doctor of Philosophy programs function within the Graduate School of Theology and Ministry.

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<sup>7</sup> Hart, *The Seminary*, 14-15.

<sup>8</sup> Hart, *The Seminary*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Hart, *The Seminary*, 16-17.

<sup>10</sup> Thomson K. Mathew, *A Seminary Dean's Experiment with Servant Leadership: Stories and Lessons from My Journey through Ivy League to Whole Person Education* (Kerala, India: Good News Books, 2021), 75–76.

## Korean Language Program

The Korean Language DMin program came about as a result of a meeting between Yeol Soo Eim and Jack Hayford in 1987. Hayford recommended that Eim visit with Paul Chappell, the dean of the School of Theology and Missions. Hayford stated that ORU was the best Pentecostal theological seminary in the world. Consequently, Chappell visited the Korea Foursquare Bible College located in Seoul, Korea, in 1988. During these initial meetings with Chappell, Eim and Seen Ok Ahn requested help in building the Korea Foursquare Bible College and Seminary (KFBC) to train ministers in two ways: 1) to train potential faculty members, and 2) to send four professors a year for two weeks from ORU to KFBC to teach eight courses a year. ORU professors traveled to Korea four times a year from 1989 until 1997 when the Asia LIFE University (previously Korea Foursquare Bible College) was accredited by the Korean government.

Two graduates from this initial program from KFBC asked if ORU planned to open a DMin program for Korean pastors in the Korean language. Chappell initially rejected the proposal; however, Eim explained that pastors from the rapidly growing Korean churches, who had never been taught Pentecostal/Charismatic teachings during their denominational seminary studies, wanted to learn more to lead their Charismatic and Pentecostal congregations. There were no Pentecostal institutions that offered doctoral level studies in Korea; some American theological institutions had initiated DMin programs, but they were not Pentecostal or Charismatic. Eim emphasized the huge market for ORU, and Chappell relented. After ATS approved the program, and the ORU Korean Language DMin program began during the summer of 1992 with fifteen pastors. This initial cohort graduated in 1995.<sup>11</sup>

During the era of the Korean Language DMin program, there were four directors in the ORU DMin program: Charles Snow, Thomson Mathew, Daniel Hedges, and Kenneth Mayton. After ORU began the Korean language program, a number of theological institutions in the United States began Korean language programs without ATS accreditation; these lacked the academic rigor of the ORU ATS-approved program. Despite requests from the Korean students, Eim and ORU maintained the quality of the courses and projects, which became known and recognized at many theological schools and seminaries and the Korean government. As of 2006, fourteen graduates were teaching full-time as professors at universities, seminaries, or Bible colleges, and more than two-thirds of the graduates taught as part-time lecturers at theological institutions while they continued to pastor in local churches. The denominations represented from the Korean language DMin program are diverse from Korean Baptists to Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors and leaders. Asia LIFE University became fully

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<sup>11</sup> Yeol Soo Eim, "The History of Korean D.Min. Program," 2013.

accredited and now offers a number of theological degrees and is accredited by the Asia Theological Association. The ORU Korean Language DMin program eventually ended in 2006.

## Fast-Track Program

Thomson Mathew was appointed dean of the seminary on January 1, 2000, and launched the school into sixteen years of continued growth and maturation. One of his initiatives was the DMin Fast Track program, which enabled pastors and ministry staff of Charismatic megachurches and leaders of large national and global ministries to obtain further theological education. The eleven students enrolled in the first cohort included ORU notables Clarence Boyd, Billy Joe Daugherty, Michael Harrison, and Ron Clark, among others, and all eleven graduated in 2003. The second group of seven fast track students included Greg Davis, Glynn Dickens, and Michael Ford, who began coursework in 2002, and all students graduated in 2005 and 2006. The Fast Track program was modeled after the executive MBA degree, and the students took the same number of courses as all DMin students. While some professors and other students expressed discomfort about the elite image of the Fast Track program, there was a desperate need for biblically sound theology in the Charismatic Movement, which trumped the concerns. Mathew explains: “It was an exciting sight to see mega church pastors and leaders of well-known ministries dealing with academic matters and arguing about theological principles and practical issues related to ministry. Thankfully, we were able to keep the standards and everyone in the first cohort completed the course work, and wrote notable dissertations.”<sup>12</sup>

ORU counts a number of well-known pastors and leaders who are graduates of the DMin program, including: Dennis Lindsay (2014) and his daughter, Missy Lindsay (2014) from Christ For the Nations Institute (CFNI); Thomson K. Mathew (1985), former dean of the ORU Graduate School of Theology and Ministry; Billy Joe Daugherty (2002), founder of Victory Church, Victory School, and the Tulsa Dream Center; H. Thomas Harrison, Jr. (1986), retired pastor of Asbury Methodist Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Madeline Manning-Mins, (2016), US Olympic Track and Field Gold and Silver Medalist, recording artist, speaker, and founder and president of the United States Council for Sports Chaplaincy.

Others include: William Buker (1998), academic dean of the ORU Graduate School of Theology and Ministry; Chaplain (Colonel) Shareen “Pinkie” Fischer (2015), serving as a Chaplain for the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA) and previously earned renown for being the “Last Chaplain in Afghanistan” during her

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<sup>12</sup> Mathew, *A Seminary Dean’s Experiment with Servant Leadership*, 51–54.

assignment as Division Chaplain for the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division of the U.S. Army; Fadi Alzoughbi (1995), pastor of the House of Bread Church in Bethlehem, Israel; Sung-Hae Kim (Cho) (2008) (deceased), the wife of Pastor Yonggi Cho, founding pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea; and Michael A. Stevens, Sr., (2012), renowned evangelist, author, founder and Senior Pastor of the City Church of God in Christ in Northlake, North Carolina.

