

Logsdon professor to chair Parliament of World Religions

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ABILENE— A missions professor at Hardin-Simmons University's [Logsdon Seminary](#) will chair an international organization dedicated to cultivating harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities.

Rob Sellers, professor of theology and Connally Professor of Missions at Logsdon, was elected chair of the board of trustees for the [Parliament of World Religions](#)—only the second Baptist to serve in that position.



Sellers hopes his election offers “a strong counterpoint to the particularly mean-spirited things that some very prominent Baptists have said in the media about other religions and their

spiritual leaders or prophets.”

“For Christians in general, many of whom are unsure of what to think about the increasingly religious plurality of our nation or concerned about religious conflict around the world, it is important to have someone of their own faith tradition to be vocal about the beauty of religious diversity, the need to treat persons of other faiths as neighbors, the wisdom of other spiritual teachers that can enrich us, and the value of working together across religious boundary lines,” Sellers said.

Sellers possesses “strong qualifications for leadership in this international

organization,” said Don Williford, dean of Logsdon School of Theology and Seminary.

Keeping dialogue open

“His selection is a tribute not only to his tireless efforts to keep the lines of dialogue open between the world’s religions, but to his love for people of all cultures and religious backgrounds,” Williford said. “I am proud to be associated with Dr. Sellers in the work of preparing young women and men to bear faithful witness to God in every culture.”

As chair, Sellers will work closely with the organization’s executive director. He will lead in vision-casting, represent the parliament, network with other interfaith organizations, raise funds, speak and write on the interfaith movement, and coordinate the parliament’s efforts.

Suzii Paynter, executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, said her organization “celebrates” Sellers’ election to his new role.

“Rob Sellers has been a diligent scholar and dedicated advocate for interfaith understanding and relationships,” Paynter said. “As in all meaningful efforts for large-scale impact, Dr. Sellers’ representation on our interfaith convening table represents the investment of time and energy necessary to lead and multiply the work of fruitful engagement. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship welcomes his voice and guidance into deeper participation with the Parliament of World Religions.”

Religious rights

Roy Medley, moderator of the National Council of Churches, USA, applauded Sellers’ election, saying it will signal to a worldwide audience that Baptists are committed fully to respecting and fostering the religious rights of all people.

“Rob’s gracious approach to people of other faiths and his genuine interest and skills in building bridges with them will enhance the work that he has been involved in through the National Council of Churches on interfaith relations through the expanded network that he will now be leading,” said Medley, general secretary of American Baptist Churches USA.

“In addition, his passion is unmistakable and energizes his work in this field. The gifts of scholarship he possesses will also be a great aid to the board as a whole as they bring a hugely diverse group of faith groups together to talk about a common future in which every person might live with dignity, security and the free expression of their faiths.”

Engaging the interfaith movement

As chair, Sellers hopes to solidify the parliament’s position as an organization that supports and engages the interfaith movement around the world.

“Through an even fuller use of social media, as well as of more traditional forms of media, we must continue telling the interfaith story, providing information, inspiration and workable ideas that will give grassroots organizations, as well as guiding institutions the vision and tools needed so that followers of the world’s religions will be more committed to work together for a better world,” he said.

Raimundo Barreto, former director of the division of freedom and justice at the Baptist World Alliance, said he believes Sellers will inspire people everywhere to engage in the cause of interfaith relations.

“Dr. Sellers is a religious leader and thinker who is committed to promote acceptance, understanding, harmonic relations and sound interfaith dialogue,” said Barreto, assistant professor of world Christianity at Princeton Theological Seminary.

“His trajectory personifies the spirit one must have for this kind of work. He is well-traveled and has a large network of relationships and contacts in different parts of the world. He will certainly energize and enlist the support of a number of people who might not be currently as involved in the life and work of the parliament as they could.”

Kyle Tubbs, pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Round Rock and a Logsdon graduate, said Sellers’ teaching about interfaith dialogue in the class, “Christian Approaches to Other Faiths” had a significant impact on his ministry.

“I also attended a local interfaith group with Dr. Sellers and began to form personal relationships with people from other faiths. These experiences started with a heightened sense of curiosity and then forged friendships over the next couple of years,” Tubbs said.

He noted Sellers’ “deep caring” for people from all faith traditions, and deep convictions for the value of interfaith dialogue.

“Now, the church I pastor presently has monthly interfaith dialogues which are integral to our ministry,” Tubbs said.