



Educating Biblical Servants for a Faithful Life of Kingdom Ministry

December 17, 2024

The Power of Receiving a Lifelong Gift

Dear Pine Lake Christian Church,

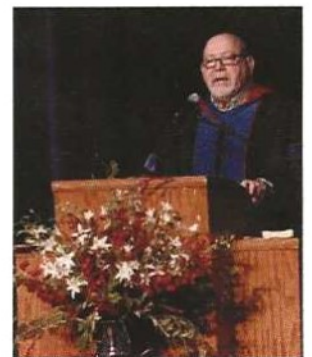
The Christmas story features God becoming embodied in flesh, the Incarnate Son named Jesus. The gospel writers share various facets of how this Gift was brought into the world. For over 2,000 years, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ have changed ordinary men and women into followers and church leaders.

I want you to hear two of those stories that came together at Central Christian College of the Bible. Since its inception in 2020, the graduate education program of Central has become an opportunity for those actively serving the church to grow their ministry leadership. Now known as Russell School of Ministry, this program has graduated almost 50 men and women with a Master of Arts in Ministry Leadership. Almost all of them received their degrees while serving in the context of their own organization or congregation.

I sat down with Dr. Billy Strother, Central's first Dean of Graduate Studies, to understand why he thinks a new minister should pursue a master's degree. Next, I interviewed one of his students, a recent graduate who shared his perspective on the experience. May their stories warm your heart as you read.

William Henry Strother II came to Cincinnati Bible College in 1981 with many life experiences and a strong desire to serve the Lord. During the Cold War, he had served in the Military Intelligence Division of the US Army. But at 21, he surrendered to the call to preach in a prayer room after a Bible study. He wrote on his application, "I do not know where God will lead me, but I do know that His Word and the victory in Jesus must be proclaimed throughout the world." Billy earned 50 credits during his freshman year at Cincinnati. With the tuition paid by his Veteran's benefits, he eventually earned a four-year degree in three years, made the Dean's List every year, and was Salutatorian in the Class of 1984.

After he was hired at a church in Louisville, Kentucky, Billy quickly realized two things: he needed more training to lead that congregation and a scholarship to afford a master's degree. When a local seminary offered him a full scholarship based on his good grades, he enrolled as a student while also ministering at the church. While being a graduate student and minister was demanding, it helped him build a successful four-year ministry at the church.



Billy always wanted to preach and teach others to preach. He became a full-time professor at Cincinnati Bible Seminary in 1989 and Point University in 2004. Dr. Billy (as he came to be known, pictured above) never had to choose between preaching and teaching others to preach. He served as a full-time, part-time, or interim preacher for almost 20 churches in Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Georgia, Alabama, and Missouri.

Billy and his wife, Carol, moved to mid-Missouri right before the 2020 pandemic. He became Central's

preaching professor and the first dean of a brand-new graduate studies program. As he and I reflected on the importance of that role, many of his students came to mind, such as.

- A brand new youth minister wanting to preach.
- A lifelong missionary in Jamaica planning for succession.
- An elder wanting to become a pastor.

The environment at Central helped him know the students better and address their specific challenges. Every name brings him joy, but one recent graduate reminds Dr. Billy a lot of himself at that age. . . .

(over, please)

Moberly Main Campus

911 E Urbandale Drive
Moberly, MO 65270
660-263-3900

St. Louis Extension Site

11960 Westline Industrial, Ste. 230
St. Louis, MO 63146
314-710-2987

Cincinnati Extension Site

8095 Connector Drive
Florence, KY 41042
859-365-8985

Daryl Struempf earned his bachelor's degree in preaching from Central in 2020, right before Dr. Billy began teaching here. For the first two years after graduation, Daryl and his wife worked and started a family while he filled the pulpit on weekends at a rural church outside of Jefferson City, Missouri. However, accepting a full-time position at Eugene Christian Church would require more leadership training than his part-time ministry provided. Central's master's degree immediately got his attention. The church could not pay for tuition, but they gave him time to take classes. Meeting the other challenges would be up to him.

- The church was experiencing miscommunication during a period of change. The *Change & Conflict Management* course taught Daryl the steps necessary to promote reconciliation.
- One intensive week started while his wife was expecting their child. She delivered the baby on Sunday night, and he attended class (via Zoom) the following day.
- As the only minister at his church, Daryl felt disconnected from other ministry professionals. However, the classroom experience enabled them to connect over the material in a lasting way.

Daryl was blessed by one-on-one time with Dr. Billy within the program. Those meetings translated into better weekly sermons and leadership decisions. Graduating in May 2024 (pictured below), he now describes the degree as “an accelerator of my leadership.” As Daryl said, “The graduate program as a whole was the mentoring guide that walked alongside my first two years as senior minister.”

The CCCB ANNUAL FUND FOR MINISTRY EDUCATION equips the saints for ministry in four specific ways. Graduate Education connects adults who want to start or expand their ministry careers with high-capacity teachers to gain professional competence. The compass illustrates how each student navigates the demands of ministry leadership, which is difficult but worth it. They receive guidance toward their own faithful life of kingdom ministry. (Read more and watch a video about each method by visiting cccb.edu/give/imaginetogether.)



That's why Central now provides a “Back to School Scholarship” for those starting a master's degree, so they don't have to go into debt. Not only does it help them, but it immediately benefits their churches. After a generous family in Cincinnati shared a lead gift in 2023, over twenty ministers received \$5,000 each to start their first year of graduate studies. It now continues to bring lifetime benefit to even more recipients.

Scholarships for graduate students are especially worthy of your financial support. As Dr. Billy told me, “The return on investment is far more immediate. It often takes ten years for the investment in an undergraduate student to pay off. A graduate student listens to the teacher and uses it this weekend.” Receiving a scholarship like this is a gift both for now and for a lifetime.

This year's scholarship is being funded by donors like you. Graduate student scholarships for the Russell School of Ministry program come from your gift to ministry education. As many as ten new students will start in January, and several will receive this scholarship. Whether you give before the end of December or wait until January, your generosity will share a lifelong gift to empower their ministry leadership.



This year's scholarship is being funded by donors like you. Graduate student scholarships for the Russell School of Ministry program come from your gift to ministry education. As many as ten new students will start in January, and several will receive this scholarship. Whether you give before the end of December or wait until January, your generosity will share a lifelong gift to empower their ministry leadership.



Preparing Christian workers with you,

David

Dr. David Fincher (president@cccb.edu)



P.S. Only God knows the donor who gave for Billy Strother's scholarship in 1984. Their gift produced a lifelong gospel preacher and faithful teacher. Due to a rare health condition, Dr. Billy Strother will retire in June 2025 after 40+ years of ministry. His final course to teach will also be his favorite: *Preaching the Resurrection of Jesus*. Your gift for graduate ministry education will help many of his students. As you consider the return on investment for these scholarships, please pray for Dr. Billy's stamina, his students, and his family as they journey through these months. May they all experience the power of God's truth, the presence of the Spirit's comfort, and the promise of Christ's resurrection.

"You need endurance so that after you have done God's will, you may receive what was promised." (Hebrews 10:36)