Project titles are varied and address many relevant issues including: “Effective Apologetics Education for Lutheran Youth in a Postmodern Age” (A. Kretzschmar, 2011); “Evaluating a Spiritually Driven Narrative Therapy Process for Suicidal Veterans Based on Case Studies” (T. Elfadili, 2018); “Results of Presenting Judeo-Christian Values to Troubled Adolescents in a Christian Residential Treatment Center” (I. Liberman, 2004); “The History and Global Impact of ‘Christ for the Nationals Institute’” (D. Lindsay, 2014); “Assessing Change in Faith Development of Theology Students from a Charismatic Background” (W. Panas, 2008); “A Clinical Model of Pastoral Ministry to Persons in Chronic Pain” (T. Mathew, 1985); and “Increasing Knowledge of Isreal in an African American Church” (M. Stevens, 2012).

During the past forty-two years, the Doctor of Ministry program has been led by nine ministry leaders and academic scholars who have provided direction and guidance to develop programs that “are consistent with the school’s mission and resources.”<sup>13</sup> Books have been carefully chosen to inform and increase awareness of ministerial issues for pastors and ministry leaders. Following are the trailblazers of the ORU Doctor of Ministry program:

- Bishop Marion “Mack” B. Stokes, Associate Dean of Doctoral Programs, 1981–1984 (deceased);
- Edward P. Wimberly, Associate Dean of Doctoral Programs, 1984–1985;
- Charles W. Snow, Jr., Associate Dean of Doctoral Programs, 1985–1994 (deceased);
- Thomson K. Mathew, Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies, 1994–1996;
- Dan Hedges, Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies, 1996–2000;
- Kenneth H. Mayton, Director of DMin Program, 2000–2015;
- John P. Thompson, Director of DMin Program, 2015–2019;
- James W. Barber, Jr., Director of DMin Program, 2019–2023; and
- Daniel D. Isgrigg, Interim Director of DMin Program; 2023–Present.

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<sup>13</sup> ATS website, 7.

Since the inception of the Doctor of Ministry program, it has grown under the able leadership of these nine directors from its initial focus to provide advanced teaching for pastors. During the early years with the emphasis focused on pastors, the Pastoral Care and Counseling concentration was introduced in 1996–1997 and the emphasis for pastors became known as Church Ministries and Leadership. In 2018, the former concentration was revised to Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy with an emphasis on Moral Injury in response to requests from military chaplains, hospice, hospital, nursing home, and other chaplains in a variety of contexts who had expressed an interest in the issue of moral injury, which differs from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As of September 2023, the Doctor of Ministry program has graduated a total of 448 students, including 290 in Church Ministries and Leadership (including Fast Track), 17 in Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy, and 140 in the Korean Language program.

## Empowered for the Future

The year 2010 saw the birth of Empowered21, an arm of global outreach and enrichment for the university and seminary. The result was a gathering of 10,000 participants from around the world and the United States at the first Empowered21 convention. The initial gathering on the ORU campus has been followed by numerous other outreaches across the globe. The academic year 2010–2011 also marked the thirty-year anniversary of the DMin program.<sup>14</sup> There are more dreams for the future that are in early stages of being studied and developed, which bodes well for the Spirit-empowered Movement in the United States and around the world. This program will continue to impact practitioners in ministry in efforts to produce transformative wisdom in a Spirit-empowered environment.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov 29:18a, KJV). The ORU DMin program has transitioned from its early days and has brought change and innovation as it looks towards the future. Prior to the 2020 COVID epidemic, all DMin doctorate defenses were conducted in-person on the ORU campus. Prior to 2020, one defense was conducted online on Skype; after the advent of Zoom, another defense was held on Zoom. Since the spring of 2020, all but two defenses have been conducted on Zoom; this transition has been seamless and has been welcomed by the students.

One aspect that has not changed is Oral Roberts’ belief that students need more than academic learning; they must intentionally involve the student’s body and spiritual life. All students at all levels throughout the university are required to develop physically through an aerobic program and advance their spirituality through worship and discipleship experiences. One cannot graduate from ORU by just passing the traditional

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<sup>14</sup> Hart, *The Seminary*, 21–22.

academic courses. A well-rounded ORU graduate has received an experience that encompasses body, mind, and spirit. Seminary students were compelled to think about what they were learning and how that was preparing them for a more excellent ministry that would be well-informed, professional, and guided by the Holy Spirit.

The Doctor of Ministry program has come a long way from its humble beginnings, and we look forward to the future as ministers are prepared in a variety of contexts to minister to a world that is changing at an exponential rate. The DMin program continues to explore ways to innovate courses that will propel students to greater heights of academic excellence and impactful ministry. The surveys included in the DMin assessment courses continue to be a source of information and feedback from students that encourage the theological administration to provide faculty who engage students in thoughtful discussion of the issues that concern them and their congregations. Oral Roberts would famously say: “As the seminary goes, so goes the university.” It could also be said: “As the world goes, so goes the university” as the Doctor of Ministry program and its students and graduates meet the challenges that affect our country and impact believers around the world.



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