

# FRONTLINES

§1 A WINDOW INTO AMERICA'S UNIVERSITIES

FEBRUARY 2014

FACULTY COMMONS-A CRU MINISTRY

## 1 Give Me a Home

True universities should provide a home for good and true ideas to be considered, not excluded. §1

## 2 Reaching the Unreached

Oklahoma State Christian faculty reach out to their influential peers. §2

## 3 "I want to hear about God."

UNC Wilmington professor ministers in East Asia with students. §3

## 4 Playing God

Provocative questions in this book may change your thinking about power. §4

## Give Me a Home

Rick Hove, Faculty Commons Executive Director



The unofficial anthem of the American West, and the

Kansas state song, is *Home on the Range*. Each year on January 29 (the date Kansas joined the Union), the

Kansas Senate and House of Representatives gather to belt out: "Oh give me a home, where the buffalo roam . . ."

Some insightful comic (probably not a Kansan) wisely opined: "If you give me a home where the buffalo roam, I'll show you a living room that can grow anything."

With some caveats, "a living room that can grow anything" could be a slang way to speak of a true university. By this we don't mean that a university should blindly rally behind all ideas, whether true or false, helpful or harmful. Or that all ideas have equal value, simply because they spring to life. Instead, we mean that the university should be a place that is open to all ideas being considered and examined.

And, a true university is the ground from which what is good and true can sprout and bloom.

Sadly, universities have migrated from serving as living rooms where that which is good, true, and admirable can grow, to places where only certain ideas are permitted.

The former feminist lesbian scholar Rosaria Butterfield, once a rising academic star at Syracuse University specializing in "Queer Theory," tells her fascinating story of conversion to Christianity in the first two chapters of *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*. I highly commend it.

Dr. Butterfield admitted that, along with every professor in her department, she put the following on the syllabus for each course taught:

*Students are expected to write all papers and examination essay questions from a feminist worldview or critical perspective. In Spanish you speak and think in Spanish. In Women's Studies you speak and think in feminist paradigms. Examination essay questions written from critical perspectives outside of feminism will receive an automatic grade of F. Papers written from critical perspectives outside of feminism will be allowed one revision. Any student who is unable to write and think from a feminist critical perspective or worldview with a clear conscience should drop the class now.*

Now—as a Christian with a completely different worldview—Dr. Butterfield wonders how she and her colleagues could get away with this. "The secularist academic world," she admits, "is bold in its protection of worldview." Correspondingly, today Christian perspectives in various academic disciplines are often excluded from consideration or discussion in universities.

There are many ways to think of the Faculty Commons dream and mission. One way to think of it is this: we want to prevent the emergence of a bitter reality in which the only thing allowed to grow out of our universities is that which is rooted in secular assumptions. How we do this is



a complex challenge. That we do this is crucial for the gospel, our country, and the world.

Our ultimate hope for this is not only programs or scholars, but the Lord. Would you join with us in asking God to raise movements of Christian professors on every university and in every discipline: professors who are rooted in the gospel, love well, and think well?

"May God be gracious to us and bless us and

make His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your saving power among all nations" (Psalm 67:1). †

Executive Director of Faculty Commons since 2005, Rick has also directed the Rice and Duke ministries. He is a summa cum laude graduate of both Georgia Tech and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Rick, his wife Sonya, and their three children live in Durham, NC.



This year's Symposium at Purdue University included a February 1 debate between Christian philosopher Dr. John Hare of Yale University and agnostic philosopher Dr. Michael Ruse of Florida State University, moderated by Corey Miller of Faculty Commons. Over 4,000 watched either live or live stream from around the world. The theme was Human Dignity, Slavery, and Sex Trafficking. The debate centered on which worldview best explains our common moral beliefs about radical injustice like sex slavery and rape: atheism or Christianity? Christians can easily argue that these are absolute injustices and it is reasonable to assume there must be an absolute moral standard, grounded in a God who is just.

## §2 Reaching the Unreached at Oklahoma State

Ministry Profile: Gary and Gena Hellman, Oklahoma State University

"American professors are one of the most unreached people groups in the world," explains Faculty Commons staff Gary Hellman. "And they are some of the most influential people as well."

