

R.C. Ryan Center for Biblical Studies

UNION'S INVESTMENT IN Biblical Literacy

As a prospective college student, Nic Seaborn vividly remembers his first visit to Jennings Hall on the Union University campus – where on the third floor he encountered the R.C. Ryan Center for Biblical Studies.

“They have their own place for Christian studies majors and minors?” Seaborn thought. “This place is amazing!”

The Ryan Center’s aim is to encourage and enable sound biblical interpretation and application in the church, according to Ray Van Neste, associate professor of biblical studies, who directs the center.

“In short, the purpose of the Ryan Center is to help people interpret and apply the Bible,” Van Neste said.

That goal is accomplished through a couple of primary methods. The first is a 1,600-square-foot library in Jennings Hall that houses commentaries, concordances, Bible dictionaries, software and other reference items to help students, local pastors and Bible study leaders as they work on assignments, sermons or Sunday school lessons.

Students like Seaborn, who graduated in May, have made the Ryan Center a central part of their academic habits at Union.

“The Ryan Center is the first place I go when working on an assignment for my theology and missions classes,” Seaborn said. “It has the best resources. You do not have to worry about whether a resource is good in the Ryan Center. If it’s in the Ryan Center, it is of great quality.”

Ryan Linkous, a sophomore at Union, agreed.

“The Ryan Center is a great place to do research for any type of exegetical or theological paper,” Linkous said. “The great thing about it is that not only does it have a plethora of commentaries to choose from, but Dr. Van Neste and the other professors of the School of Theology and Missions have selected the best

commentaries to use for study. This helps when finding the best sources for research papers, but it is also a tremendous help when preparing a sermon or lesson because you have trusted resources selected from trustworthy people.”

In addition to Union students, some local pastors also take advantage of the Ryan’s Center resources. Eric Smith, pastor of Curve Baptist Church in Curve, Tenn., said that since his town doesn’t have any kind of theological library, driving an hour to use the Ryan Center is time well spent.

But the benefit doesn’t stop with the books.

“The great value of the Ryan Center, even more than the books that are on the shelves, is the relationships that I’m able to have with professors who have been mentors to me,” Smith said.

The second method through which the Ryan Center accomplishes its goals is a biennial conference that brings respected biblical scholars to the Union campus. In April, the conference featured David Platt for the center’s fifth conference. Previous speakers have included D.A. Carson, Gordon Fee and Paul House, among

others. Van Neste said about 80-90 percent of conference attendees are lay people.

In addition to its library and conferences, the Ryan Center has extended its influence internationally. In 2010, the center donated 450 pounds of books to a library in Ethiopia.

The center also houses a few historical Bibles, including a 1615 Geneva Bible on display. Van Neste said the Geneva Bible was the first to capture the hearts and minds of the English-speaking people.

“We have that there to remind us and to represent our mission,” he said.

The center is named in honor of R.C. Ryan, a pastor and longtime supporter of Union who donated more than \$1 million to the university before his death in 2001. 

