

**Hannibal-LaGrange University**

**The History of HLGU**

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**3 April 2023**

Education is a very important tool that people use every day of their lives. Some use their education to build buildings, some use it to fight wars, but for Christians they must use it to share the Gospel. In Matthew 22:37 it says, “And he [Jesus] said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” So, the best way to focus your mind on Jesus Christ is to have a good understanding of how to follow and live for him. Hannibal-LaGrange University has a long history of teaching students how to follow Christ and his commandments to ensure the growth and development of future Christian leaders.

A Christian education is extremely important especially in today’s society. With all the terrible things that are happening in the world right now, the best way to live a moral life is to follow Christ. Missouri Baptists support education through the Cooperative Program, as proven by the 2022 budget when they allocate \$2,400,000 or 16% of the annual budget towards the three Baptist institutions. This support helps ensure that the Church will have future ministers and missionaries. Without a Christian education or a place to provide one, future leaders in the Church will not be developed.

One of these three Christian institutions is Hannibal-LaGrange University, also known as HLGU. Hannibal-LaGrange was formed after two school merged to build a stronger organization to ensure Christian education in northeast Missouri. The original school was the LaGrange Male and Female Seminary founded in 1858 by the Wyaconda Baptist Association. This association founded it in order to create a Christian school that educated students and advanced Christian morals and principles. According to Richard Nations article in The Pathway, the school was founded for the “advancement of the cause of religion and sound morals” and as a “convenient point at which young men whom God may call to the work of the Gospel ministry, may be educated” (Nations).

In 1928, the Hannibal community chose to establish a new Baptist college in their area. They were able to raise \$232,000 to acquire a 116-acre campus and encouraged the LaGrange Male and Female Seminary to merge with them. The LaGrange campus was moved from LaGrange Missouri to Hannibal Missouri and became Hannibal LaGrange College. With the two colleges merged, they could now work towards teaching young Christians to spread the Gospel more effectively than before. By the end of 1929, the enrollment had grown to 222 students (The Pathway).

In 1957, a new charter was created for the college giving leadership of the college to the Missouri Baptist Convention. With this new charter came an opportunity to begin a new “extension at Tower Grove Baptist Church in midtown St. Louis for 68 students taking courses for pastors and laymen” (Mbu History). The two campuses continued to thrive until 1964 when the St. Louis extension chose to form the Board of Trustees of Missouri Baptist College. Just a few years later in 1973, the Missouri Baptist Convention would separate Hannibal LaGrange College and Missouri Baptist College of St. Louis and reestablish Hannibal LaGrange College.

In the year 1981, Hannibal LaGrange College started offering four-year degree programs to its students. This change allowed the college to teach students about how to lead in churches more thoroughly. Now that the college was able to offer four-year degrees, it could create more ministers and missionaries for spreading the gospel. With the ability to create more ministers and missionaries without sending students to other colleges, the college became more popular for those seeking higher education in regard to ministry.

In the year 1989, the main building of Hannibal LaGrange College caught on fire and unfortunately burned to the ground. During this time lots of people from Hannibal helped fund and rebuild the main building. The then president at the time, Dr. Paul Brown said:

We were so saddened and so heartbroken. But at the same time, my fondest memory is of how wonderfully people responded after that fire. People all over the area came through with such wonderful offers to help. I really believe that that fire caused people to have a fresh awareness of what a tremendously valuable asset Hannibal-LaGrange College was and is to the community... (Nations)

After the old building was cleaned up and removed, all that stood from it was the arched doorway. This arch now serves as the main symbol of Hannibal-LaGrange University.

The original building was home to the offices, the gymnasium, cafeteria, theatre/chapel, and classrooms. The new administration building was rebuilt just a few feet from the spot of the original building. The Burt Administration Building houses most of the offices of HLGU staff as well as the office of the President, and many of the classrooms for students. The Burt Administration Building might not be as big as the original, but it is a sign of positive renewal and regrowth.

From the year 1995 to the year 2012 Dr. Woodrow Burt served as the 16<sup>th</sup> president of HLGU. During his presidency, he helped grow the enrollment size of Hannibal-LaGrange University. Not only did the enrollment numbers grow, but under Dr. Burt, the Roland Fine Arts Center was built along with the Roland Library. According to an article from the Baptist Press, Burt spoke about his experience at Hannibal-LaGrange University and said:

“God has blessed me with the privilege of serving at Hannibal-LaGrange for 32 years...As I begin my 33rd year with HLGU, I want to thank you for the opportunity you’ve entrusted to me over these years. I’ve accomplished most all I set out to

accomplish. Between that and turning 66 next August, I just believe it's time to move on." (Koonce)

Dr. Burt had an amazing career at HLGU with his most notable accomplishments being two of the most important buildings on the HLGU campus.

In 2007, the college was approved to start offering graduate degrees. The first degree it offered was the Master of Science in Education. In 2010, the Missouri Baptist Convention voted to rename the college to Hannibal-LaGrange University. With the University now offering master's degrees, there were more opportunities given to students of HLGU. A student was now able to gain a higher education without having to transfer to a different college or university.

On May 4, 2012, the trustees voted to elect Dr. Anthony W. Allen as the 17<sup>th</sup> president of HLGU. President Allen was president for 10 years until he resigned in 2022 after HLGU got into some financial trouble. One of Dr. Allen's most notable accomplishments was when he helped change the bylaws of HLGU in order to keep a strong connection with the Missouri Baptist Convention.

The college has had its fair share of damage to its buildings. While Dr. Allen was president in 2013, straight-line winds damaged HLGU's T.M. Mathews Science building beyond repair. During this time the campus set up temporary classrooms and laboratories for students. In 2015, the Carroll Science Center was completed, and the students were able to return to the official classrooms and laboratories. Currently the Carroll Science Center serves as the scientific center on HLGU's campus. While the damage of the previous science center was a tragedy, the initiative taken by HLGU to make sure that students were able to get their science classes done shows just how much the university cares about its students.

After Dr. Allen's resignation, Dr. Robert Matz was elected president by the board of trustees in October of 2022. Dr. Matz has faithfully filled the role of vice president under the acting president Dr. Harrison until he assumed the role of President of Hannibal-LaGrange University in the fall of 2022. According to an article on the HLGU website, Dr. Matz says, "Christian Studies stands at the center of HLGU's identity...No matter what discipline a student chooses to pursue, you will be challenged to think Biblically through courses in the Old Testament, New Testament, and a Biblical Worldview." Dr. Matz has helped the university through the financial issues it faced. While Hannibal-LaGrange University is not completely financially stable yet, Dr. Matz is doing everything he can to push the university through this hard time.

In conclusion, all these things have led to HLGU being an institution that helps teach students how to be the future Christian leaders of America. Through tragedies and destruction, the university has remained standing. When the main administration building burned down, the university rallied together and built a new building. After the science building was damaged the university took measures to make sure students were able to learn science while the new building was being constructed. Even through financial struggles the university has stayed standing with the help of the surrounding community and the help of Missouri churches. Thanks to the leadership of the presidents, the university has been able to keep a Christian atmosphere and will continue to do so for many years to come.

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