

community & covenant life
2005–2006



COMMUNITY COVENANT

All of Life Under the Lordship of Christ

In the motto “Christ Preeminent” the Messiah College 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.

Freedom and Obligation

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.

BENEFITS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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 College community.

Relationship with God

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.

Relationships to Creation

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 College 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.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

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

Integrity and Excellence

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.

Christian Values

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.

Corporate Guidelines

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 College's distinctives, goals, and educational objectives. Prohibitions about the use of alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, and the abuse or unauthorized use of prescription or non-prescription drugs relate most clearly to concerns about personal well-being and the scriptural mandate to care for our bodies. Gambling is prohibited because we want to be wise stewards of the resources entrusted to us by God.

Scriptural Guidelines

As a community we believe that certain 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 such sinful practices as drunkenness, stealing, dishonesty, profanity, occult practices, sexual intercourse outside of marriage, homosexual behavior, and sexually exploitative or abusive behavior. Although wrong attitudes such as greed, jealousy, pride, lust, prejudice, and factiousness are harder to detect than wrong behaviors, both are prohibited as sinful and destructive of community life and of the body of Christ.

Corporate Covenant

With this understanding of our benefits and responsibilities as members of the Messiah College 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 College. 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.

EXPECTATIONS OF COMMON LIFE

Messiah College 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 College 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.

The College expects the values and behaviors of students to be generally consistent with the guidelines affirmed in the Community Covenant. In addition, the College delineates specific standards which serve to guide student life while students are on campus and/or participating in College-sponsored activities in off-campus locations. These standards are delineated in this Handbook.

AREAS OF SPECIAL CONCERN AND CLARIFICATION

growth initiative

Messiah College 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.

Theological Foundations for Racial Justice and Multicultural Education

Messiah's commitment to racial justice rests on three foundations: biblical teaching, our theological heritage, and our institutional declarations. These resources provide inspiration for the hard work of racial justice and multicultural education.

I. **Biblical Foundations**

- A. **Celebrating God's Work in Creation (Genesis 1:26–31).** All people are created in God's image. Thus, each person carries the signature of God. Scripture declares that God considered all the creation "good." Thus we believe that all humans, regardless of their language, skin color, or other physical characteristics reflect God's good creation. We are called to respect and honor one another as members of the human family—a family membership that transcends skin color, ethnicity, race, and related physical traits. We honor God's creation by celebrating—not merely tolerating—the unique beauty and diversity that each person and group contributes to the family of God.
- B. **Heeding God's Call for Righteousness and Justice.** The Kingdom of God rests on the twin pillars of righteousness and justice (Psalm 89:14). A right relationship with God and right relationships with other people form the bedrock of righteousness. The Prophets of the Old Testament repeatedly call us to labor on behalf of justice. "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" (Amos 5:24). "What does the Lord require of us? To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8). To act justly means that we will actively seek to break down walls of racial hostility, build bridges of understanding, and dismantle social structures that perpetuate racial superiority. These prophetic scriptures invite us to engage in the righteous struggle for racial justice.
- C. **Understanding God's Work in Jesus Christ.** Christ came, in the words of Scripture, "to break down the walls of hostility." For Jesus Christ "is our peace, . . . and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility . . ." (Ephesians 2:14). In Jesus Christ, God has taken the initiative to dismantle the dividing wall of racism. Moreover, the Gospel message clearly declares that in Christ "there is no Greek or Jew . . . but Christ is all, and is in all" (Colossians 3:11). The universal kingdom of God welcomes all peoples from all nations. To say that we are one in Christ means that following his example we will work to dismantle any walls of racial hostility that divide us as the children of God.

D. **Practicing God’s Ministry of Reconciliation.** God calls us to be ministers of reconciliation in both the spiritual and social realms. In the context of the United States this means helping to break down the walls of color, ethnicity, hostility, and misunderstanding. “God reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:17–19). We are called to be ministers of reconciliation, knowing that this calling may require personal sacrifice. Confident, however, of our calling, we seek to build bridges of understanding across chasms of racial hostility and oppression.

II. **Anabaptist–Pietist–Wesleyan Heritage Foundations.** The three-fold theological heritage of Messiah College accents the following four themes.

- A. **Discipleship**— We seek to follow Jesus in daily life in our practical decisions and relationships. As disciples of the new way we will embody the spirit of Jesus— love, understanding, respect— as we interact with people regardless of the color of their skin.
- B. **Community**— We strive to incarnate the corporate implications of the Gospel in our social relationships. Living in community we seek to esteem others more highly than ourselves and restore everyone to full citizenship in the family of God. We are accountable to each other under the Lordship of Christ.
- C. **Peacemaking**— We seek to reconcile broken relationships and build trust through nonviolent means. Where racism has infected relationships, pained or injured others, we endeavor to bring healing in ways that restore the dignity of each person and contribute to the shalom of our community.
- D. **Justice**— We champion the cause of justice by working to dismantle evil social structures that promote violence and racial injustice. As a Christian community we deplore all incidents, practices, and structures that demean and oppress others because of the color of their skin, related physical characteristics, ethnicity, language, or nationality.

III. **Messiah College Foundations.** Many of our official institutional documents declare our commitment to racial justice.

- A. The College **mission statement** explicitly notes that “Our mission is 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.”

- B. Three of our five foundational values directly speak to key issues surrounding racism.
1. **Importance of the Person.** “Every person is to be respected and valued regardless of gender, race, nationality, status or position, because each person is created in the image of God . . .”
 2. **Significance of Community.** “Our understanding of the church as the body of Christ and our recognition of humanity’s interdependence cause us to value community. In community we voluntarily share our lives with each other, we care for each other, we rejoice and suffer together, we worship together, and we offer counsel to each other . . .”
 3. **Service and Reconciliation.** “Central to the Gospel is the work of *reconciling* individuals with God, *with each other*, and with all of creation. God has called us to be *active* agents in this work . . . We are compelled to share the redeeming Gospel of Jesus with those around us, to build bridges of understanding and peace across dividing lines of race, class, age, gender, religion, and *ethnicity* to demonstrate the love of God in service to others, to open our hearts to the poor and needy, and *to work for* justice wherever injustice pervades.”
- C. Beyond our foundational values, one of our **educational objectives** and one aspect of our **strategic plan** also underscore the importance of our commitment to racial justice.
1. **Collegewide Educational Objective** (No. 7) is to enable students “to be prepared to act as servants in the world.” This understanding of servanthood includes an “Empathetic understanding of cultural diversity . . . and a willingness to work for peaceful reconciliation at both global and personal levels.”
 2. **The College Strategic Plan** “Turning the Century” calls for reconciliation and embracing diversity.
 - a. A “*Reconciling Faith* . . . God has called us to be the agents or servants of this reconciling faith, hope, and love.”
 - b. “*Embracing Diversity* . . . We seek to affirm and engage the multi-ethnic nature of North America and international culture . . . our goal is to welcome on our campuses and include among our numbers men and women from diverse backgrounds, knowing that each reflects the image of God in particular ways, each represents a part of the church worldwide, and each contributes to the educational richness of the College.”