Over a 30-year career, most professors will influence 5,000-8,000 students. What will they tell their students about Jesus? That He is "a fairy-tale" or that He has personally changed their own lives?

Since 1986, Gary and his wife Gena have been



Gary and Gena Hellman

talking about Jesus with the professors at Oklahoma State University (OSU). They, along with a board of six Christian professors and university staff, lead a group of 150 called the Fellowship of Christian Faculty and Staff.

"Our mission is to encourage faculty, staff, and students to explore the relevance of Jesus

Christ to the academy and to extend His love and grace to those within it," the group's website [fcfs-okstate.org](http://fcfs-okstate.org) proclaims.

Each year, they invite Christian academics to campus to discuss their academic discipline from a Christian perspective. Last year, Dr. Rodney and Cortina Orr spoke six times and met with seven individuals or small groups during Black History Month. Former Cru staff themselves, Dr. Orr has a PhD in African American Missions History and is now a professor of missions and department chair at Dallas Theological Seminary. Their visit was co-sponsored by OSU.

"All of these meetings allowed our ministry to meet and develop friendships with African Americans and one Native American on campus," Gary told us.

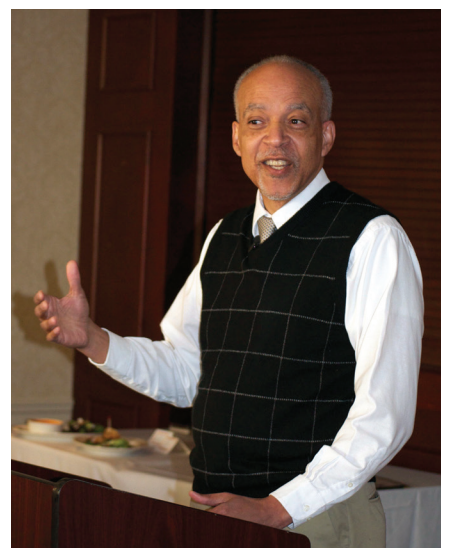
The faculty group also reaches out to new, untenured professors with seminars on "How to Make Tenure," and with their annual Welcome Gifts. These hand-delivered gifts include a custom coffee mug full of coffee, tea, and chocolate—plus a copy of *Mere Christianity* by Oxford professor C.S. Lewis.

Lewis's book has a big impact on professors. One professor, who had rejected Christianity as unintellectual, read *Mere Christianity* and it awakened his soul. He eventually became a follower of Jesus himself.

Another professor, who had moved from OSU to a university in another state, ran into one of

the OSU Christian professors at a conference. He related that he had read the *Mere Christianity* that came in his welcome gift, and now he was a Christian, too!

The Fellowship of Christian Faculty and Staff is looking toward the future. They are launching an outreach to graduate students, building the next generation of Christian professors who will continue to extend Jesus' love and grace to their colleagues and students. †



Dr. Rodney Orr addresses 30 professors at OSU on the topic "Rethinking Success and Significance," urging all to consider their calling and to be available to serve their students, colleagues, and the university, as unto God.



Edmon Low Library at OSU - Stillwater, Oklahoma

### Oklahoma State University

Oklahoma State was founded in 1890, in the township of Stillwater, 17 years before Oklahoma became a state and one year after the unstable environment created by the Land Opening of 1889. "America's brightest orange" has much to be proud of today:

- 35,000 students across its five-campus system
- 23rd on the Forbes list of Best Value Colleges
- One of the highest rated US veterinarian colleges
- Agriculture and engineering are dominant, but education, business, and health science are important fields
- Annual "America's Greatest Homecoming Celebration" draws more than 40,000 alumni
- Home of 51 national athletic championships—a total greater than all but three NCAA Division I schools
- Go Cowboys!

