

Concordia University launches new Center for Public Policy

By Lori Arnold

IRVINE — Concordia University has launched a new public policy center that will serve as a forum for events, research and strategic partnerships between the campus and Orange County's public sector leaders.

University president Kurt Krueger said the college is also in the process of adding more public policy courses as part of a goal to offer a degree in public administration with an emphasis in public finance.

"There is no question that state and local governments are experiencing profound change," the university's CEO said. "I believe our university can play an important role in facilitating the discussion of how that change will impact Orange County and in the preparation of leaders equipped to manage that

change in the next decades."

Keith Curry, a Newport Beach councilman and its former mayor, will head the Center for Public Policy. Curry recently retired after a 23-year career as a managing director for Public Financial Management, a national finance consulting and advisory firm. He previously served in the Ronald Reagan administration at the Department of Transportation.

"Our goal is to focus on Orange County as an urban area of more than three million people and to serve as a resource in helping local officials make better decisions," Curry said in a statement. "We also aim to prepare students with practical, real world skills needed for today's local governments, with a particular emphasis on public finance."

The University also announced a broad-based list of "who's who" in Orange County who will be serving as

board members of the Center.

In keeping with the diversity of Orange County's urban core, the center's board includes business leaders and local leaders from both parties, including labor leader Nick Bernardino and union-critic Supervisor John Moorlach.

"The board represents the diversity of opinion and the breath of experience that we want to be the hallmark of center programs," said Curry.

Its first official business was hosting Orange County's "Annual Report," which was presented Nov. 17 by Board of Supervisors Chairman Bill Campbell. The center is also scheduled to hold a Pension Reform Forum breakfast on Feb. 24 and a daylong seminar on Creating High Performance Government on March 30.

Stephen D. Christensen, the university's executive vice president for External Relations, said the center will offer a perfect opportunity for students

and staff at the Lutheran-affiliated school to put their faith to work in the public sector.

"Concordia has obviously been preparing students for ministry work but at the same time not all work is in ministry, including secular work," he said. "This is an extension of the work we are already doing with our students. It used to be if you were at a Christian university you had to go into Christian ministry but business is now an option. Government is now an option. We want them to see that as a worthwhile career and a very good way to be salt and light in a very dark world. If we want to change the world we have to work within the world's system. We want to train up a generation that understands God comes first."

Christensen, a business professor, who also heads up the university's Center for Faith and Business, said that 70 percent of the people in the workplace

don't attend the church.

"How are they going to know about a relationship with Jesus Christ?" he said. "It's through the witness and relationship of a co-worker. These co-workers go places pastors can't. God uses everyday people. His followers, to represent Him in the secular field. The world is in trouble. God didn't give us a pass to not be in the world."

The Concordia executive said that in the past Christians had a tendency to run from the rough-and-tumble arena of public policy and politics, but that has only led to a darker world.

"We are not going to make progress by withdrawing," he said. "We need to engage in the community. Jesus went into the marketplace. At the end of the day, it's part of the Great Commission.

For more information, visit www.cul.edu and type in Center for Public Policy in the search box.