



## **Boosting black enrollment - Georgetown College head has a vision of diversity**

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By Chris Kenning

GEORGETOWN, Ky. -- Growing up as a white pastor's son in 1950s Mississippi, William Crouch came to loathe segregated restaurants, bathrooms and schools.

As a teen, he witnessed forced busing in Charlotte, N.C. As a young country preacher, he battled the belief that black families should remain separate from whites.

Today, Crouch is in his 17th year as president of Georgetown College, gaining notice for his push to expand the enrollment of African Americans, and hoping to change the face of the mostly white, 1,300-student Baptist college near Lexington.

"I used to tell my parents that one day I wanted to do something about what I saw, but, before, I was never in a position where I could," said Crouch, who cultivates relationships with black students, and even sought instruction to broaden his understanding of black culture.

With the goal of raising minority enrollment at Georgetown from 6 percent to 17 percent, Crouch travels constantly to meet with black groups, ministers and leaders. He's offered jobs to black graduates who return after gaining doctoral degrees, opened an Underground Railroad Institute, given scholarships through partnerships with black churches and formed a school office of diversity.

He is also driving a \$28 million campaign to have his school serve as a "foster home" for Bishop College, a historically black school in Dallas that went bankrupt and closed in the 1980s.

The idea is that the Kentucky college will play host to Bishop reunions, sell a Bishop clothing line, house its archives and offer scholarships in its name to relatives of Bishop graduates. In exchange, Crouch hopes that Bishop alums will send talented black students to Kentucky.

With the support of his trustees and faculty, Crouch's efforts have already boosted black applicants to Georgetown from 101 in 2006 to 228 in 2007. There are now 70 black students, and one tenured black professor.

Yet experts say reaching Crouch's minority goals will be a challenge.

"There have not been very many success stories of places that have been able to attract minorities a great distance," said Jon Fuller, a senior fellow at the Washington D.C.-based National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. "Minority students in general have been even less inclined to travel considerable distance."

At the same time, some white students at Georgetown have complained that Crouch is giving preferential treatment to blacks -- and some Bishop alumni believe Crouch is attempting to commandeer a tradition that has no historic link to Georgetown.



"I think his motives are basically good but somewhat misplaced," said Bobby Moten, president of the Bishop Alumni Association, made up of about 6,000 active members. "When you start taking someone's tradition, people are hesitant to embrace that."

#### Past informs present

As a child in Jackson, Miss., where his father was a young pastor of a 500-member white church, Crouch said he remembers segregated drinking fountains and Ku Klux Klansmen. He recalls civil-rights marches that went right past the church.

Crouch's father, who opposed segregation from the pulpit, invited black families for dinner and tried, unsuccessfully, to invite them to his church.

"People didn't want black people coming to their church," he said, "or being in their restaurants."

When the family moved to Winston-Salem, N.C., in the 1960s, it was "more of the same," he said. His father started an interracial minister's association, but "our world was still pretty white," he said.

Later, living in Charlotte, his younger siblings were in the first group of students to experience forced busing. He watched many white families flee to private schools.

After graduating from Wake Forest, by then married and with a child, Crouch went on to get a master's degree in divinity and entered the ministry. Among his first jobs was to pastor a 200-member country church in Warren County, N.C.

There, white families had moved their children to a private school they'd started, he said, and his parishioners urged him to do the same.

Reluctantly, he took their advice -- deciding, he said, that his daughter's need for a secure and familiar environment demanded it. He still isn't certain he made the right decision.

"It was the first time in my life I was caught" between priorities, he said.

#### Laying a foundation

After obtaining his doctorate and moving into academics, Crouch was hired as Georgetown's president in 1991. He said it took nearly a decade of dealing with other issues -- such as raising low faculty pay, boosting ACT averages of arriving students and upgrading old facilities -- before his focus on changing the face of the campus sharpened about six years ago.

He argues that diversity is needed because "the world is changing, becoming more interconnected, and people have to learn how to function in a diverse society."

At first, the college community seemed apathetic about the campus' racial homogeneity, Crouch said, but in the last six years he won support of the faculty and trustees.

"Clearly the minority populations aren't as adequately served in higher education as they should be, so it's the right thing to do," trustee president Guthrie True said. "And it makes Georgetown College a



better place, the more we reflect the world."

In 2001 the college created the Underground Railroad Research Institute, which studies the network that helped 19th-century slaves escape to freedom. Although valuable, Crouch said, it proved a "total miscalculation" because it mainly attracted whites, not blacks. "(Black students) wanted to learn about the future, not the past," he said.

Realizing that cultural differences were stifling his efforts, Crouch said he asked a retired black University of Kentucky sociology professor and others to "teach me how to think like a black person."

For two years he completed assignments such as eating dinner with black families in their homes and joining a Black Expressions book club. He read soul-food cookbooks, pored over black history books, attended an African-American Kentucky Derby ball and met with black women familiar with inner-city turmoil.

"I felt more confident to go across the county and meet with African-American groups," he said.

#### Efforts under way

Crouch is currently taking a year off from day-to-day university operations to meet with black groups, ministers and business leaders. His goal is to recruit students and raise money for the scholarships and diversity programs.

Last year, for example, Crouch made a connection with the First Baptist Church Bracktown in Lexington, offering five scholarships to students who complete the church's academic-excellence program. A similar relationship is under way with the Eastern Star Missionary Church in Indianapolis.

He established an office of diversity on campus and installed the First Tee Scholars program, a golf-scholarship program for minority students. And he partnered with four national black Baptist conventions to recruit students, offering a scholarship to each and allowing members to serve on the trustee board.

That led to his partnership with alumni from Bishop College, a historically black Baptist College in Dallas that closed in 1988. Crouch hopes the partnership will encourage Bishop alumni to send talented students his way.

One is Ashley Colwell, 24, a Dallas resident whose uncle was a Bishop graduate. She said her scholarship pays for about \$10,000 of the roughly \$25,000 annual cost of tuition, room and board. Although there aren't many fellow minorities on campus, she said, "Dr. Crouch said I'd be ... breaking down the path for others."

Some Bishop alumni question the Georgetown connection. Moten said Bishop's Dallas-based alumni association conducted an informal e-mail survey and found most alumni "weren't too enthusiastic about it. ... Basically, when you don't know anything about a place, you're going to have your reservations."

Crouch said he is also contending with the perceptions of some white Georgetown students who feel slighted, he said.



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"The rumor is every black student is on a full scholarship and you're lowering your admission standards," he said, noting that neither is true. "I tell them, 'You've had opportunities for 400 years they haven't had.' "

Granetta Blevins, a trustee from Mount Sterling, said while she supports enriching the racial makeup, it must be balanced with the "many areas we're focusing on," including a \$74 million capital campaign for building projects, scholarships and boosting the college's endowment.

Challenges remain

Crouch -- whose efforts recently helped him win the 2007 Lauren K. Weinberg Humanitarian Award from the Kentucky Conference for Community and Justice, a human-relations organization dedicated to eliminating racism -- said he'll continue pushing because he thinks it will enrich students' college experience.

Future plans include drawing a black fraternity or sorority to the school's Greek system, and continuing to make connections and raise money for scholarships and programs to further boost minority enrollment.

If he's successful, he said, Georgetown could be a national example and make a lasting change to the makeup of the college.

"We're really involved in a great experiment," he said.