Photo: Keith8404, Creative Commons on Wikipedia ©2006

# “I want to hear about God.”

Faculty Profile: Dr. Tom Simpson, *Executive in Residence of Economics, University of North Carolina Wilmington*



Dr. Tom Simpson traveled halfway around the world from his work at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) to minister to students in East Asia. On his first day there, he and another American professor were seated at a restaurant table with an American Christian student and his East Asian student friend. The East Asian student had brought a fellow student along to this meeting with Christians from America.

“Is there anything you would like to know about America?” the professors asked them.

“I want to hear about God,” the new student replied.

A great discussion ensued as the students asked honest questions, and the professors explained the reasons why they each had chosen to become followers of Jesus. The students asked for English language Bibles so they could continue exploring the claims of Christ on their own.

Dr. Simpson was invited on the trip by Faculty Commons staff Shane Hartley, who worked with Dr. Simpson to launch the Faculty Commons ministry at UNCW. “He was already helping with Cru’s student ministry,” Shane explains. “Tom and I met to discuss the idea of starting Faculty

Commons on campus. We planned everything together to start the group, and he’s continued to be a key leader.”

In East Asia, Shane set up another meeting for the two professors with a group of students at the local “English Corner.” Eager to practice their English skills with native speakers, these students were equally interested in learning more about American culture.

“They asked really wonderful questions,” Dr. Simpson remembers. “Many of them allowed us to talk about our faith. In that culture, there is a respect for professors that results in a special interest in having an opportunity to meet with one—particularly an American professor.”

Dr. Simpson hopes to return to East Asia along with Cru students from UNCW. In the meantime, he reaches out to international students at his home. He and his wife host an annual Thanksgiving dinner for these students, involving as many as 100 students and 30-40 other professors and volunteers.

Though Dr. Simpson played a key role in launching Faculty Commons at UNCW, he credits the prayers of others with the accomplishment. Shane noted, “Tom has often remarked that people years before us must have been praying for this work on our campus.” †



Dr. Tom Simpson enjoyed gospel conversations and building relationships with East Asian students during a Cru global missions trip last summer.



## Easter: Jesus in My Place

LIFE THROUGH DEATH

Before Jesus was born, an angel declared that He would “save his people from their sins.” The problem of sin had threatened humanity’s relationship with God ever since Adam and Eve’s disobedience in the Garden of Eden. In order for God’s people to be in a right relationship with Him, sin had to be atoned for. Jesus lived the sinless life we could not live. He died the death that we deserved on a cross in our place so that we can live....

We are followers of Jesus ourselves: faculty and staff at NC State. We share the good news of a King who conquered death for us. We would love to interact with you more about this. We also invite you to check out EveryStudent.com for answers to questions you may have.

Over 100 professors at North Carolina State University have listed their names and departments with this online gospel presentation for Easter. Professors and students are pointing others to it through Facebook and other social media. View the full message and list of professors at [www.ncsafacultycommons.org](http://www.ncsafacultycommons.org).

## Join with us in Prayer

*I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people. – 1 Timothy 2:1*

1. Ask God to raise up a movement of Christian professors on every campus and in every academic discipline.
2. Pray that God would call many students in Cru student groups to become Christ-centered professors when they graduate.
3. Pray that God would draw many English professors to Himself.

# 54 Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power

Review by Dr. Jay Lorenzen, *Faculty Commons staff and retired professor of Political Science, Air Force Academy*

Andy Crouch’s in-depth reflection of the biblical meaning of “power” shows how infinitely practical theology can be. I love this book.

Crouch’s book poses a set of provocative questions:

What if power is a gift of God and is inherent with being human?

What if power is not coercive but creative?

What if power is not zero-sum, but actually multiplies when we give it away?

What if we were made to exercise power... what if power is rooted in creation, in the very

image of God in us?

In *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*, Crouch leads us through the Scriptures to counter the myth that collapses all power into violence and domination. He argues that this broken world needs not less power, but more power wielded by followers of Christ, who do more “God-bearing” and less “god-playing (injustice) and god-making (idolatry).”

