

MEDIA Coverage



Jersey's **BEST**

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Dr. Dale Caldwell leads Centenary University forward



DR. DALE CALDWELL, who was inaugurated and sworn in on Oct. 21 as the 15th president in the history of Centenary University in Hackettstown, is almost always seen smiling.

“I have on my wall in my house a picture of a 1970 family reunion in Kansas City. I had the biggest smile. And I do not even smile as big as that anymore, but I feel blessed. There is no job on earth that I would rather be doing,” Caldwell said.

Caldwell, who on July 1 assumed the Centenary helm from recently retired Dr. Bruce Murphy, also is the school’s first Black president.

For the 63-year-old Caldwell, his hiring is exciting, but also bittersweet.

“My biggest disappointment in life is that my dad is not here to see me in this role,” he said.

The Rev. Gilbert H. Caldwell, who marched with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., died in 2020. “You grow up around the Civil Rights Movement, and even though you have big shoes to try to fill, you cannot fill them the same way that my dad did. I look at the Civil Rights Movement in that it was not just about Black people. It was about bringing people together, people who are diverse. I see the role here at Centenary as the same thing. My job is to

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really bring people together in a way that is positive, in a way that that pushes away division, and really helps to change the world.”

Caldwell has big plans for Centenary, and one of those is the creation of the Centenary Institute of Entrepreneurship. Caldwell, who is the former executive director of the Rothman Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Fairleigh Dickinson University, said, “One of the things that I learned is the power of institutes to really help to transform universities. I came here saying, ‘We need to create institutes to really help to supplement our wonderful, traditional academics, but we need to reach a broader audience. One of the things I am most excited about with the Centenary Institute of Entrepreneurship — the first in the nation as far as I can see — is a consulting co-op, the Centenary Consulting Co-Op. They have already been doing some consulting with local businesses, but I want to formalize it. What I want the students to do is to really have this consulting process to help the local businesses, but also develop analytical skills and communication skills and understanding of finance, to take what they learned in the classroom and make it very real.’ ”

Caldwell, who serves as president of the Educational Services Commission of New Jersey, has a Princeton University bachelor’s degree in economics, attended the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania for his MBA in finance, and received a doctorate in education administration from Seton Hall University.

Caldwell’s 87-year-old mother, Grace, spent 50 years in education. “She was a quiet lady of the church, behind the scenes, but she instilled in me the value of education,” Caldwell said.

“She has Alzheimer’s, so I take care of her, and we have some people come in and help her as well. She is the personification of grace and graciousness. I will kiss her, and she will say, ‘Thank you.’ Even though she has Alzheimer’s, she remembers me. It is a blessing to have her alive.”

Caldwell’s daughter, Ashley, is a sophomore at Rutgers University. “She’s just lovely, she really is,” Caldwell said of his daughter. “And she is very outgoing. She is probably going to major in public policy at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers, but this summer she was a volunteer with the (Centenary University) Equestrian Center to work with the Therapeutic Riding program.”

For Caldwell, who also is pastor of Covenant United Methodist Church in Plainfield, a significant problem he would like to focus on and solve is poverty. “Proverbs 31:8 says to be a voice for the voiceless and speak up for the destitute,” he said. “I have the Dale Caldwell Foundation, and the mission of the foundation is to reduce poverty with education, employment and entrepreneurship. I am obsessed with doing all that I can to reduce poverty.” In fact, Caldwell and the university are launching a \$10 million social mobility campaign to raise money to allow every child who wants to go to college to have a chance.

“By getting them into Centenary, we can transform them and take them from poverty or even special needs to success in life.”

Caldwell concluded, “I care about all people, and I care about them having the best life possible.”

For more information about Dr. Dale Caldwell, visit <https://www.centenaryuniversity.edu/about-centenary/presidents-office/>.

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