



## COMMUNITY & COVENANT LIFE

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*2024-2025*

Messiah University is a community of students, faculty, administrators, and staff who are interested in achieving common goals through curricular and cocurricular activities. The Christian faith provides the basis which motivates, directs, and integrates the life of this academic community.

Each student brings a unique combination of interests, ambitions, abilities, habits, perceptions, values, and background. While the University accepts all students fully as they are, it also aims to assist them in developing their full potential. The expectations for community life at Messiah are devoted to this end.

Our Community Covenant establishes the biblical standards for how we live in community together and reflects the University's theological heritage and educational commitments. Similar to other universities, students at Messiah University are asked to adhere to certain behavioral guidelines, these are found in our Code of Conduct. This Code of Conduct helps assure that the University fulfills its mission through nurturing personal and spiritual growth and maintaining an atmosphere conducive to learning and academic excellence.

## **COMMUNITY COVENANT**

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In the motto, "Christ Preeminent," the Messiah University community affirms that life draws meaning from submission to Christ and service to others. Our philosophy statement affirms the triune God as the creator of all that is, the source of all truth. As beings created in the image of God, we have special responsibilities and challenges. In our community of believer-scholars we affirm the interrelatedness of what we believe, the way we live, and the way we learn. Our search for truth and commitment to Christ connect us not only to each other but also to God's creation and God's people throughout history.

Within this community, it is not easy to find the right balance of challenge and support for each individual. Personal freedom and community obligation sometimes seem to be in tension as individuals work to integrate belief and behavior. This growth-producing process benefits from the dynamics of a diverse but concerned community, as well as the sense that the lordship of Christ and a commitment to being part of the body of Christ are key values to guide us.

With the task before us of searching for truth and promoting personal growth, we join together in the hope of achieving more together than we

could separately. We agree to pursue the obligations and challenges of community membership with integrity, respecting our institutional heritage and practicing biblical accountability.

Our submission to the lordship of Christ has many implications. Some of the primary implications can be seen in terms of benefits and responsibilities based on our relationship to God, to his creation, and to the group of people who constitute the Messiah University community.

The benefits and responsibilities of living under the lordship of Christ focus first on *our relationship to God*. We affirm that there is but one true God and that His Word is our guide for faith and life. Because of the importance of knowing God and His Word, we affirm the importance of the spiritual disciplines in corporate and individual life. Prayer, Bible study, meditation, fellowship, and group worship should be regular activities in the believer's life. Because God is a faithful keeper of covenants, we affirm the importance of fidelity and covenant keeping in our relationship with God and in our relationships with each other. Scripture guides us in knowing how to live out the impact of God's grace in our lives. We are to honor and revere Him in the way that we worship, serve, and enjoy Him. As teachers and learners, we see our activities as acts of service and honor to Him. Because of the love which He initiates by grace, we respond in love to Him and to those He has created. His love gives us a sense of meaning and intrinsic worth that goes beyond any earned value or identity.

The benefits and responsibilities of living under the lordship of Christ focus also on our relationship to God's creation. As people created in God's image, we are to follow Christ's example in preaching the good news to the poor, binding the brokenhearted, proclaiming freedom to the captives and restoring sight to the blind. As those committed to living out the teachings of Scripture, we are to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly. We are to bring peace and unity where there is conflict and discrimination. We are to respect people and to value life above material wealth. Because we see people as having intrinsic worth, we avoid gossip, manipulative behavior and sexist or racist attitudes or behaviors, stressing instead integrity, commitment and compassion in relationships with others.

This respect for creation also shows itself in our treatment of natural resources. As stewards, we are to be faithful in preserving the environment and in maintaining the balances within the creation order. We are to use our intellect and creativity to preserve and enhance the creation, using its resources prudently in light of the uncertain limits to history and life as we

know it.

## **Relationships With People**

The benefits and responsibilities of living under the lordship of Christ focus also on our relationship to the group of people who constitute the Messiah University community. We recognize that significant diversity exists within our community, bringing a richness that results from varying ability levels, backgrounds and interests. That individual diversity, however, must come within the bounds by which the community defines itself. Individuals who join the community must also be willing to live with integrity within those boundaries if the community is to function.

