

Seminary, private college form Desmond Tutu center

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(RNS) Two schools hope to bring the message of reconciliation retired Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu preached in South Africa to a new center based in Indianapolis.

Christian Theological Seminary and Butler University announced Thursday (Sept. 12) the creation of the Desmond Tutu Center, considered North America's first and only academic center named after the religious leader.

"I'm blushing," Tutu said before the announcement. "I am thrilled and yet am so aware that any achievement has an aspect that we owe it to the people."

In his speech, the 81-year-old religious leader cackled at his own jokes about his police escort ("It's so wonderful not to have the police chasing you.") and the praise he received ("One of the benefits of a complexion like mine is that no one knows when you are blushing.").

A recipient of a Nobel Peace Prize for resisting racial apartheid in South Africa, Tutu has fought AIDS, poverty, racism, sexism and other issues.

"We think it'll be a key center in connecting the local and the global to these issues of reconciliation and justice," said CTS President Matthew Myer Boulton. "He's unparalleled among living icons of people who have put faith in action."

The center may include conferences and programs on justice and reconciliation. As the first black South African archbishop of Cape Town, Tutu fought for an end to the white minority rule of South Africa.

"We want to use his legacy to inspire people," said South African cleric and anti-apartheid activist Allan Aubrey Boesak, a longtime friend of Tutu's who will serve as

the center's first director. "It's a legacy that spans global issues over justice, peace and at the heart of it is reconciliation that's not confined to South Africa."

Bolstered by a grant from former Colts head coach Tony Dungy's family foundation, the center will likely have a \$5 million endowment, operating with a budget of at least \$500,000 a year, said Butler University President Jim Danko. The partnership between the two schools reflects Tutu's broad reach. "His impact has extended beyond issues of religion into a broader set of social issues," Danko said.

Butler's religion department birthed the ecumenical seminary several years ago and the presidents of the two schools have been looking for potential partnerships. The seminary has about 200 students and sits next to the liberal arts school of about 4,000 students.

The partnership between a religious and a secular institution might be unique, said Daniel Aleshire, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools, but Tutu's name would be a natural draw.

"There would be few names that would get the wide respect like he does across the country," Aleshire said. "He transcends denominations and religious affiliations."