



Communicating Pentecost

Derrick Rosenior's life was powerfully changed when he was a boy in Sierra Leone and his family experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He later made his passion for Pentecost the focus of his academic career. Today, as an assistant professor of communication studies at Vanguard and director of the Lewis Wilson Institute for Pentecostal Studies, Rosenior is teaching students how to embrace the Pentecostal experience with head and heart.

"I've always found that studying Pentecostalism made me more passionate about the move of the Spirit," says Rosenior. "You don't have to lose the passion just because you're in education. Just because you get a PhD doesn't mean you need to stop flowing in the things of the Spirit and allowing that to be a vital part of your life."

Rosenior earned a PhD in rhetoric and intercultural communication from Howard University in Washington, D.C., focusing on how Pentecostals communicate interculturally. His interest in Pentecost began during his youth. His family, which came from a strong Wesleyan Methodist background, was dutifully church-going but did not have a personal relationship with Christ, he says. Then an aunt was saved and shared her experience with other members of the family. In 1984 Derrick attended evangelistic meetings held by an Assemblies of God minister and experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

"Getting baptized in the Holy Spirit was a transformational experience in my life," he says. "In school I began to share the gospel with my friends, and I saw

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many of them saved, baptized in the Holy Spirit and delivered from the powers of darkness. A glorious revival began to sweep through the school.”

At eighteen, Rosenior came to the U.S. to study, just as his father and grandfather had done. He soon observed that there were racial divisions in the Pentecostal movement in the U.S. that went back to the movement’s beginnings. The reconciliation movement that took place among denominations in the 1990s piqued his interest, and he took up the subject in his doctoral studies. He was interested in how Pentecostals communicate across racial lines, and how the rhetoric of Azusa St. impacted reconciliation efforts today.

“Once I was in the academic realm, being Pentecostal was such a significant part of my life that it was a no-brainer to combine the two,” he says. “I wanted to know, how

are the gospel and the Pentecostal message being communicated? How are we talking to each other from various racial and ethnic backgrounds within the church?”

After completing his PhD, Rosenior came to VU to teach in 2005.

“I’ve always innately enjoyed teaching. It was kind of a calling God had for me,” he says. “My goal when I was in grad school was to teach in an environment where I could make a difference in the spiritual lives of my students. I saw teaching as a ministry, a calling just like a pastor would see their calling. I wanted to use my doctoral education as a tool for ministry. I decided I was going to teach at a Christian institution, preferably a Pentecostal institution.”

As an assistant professor of communication studies, Rosenior teaches rhetoric of Pentecostalism, intercultural communication, interracial communication, nonverbal

communication and communication theory. He also directs the Wilson Institute, which aims to preserve and present Pentecostalism to the Vanguard community through events, lectureships and more. His course on the rhetoric of Pentecostalism does the same.

“We talk about what it means to be Pentecostal, and how Pentecostalism has been communicated in the past as well as current trends in the movement,” he says. “There is this idea that if you’re educated you’ve lost the Spirit. But I hope students see there are people like me who are passionate about things of the Spirit but are also educated. I want them to say, ‘If he can do it, I can do it. I don’t have to compromise my faith.’”

Rosenior is also the faculty advisor for Mosaic, a student multi-cultural organization at VU. Mosaic was born out of an interracial communication class he taught in 2007. The students wanted to take what they had learned and put it into practice. To date the group has put on several large, multi-cultural events on campus, including an event called One Love which offered ethnic foods, mariachi music, Samoan dancers, poetry and panel discussions.

Rosenior is married to Karine and they are members of Orange County First Assembly in Santa Ana. Derrick is also a member of the Society for Pentecostal Studies and currently serves as chair of its religion and culture interest group.

“I hope that my students experience the living Christ for themselves, and integrate their faith with their learning experience,” he says. “Communication people are world-changers because they can go out and talk with authority and expertise on issues people deal with on daily basis. I want students to go out and make a difference with what they have learned here.”