While acknowledging the difficulty of applying general principles to specific behaviors and contexts, we agree to the following guidelines:

1. As a community, we commit ourselves to academic integrity and excellence in a cooperative, rather than a competitive, environment. We strive to work together responsibly and honestly in exploring and understanding the world around us, searching for truth within all academic areas.
2. As a community, we commit ourselves to expressing Christian values in responsible decisions and actions. While not all Christians agree about the application of Christian values to specific situations, we expect honesty in dialoguing about and applying Christian values to things such as the use of language, leisure time and entertainment options, observance of the Lord's Day, and personal appearance.
3. As a community, we commit ourselves to balancing personal freedom with concern for the moral standards of others. In addition, rules are designed to promote a campus atmosphere that is most conducive to personal well-being, corporate service, and the achievement of the University's distinctive, goals, and educational objectives.
4. As a community, we believe scriptural teachings apply to us as they have to all people in all cultures. Our lives are to be characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We are to use our gifts in doing such things as serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy. In contrast, we are to avoid sinful or unhealthy practices as articulated in the University's Student and Employee Codes of Conduct.

With this understanding of our benefits and responsibilities as members of the Messiah University Community, we covenant together as a community of believer-scholars to pursue the challenge of living out this document. We commit ourselves to pursuing the distinctives, goals and educational objectives of the University. We commit ourselves to seeking increased

understanding of the Christian faith and applying that faith to specific academic disciplines and world problems. We commit ourselves to encouraging growth in others by living as examples, applying our faith to personal lifestyle issues, confronting inappropriate attitudes or behaviors directly and affirming the evidence of God's work in others. We will strive to use our talents and time, both in and out of class, for the benefit of the community and the glory of God, working together to bring all of life under the lordship of Christ.

## **CODE OF CONDUCT**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Messiah University is a community of believer-scholars who share a common mission to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character, and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership, and reconciliation in church and society. A specific code of conduct has been developed to help assure that the University fulfills its mission through nurturing personal growth and maintaining a university-wide atmosphere conducive to learning and academic excellence. Undergraduate students are held accountable to these codes of conduct during times when the university is open, including fall break, Thanksgiving and spring break. Although held to a different level of accountability during times when the university is closed during Christmas and summer breaks, students are encouraged to continue to uphold biblical principles which inform our community standards. As responsible citizens of our community, students voluntarily agree to abide by University guidelines and standards in exchange for the benefits of being a part of the Messiah University community.

### **STUDENT BENEFITS**

The benefits of belonging to the Messiah University community of believer- scholars include:

1. Students will benefit by engaging the mission of the University and achieving university wide educational objectives without impediment and within a safe environment.
2. Students will benefit from the expectation that 'every person within each race, gender, nationality, status, and position will be respected and valued because each person is created in the image of God'. (*Foundational Values*).
3. Students may benefit by freely participating in the goals of living in a Christian community which include, but are not limited to, practicing

the spiritual disciplines individually and corporately, engaging in theological reflection and discourse, and ultimately, 'helping one another live more faithfully as disciples of Christ' (*Foundational Values*) both inside and outside the classroom.

4. Students will benefit from being a part of a drug- and alcohol free environment.
5. Students may benefit from engaging in responsible expression and association through established campus procedures.
6. Students may benefit by having access to resources on campus to assist with their academic, spiritual, and personal growth, as well as physical health and safety. These resources include, but are not limited to, the Agape Center, Learning Center, the Engle Center for Counseling and Health, Campus Ministries, Residence Life, wellness and recreational facilities and programs, and the Office of Academic Accessibility.
7. Students will benefit from having access to excellent faculty, academic technology, classrooms, libraries, presentations, and other resources necessary for the academic success.
8. Students may benefit from availing themselves to a wide variety of leadership, service, and study abroad opportunities provided through a variety of offices on campus (Agapé Center for Local and Global Engagement, Office of Student Engagement, etc.)
9. Students may benefit from active participation in Student Government Association, student clubs and organization initiatives.
10. Students will benefit from a caring and responsive Messiah University Administration which will administer policies that are supportive of the University mission and educational objectives.

