

# **“The Laboratory”**

## **Concept**

The life of a minister can be lonely, and increasingly Assemblies of God ministers are raising impassioned pleas for more ministerial fellowship and open, honest discussion. While no one denies that ministers are responsible for their public teaching or the leadership of their congregations, many seem to be crying out for some venue in which they can share their questions, hopes, half-baked ideas and theories, etc. with fellow ministers in a safe, non-political setting.

Since North Central University has attempted (successfully we think) to provide an open constructive setting for creative faculty discussion since 1998 through its Pentecostal Issues Seminar, it has occurred to several members of the NCU faculty and administration that we may be able to play a role in establishing an ongoing opportunity for Assemblies of God ministers to engage in creative discussion in a safe environment. “The Laboratory” is our attempt to adapt what has worked for us to a wider audience.

## **Commitment**

The foundation of “The Laboratory” is a shared commitment to Christ as expressed in vibrant Pentecostalism. Specifically, all who participate must be committed to both affirmation and proclamation of the Statement of Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of God, without mental reservation. A constructive attitude is essential, and all discussions will focus ideas, methods, or practices, rather than on individuals or personalities.

“The Laboratory” will be conducted with the full knowledge of District Council and General Council officials, and District and Council and General Council officials will be welcome to join and participate.

## **Key Idea**

The key idea that makes safe discussion possible at North Central is a clear distinction between, on the one hand, the regular speech that members of the faculty and administration engage in as we teach and interact with students, pastors, etc. and, on the other hand, “experimental speech,” which is carefully defined and protected by the Academic Freedom Policy found in the NCU Faculty Manual. We propose that “The Laboratory” must also be based on a distinction between the regular speech of ministers and speech we characterize as “experimental speech.” The following is offered as definition of “experimental speech” as it might relate to “The Laboratory”:

It is both constructive and healthy of ministers on occasion to engage in conversation with their peers that are experimental in nature and in which they expressed opinions that have not necessarily been well considered. In such circumstances, ministers will not be held to the same standard of responsibility for what they say as normal. Such “experimental speech” is to be distinguished from utterances made in public meetings, utterances that occur in the course of ministerial functions such as counseling sessions,

or even casual conversations with parishioners, for in each of these cases the minister must be held to a high standard of responsibility and scrutiny by others.

All meetings of “The Laboratory” will be defined as comprising “experimental speech.” Consequently, participants in “The Laboratory” agree not to quote statements made by others in seminar sessions to those who are not part of “The Laboratory” unless explicit permission is granted by the person being quoted. Moreover, statements made in “The Laboratory” sessions are never to be used to damage or injure a person, particularly in the context of credentialing or disciplinary hearings.

### **Covenant**

All who participate in “The Laboratory” must agree to be bound by the following covenant:

We undersigned commit ourselves to

- Without mental reservation affirm and proclaim the Statement of Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of God,
- Maintain a constructive attitude in all sessions of “The Laboratory,”
- Make ideas, methods, or practices the focus of “The Laboratory” meetings rather than individuals or personalities,
- Maintain complete confidentiality about what is said in “The Laboratory” meetings, as is fitting for utterances defined as “experimental speech,” and
- Agree never to quote anything said in “The Laboratory” in a way that is injurious to the person being quoted.