According to Crouch, our allergy to power is a sign we haven’t read our Bible very closely. From the very beginning of the biblical narrative, God commissioned humanity to exercise power, to bear His image as we tend and till the earth, so that all the potential and promise of God might be revealed. Indeed, the biblical narrative argues that power is a creative gift, and when we exercise that power rightly we bear God’s image and love our neighbor. Thus, if we fail to exercise power, we fail as image-bearers.

And since “the deepest form of power is creation,” we should reimagine power as “creative love”—the kind of power that multiplies when it is shared, a power that empowers. It’s the kind of power the ascending Jesus promised to his followers when he echoed the creation narrative at Pentecost and said, “You will receive power” (Acts 1:8).

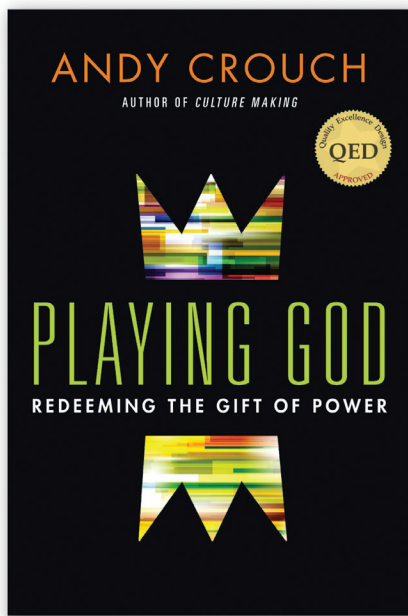
Crouch is certainly not naive to the ways power goes wrong and turns to domination, repression, violence, and exclusion. “Power at its worst,” he observes, “is the unmaker of humanity.” Such exercises of power lead to idolatry and injustice—

ways in which god-playing steals, kills, and destroys. When we misuse power, we create idols that oppress and exclude.

*“Whether making false gods (idolatry) or playing false gods (injustice) the result is identical—the true image of God is lost, and not just lost but replaced by something that purports, often very persuasively, to represent the ultimate truth about reality.”*

But in his intended double-entendre, Crouch says that when we exercise power well and justly—in love—we actually fulfill our creational mandate to “play God,” to be present to and for His creation as His image bearers.

Provocative. No doubt. I might have balked before at “power as a gift.” But in the theologically astute hands of Crouch, this reflection has changed my thinking about power. †



## Investing in the Mission

Your financial investment will help us build movements of professors and students to take the hope of Jesus Christ to the world. Will you prayerfully consider partnering with us in this vital endeavor? All contributions to Faculty Commons are income tax deductible.

### Cash donations

Make check to Cru and mail to Faculty Commons; 2001 W. Plano Parkway, Suite 2700; Plano, Texas 75075. Or invest online: [give.cru.org/2271527](http://give.cru.org/2271527)

### Maximize your giving to help reach the world for Christ

Stocks, bonds and mutual funds held for at least a year, which have increased in value since the time purchased, will receive extra tax savings when used as a donation.

### Gift and Estate Design

At no charge, professionals at the Great Commission Foundation can help you and your financial advisor develop a strategy to meet your fiscal goals minimizing taxes and maximizing Kingdom impact.

If you need assistance, please contact our Director of Ministry Development, Rich McGee at 214-727-6084 or [rich.mcgee@facultycommons.org](mailto:rich.mcgee@facultycommons.org).



A higher standard. A higher purpose.

### Support Faculty Commons Staff

As part of Cru, all of our staff trust God for their salary and ministry expenses. You can contribute directly to individual staff at [give.cru.org](http://give.cru.org) by typing their name in the search box.

## Fast Facts:

A new Faculty Commons ministry to professors was launched in January at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga with 12 interested professors.

Mathematics Professor Dusty Wilson of Highline Community College in Des Moines, WA leads both the Cru student ministry and Faculty Commons on campus.

Ten Christian faculty from the University of California, San Diego are prepared to lead student conversation groups following the Veritas Forum on April 14.

Penn State Faculty Commons staff have created Venture Groups for fellowship and outreach to first year graduate students—20 joined groups this fall!



**Frontlines** is published by Faculty Commons, the faculty ministry of Cru.  
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 • Design: Rich Bostwick

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