## **BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS**

Violations of the Code of Conduct impede the ability of the University to provide an atmosphere that is conducive to learning and is supportive of achieving its mission. Therefore, when codes are violated, appropriate intervention takes place to address those behaviors. In some cases, a student conduct process may be initiated. Disciplinary procedures are designed to educate students, ensure community responsibility, promote restoration, and treat students justly. Generally, prohibited conduct for which a student is subject to discipline is defined as follows:

1. Behavior that violates Messiah University standards on personal integrity. This includes acts of dishonesty (such as cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty), misrepresentation (such as lying or materially misrepresenting information to a University official, including Residence Life or Department of Safety staff), fraud (such as the fraudulent use of

- Messiah University Identification Card), or forgery (such as fabricating a University parking pass). *See Community Covenant.*
2. Behavior that disrupts or materially interferes with the basic rights of others and the educational functions of Messiah University. *See Messiah policy on respect for the rights of others.*
  3. Assault. Any physical attack on another person that prevents that person from conducting his or her customary affairs, puts that person in fear for his or her safety, and/or causes injury. *See Messiah policy on respect for the rights of others.*
  4. Harassment. Subjecting another person or group to abusive, threatening, intimidating, or harassing actions, including, but not limited to, those based on race, religion, gender, disability, age, economic status, ethnicity, national origin or sexual orientation. This includes any communication that attacks or interferes with a person conducting his or her customary affairs, puts that person in fear for his or her safety, or causes actual physical injury. *See Messiah policy on racial harassment and respect for the rights of others.*
  5. Sexually inappropriate behavior. This includes overly intimate sexual behavior, sexual intercourse outside of marriage and the use or distribution of pornography. Students who experience same sex attraction or identify as gay or lesbian are expected to refrain from same-sex sexual expression. *Please see Messiah sexual behavior expectations.*
  6. Sexual misconduct. This refers to sexual acts using force, threat or intimidation or advantage gained by the offended student's mental or physical incapacity or impairment of which the offending student was aware or should have been aware. It also includes sexual assault and harassment. *See Messiah policy on sexuality and relationships, sexual assault, sexual harassment.*
  7. Use, possession, manufacture, and/or distribution of illegal drugs, alcohol or tobacco. *See Messiah policy on alcohol, illegal drugs, and tobacco.*
  8. Theft or attempted theft of property and/or possession of stolen property.
  9. Vandalism of any kind. *See Messiah policy on property damage.*
  10. Possession, use, or distribution of firearms, ammunition, explosives, or other weapons. Weapons include, but are not limited to, BB guns, paintball guns, CO2 guns, air soft guns, pellet guns, water balloon launchers, bows and arrows, crossbows, knives (except those used for food preparation), clubs, whips, spears, swords, martial arts weapons, machetes, etc. *See Messiah policy on firearms and weapons.*

11. Failing to comply with the directives of a University official, including refusing to identify oneself and/or refusing to present Messiah University identification to Messiah University staff including Department of Safety and Residence Life staff. *See Messiah policy on respect for the rights of others.*
12. Violation of operational rules governing various offices, departments and facilities of Messiah University. This includes, but is not limited to, Residence Life, Department of Safety, Dining Services, Student Engagement Programs, Agape Center, Information Technology Services, the Murray Library, etc. *See individual department policies.*

The Vice Provost for Student Success and Engagement or designee may impose an interim suspension and ban from campus prior to a hearing before a disciplinary officer or body in the following circumstances: a) to ensure the safety, health and well-being of members of the University community or preservation of University property; b) to ensure the student's own physical or emotional safety, health or well-being; or c) if the student poses a definite threat of disruption of or interference with the normal operations of the University. All interim suspensions will be reviewed promptly, typically within one week, by the appropriate University authority.

### **GROWTH INITIATIVE**

Messiah University desires that students have the opportunity and encouragement to receive the best possible support and assistance in addressing destructive behavior. Therefore, students who take the initiative to ask for help in dealing with a problem or who acknowledge rule violations before they are confronted will be dealt with through a counseling mode rather than a disciplinary mode. Students must take the first step and be willing to accept help.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Students are expected to encourage each other to live according to Messiah University's Code of Conduct. For this reason, students who are present when behavior occurs that violates university standards may be found responsible for supporting the behavior.

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## **DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

Messiah University is an institution committed to diversity, inclusiveness, intercultural learning and reconciliation. Our goal is to provide students, faculty, educators, and staff with the opportunity to live, learn, and serve in



a world that is increasingly diverse and interconnected. Messiah University's commitment to diversity is necessary because the pursuit of our mission "to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society" requires both an appreciation for and an ability to engage difference in a way that promotes wholeness and reconciliation with God, with each other, and with all of creation. Our core Christian values as understood in our foundational documents compel us to leverage diversity in our pursuit of academic excellence.

