



Union's new Doctor of Ministry

program focuses on
EXPOSITORY PREACHING

By any measure, Craig L. Oliver is a successful pastor.

He leads the Elizabeth Baptist Church in Atlanta, a largely African-American congregation with more than 6,000 members. The church has grown steadily in his 14 years as pastor.

But Oliver wants to develop new goals and objectives in his ministry. He chose to pursue a Doctor of Ministry degree from Union. He is among 12 members of the inaugural D.Min class.

Oliver says the factor that helped him choose Union over other options was the emphasis here on expository preaching – something he expects to draw on in the pulpit and beyond.

“I have the privilege of providing

leadership to a large group of ministers,” says Oliver. “Some have just accepted the call to ministry, others have been in the ministry for quite some time but have not had the opportunity to engage in formal education.

“It is my desire to take what I learn and teach others to be expositors of God’s word.”

Expository preaching, which involves close examination of the meaning of a particular biblical text, has experienced a resurgence in recent years. Union’s program is housed in the Stephen Olford Center, named in honor of one of the best-known expository preachers of the past century.



Craig L. Oliver

Olford's son David, the Stephen Olford Chair of Expository Preaching and a Union professor, is among the faculty members providing instruction and leadership in the D.Min. program.

"Our goal is to help people in their preaching ministry," Olford says. "Not just with how they think about preaching, but how they actually preach."

Academic rigor

"About a month and a half before the student comes for his seminar at the Olford Center, he will be given a syllabus where there will be reading assignments and reflection on the reading," says Ken Easley, professor and program director at the Stephen Olford Center.

Easley says applicants must have three full years of vocational ministry experience after completing a Master of Divinity and a ministry endorsement letter supporting the applicant's intent to pursue doctoral study. Enrollment in each class is limited, and preference is given applicants with preparation in biblical languages.

The program combines distance learning with important sessions at the Stephen Olford Center. But the structure also allows busy pastors to attend to church and family needs.

"We are required to spend only four weeks away from our ministry positions a year," says first-year student Phil Mitchell, pastor of First Baptist Church Adamsville, Tenn. "We have full-time jobs. We all have families."

Olford says the brief but intensive group meetings are an important component of the program.

"We've set up this program to be very practical for the busy pastor," says Olford. "There is face-to-face time because that's absolutely indispensable. We want to engage personally, and as deeply as we can."

The reading and writing requirements are designed to meet the strong academic expectations attached to all Union degree programs.

"If you're looking for an easy doctoral degree, this is not the program you're looking for," says first-year student Howard McNeill, pastor of Maple Springs Baptist Church in Seagrove, N.C. "This is going to stretch you. It will challenge you."

As with all Union programs, faculty members remain in close contact with students to be certain they are progressing and getting whatever assistance they need to succeed.

"It's not a program where they're trying to see if they can flunk you," says first-year student Warren Pellom, pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Southaven, Miss. "It's a program where they really want to see you succeed."

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE D.MIN PROGRAM

www.uu.edu/dmin

4000 Riverdale Rd.
Memphis, TN 38175-7800

Director: Dr. Ken Easley
Contact: Michelle Brown

Phone: 901-757-7977 | Fax: 901-757-1372
E-mail: dmin@uu.edu

Student-initiated covenant

The first class of students shares that desire to excel and decided to set a clear standard for other classes to follow. Without any prompting from faculty, they met privately and developed a written covenant that each member signed. It was evidence that the students wanted to be held to the highest standards of learning and preaching.

"These are men who say 'we're covenanting with our professors and those who are leading the program to say that we realize the seriousness of what it means to take up the word of God and preach,'" says Gregory A. Thornbury, dean of the School of Christian Studies, "and we want you to help us to do that in a more faithful way.' I found that extremely encouraging."

"We have failed if they do not integrate into their lives and ministries what they learn here," Olford says. "You're taking it back into your

ministry, and then we're able to watch that and discuss that, so it's practical in relation to how you're actually ministering the word of God."

"The desire is not to preach better, but the desire is to be a better preacher," says first-year student Bartholomew Orr, senior pastor of Brown Missionary Baptist Church in Southaven, Miss.

"It's exceeded my expectations, added Kevin Ferrell, pastor of Egypt Baptist Church in Memphis. "The things that I have learned and taken away have been immediately practical."

The 'signature element'

Oliver made his decision to apply to Union and waited to see if he'd be accepted. During that time, he had to be hospitalized for five days.

"To my surprise, the (Union) instructors called the hospital, spoke with me and prayed with me over the phone," says Oliver, "which really confirmed in my heart that Union University is certainly the type of school I would want to be a part of; I was just tremendously blessed that

instructors would take time out of their schedules to reach out."

He says the spirit of care, concern and love prior to his official acceptance "is one of the signature elements of Union University."

"It's really a combination of head and heart." ■



Union faculty pose with the first D.Min. class.