In defining academic excellence, Messiah University has adapted the concept of inclusive excellence developed by the Association of American Universities and Universities which posits that an educational institution cannot truly be excellent if it does not draw upon the full range of humanity and that diversity is central to educational quality. Inclusive excellence is an "active, intentional, ongoing engagement with diversity in interpersonal relationships, in the curriculum, in the cocurriculum, and in the communities with which students, staff, and faculty connect."<sup>1</sup>

At Messiah University, there is a growing realization that diversity cannot be viewed merely in terms of a problem to be solved or a challenge to be addressed. Rather, it is an invaluable asset to the educational community which can and must be engaged in the learning process. Implementing "inclusive excellence" aids in preparing students to become agents well equipped to adapt, engage, work, learn, and heal within diverse worlds, both at home and abroad. The responsibility and the cost of pursuing inclusive excellence is a collective one that falls on the shoulders of every individual and office on campus through the pursuit of opportunities for professional development, training and spiritual formation. Consequently, the notion of inclusive excellence has been a key consideration in Messiah University's strategic planning process. The University's most recent strategic plan *Embracing Change as Opportunity* (2016-2020) makes significant commitments in the areas of student and faculty recruitment, community engagement, campus climate, and the development of intercultural competencies in student leadership, teaching, and learning.

<sup>1</sup> Association of American Universities and Universities, "Making Excellence Inclusive," [http://www.aacu.org/inclusive\\_excellence/index.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/inclusive_excellence/index.cfm).

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## INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE POLICY

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### Rationale

In its statement of Foundational Values, Messiah University recognizes the importance of the person, affirming that "every person is to be respected

and valued ... because each person is created in the image of God.” Divinely created and sharing equally in God’s design, each human is worthy of respect and honor, regardless of characteristics including but not limited to gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, age, ability, or marital or parental status. As an expression of that conviction and in recognition of God’s gift of love to each of us, inclusive language should be used in all levels and forms of communication at the University in reference to human beings.

1. Further, the University’s Foundational Values affirm that “every person must be responsible in their pursuit of truth.” Every member of this educational Christian community—teacher and learner, scholar and thinker, faculty, staff, and student—should uphold the pursuit of truth, using language that seeks to avoid false assumptions and inaccurate or negative stereotypes, biases, or prejudices. We uphold the use of communication that reflects a high ethical standard of truth-seeking and scholarship by avoiding misrepresentation or discrimination of any kind. As an expression of that commitment to truth, inclusive language is used to achieve clarity by neither rendering certain people invisible nor misrepresenting by overemphasizing or generalizing traits of individuals or groups.
2. Language, as a means of signifying and communicating, is not static or value-free. It is, by its very nature, fluid and dynamic. Thus, patterns and significance of language evolve as culture and ethos change. Language is a powerful means of not only reflecting culture, but also constructing and reinforcing beliefs and biases. It describes reality, but it also shapes reality. The use of inclusive language provides a means of positively influencing the social environment by contributing to the sense of worth, empowerment, freedom, and ability of all human beings. At Messiah, it thereby has a positive impact on campus climate, allowing all members of the community to function in an environment of equal opportunity and expectation.
3. Because of our Christian frame of reference and in recognition of the ways that language shapes as well as reflects culture, Messiah University has a particular responsibility to ensure that language is used in ways that do not exclude members of the community or distort the significance of contributions made by all persons to our historical and present day experience. Through our communication and use of language, greater sensitivity motivated by love becomes the norm.
4. In sum, Messiah University is a Christian community of divinely created beings informed by God’s love and pursuing truth in every endeavor. We are committed to the use of inclusive language as a means of reflecting our Christian commitment and responsibility as we

serve as a creative and liberating force in the world.

### **Definition of Inclusive Language**

Inclusive language is written or verbal communication that accurately reflects and affirms the presence, role, status, and value of all members of society by trying to avoid language that excludes certain groups of individuals or that distorts the role or value of those individuals in the community.

### **Forms of Exclusive or Discriminatory Language**

Improper language usage can lead to various forms of blatant inaccuracy and discrimination. Inclusive language seeks to remedy forms of linguistic discrimination. (Note: For a person who is not part of the excluded or affected group, it is difficult to perceive the discriminatory nature of his or her language and thus requires extra sensitivity and receptiveness.) The following illustrate examples of linguistic discrimination:

1. *Invisibility* occurs when certain phrases exclude or ignore a person or group (e.g., using “he” to mean people of either gender). Inclusive language acknowledges the presence of such unrepresented persons or groups.
2. *Extra visibility* occurs when a personal characteristic irrelevant to the context is emphasized, making the individual or group seem out of the norm (e.g., “blind singer” or “Chinese doctor” rather than simply “singer” or “doctor,” when the modifier to the subject has no bearing on the topic discussed). Inclusive language refuses to place extra emphasis on irrelevant differences.
3. *Trivialization* occurs when certain phrases unnecessarily devalue or denigrate the actions, activities, and occupations of a person or group (e.g., “even a woman can do it”). Inclusive language avoids the belittlement of individuals and groups.
4. *Stereotyping* occurs when oversimplified and over generalized labels are applied to a person or group, thereby denying individuality (e.g., “African-Americans are good dancers”). Inclusive language refuses to limit or pigeonhole any individual or group.
5. *Imposed labeling* occurs when individuals or groups (often minority or less powerful groups) have a name or term given to them by another individual or group (e.g., Euro-Americans historically called Americans of African heritage “Negroes,” but that group’s generally preferred name for itself is “African-Americans”). Inclusive language avoids the use of such labels or allows the group to define itself. It is important to be aware of and honor the way a group prefers to be named. It must be recognized that sometimes particular groups’ preferences and labels change or are in flux, and one specific

appellation may not be embraced as the norm.

## **Policy Statement**

Messiah University calls for all members of the University community to be informed and intentional about the use of inclusive language. Further, Messiah University expects members of the University community to use inclusive language in official written and oral communication intended for internal and external audiences. For some, this requires an intentional shift from habitual usage; grace should be exercised as community members conscientiously try to adhere to the policy. This policy should be understood within the context of the basic tenets of academic freedom, and is a complement to, rather than an infringement of, the University's policy on Academic Freedom (Community of Educators Handbook).

## **Specific Application of Policy**

1. University employees, staff, and offices employ inclusive language in all forms of official communication, including but not limited to press releases, published materials, community addresses, campus-wide communications, and interoffice memos.
2. Faculty members use inclusive language in classroom discourse, syllabi, and in public lectures and interviews. Faculty members have a responsibility to demonstrate and reinforce inclusivity in their interactions with students, as well as in their assessment of student writing and choice of course materials.
3. Students employ inclusive language in their academic activities, including classroom discourse and writing assignments. In addition, students use inclusive language in their cocurricular endeavors (e.g., student publications and activities sponsored by student organizations).
4. Historical and/or non-inclusive texts. As part of the academic enterprise, a wide variety of texts is encountered, representing a diversity of perspectives and contexts. When non-inclusive texts are used, it is expected that the originator's context will be indicated and, when possible and appropriate, that context will be discussed

## **Responsibility for Implementation**

All employees and students will be apprised of this policy upon joining the Messiah University community. Initially, the Vice President for Human Resources and Compliance, the Assistant Dean/Director for Faculty Development, and the Vice Provost for Student Success and Engagement will be responsible for communication of this policy. Subsequently, it is the responsibility of the appropriate administrators, including department chairs and supervisors, to encourage adherence to this policy.

1. This policy is included in all first-year seminar syllabi, per the first-year seminar parameters established by the General Education Committee. Further, faculty members are encouraged to include it in all other syllabi.
2. Further, ongoing education (at least annually) in the use of inclusive language will be the responsibility of the Vice President for Human Resources and Compliance, the Assistant Dean/Director for Faculty Development, the Vice Provost for Student Success and Engagement, and the Director of Writing, in collaboration with the Gender Concerns Committee, and the Office of Academic Accessibility.
3. When a party is offended by breach of this policy, the offended party is encouraged to act in accordance with Matthew 18:15–16 by seeking informal resolution. For instances in which informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate, the grievance procedures established by the University for employees in the Grievance Procedures, Employee Policy and Procedure Manual (1.18) should be followed; for students, the Student Harassment Policy and Procedure outlined in the Student Handbook should be implemented. Grace and understanding should be exercised in the application of this policy, allowing persons to change from traditional, habitual language patterns toward inclusive ones.

## **Annual Reporting**

To assess campus climate and to address perceived problems, at the end of each year, the Gender Concerns Committee will solicit and collect reports on breaches of this policy. These reports describe in general terms (but omit names and identifying details) each incident reported to the committee and the disposition of each.

## **Consultants**

Useful contacts and consultants when questions or difficulties arise regarding use of inclusive or exclusive language include:

- Vice President of Human Resources and Compliance
- Chair, Gender Concerns Committee
- Dean of Students
- Director of Writing
- Director of Academic Success

(Adopted 4/20/04, Community of Educators Senate)