

RELIGIOUS LIFE AT BIRMINGHAM-SOUTHERN COLLEGE

Birmingham-Southern College was founded by the United Methodist Church, one of 113 institutions of higher education in the United States today that were begun by the Methodists as a part of their historic emphasis on education. According to the mission of the College, its most responsible service to the Church is to perform its educational mission with distinction.

Methodism's founder, John Wesley, emphasized the roles of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience in formulating one's world view. John's brother, Charles, wrote many of the Methodist hymns—one of which expresses the hope that we should “unite the two so long disjoined: knowledge and vital piety.”

In 2000, “An Education Covenant of Partnership” between the church and college was affirmed. It reads:

Continuing 250 years of commitment to church-related education, the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church, the National Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities of the United Methodist Church, and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church commit to this education covenant as partners in mutual service and support.

As evidence of our commitment to a vibrant and meaningful relationship between the educational institutions and the church, we will:

- Create an inclusive and celebrative atmosphere that nurtures and supports the faith journeys of students, faculty, and staff;
- Uphold the vital principle of academic freedom where there is open and honest pursuit of knowledge and wisdom without restriction and with respect for the integrity of each educational institution and the church;
- Stress through teachings and example the worth and dignity of each person, an emphasis on voluntary community service, and concern for international relations;
- Prepare students, regardless of social standing, ethnic identity or gender, for lives of intellectual vigor, moral integrity, and spiritual fulfillment, not just as personal benefit, but for leadership in a new century;
- Provide support and service to each other wherever appropriate and mutually agreed upon;
- Affirm this relation between the church and the educational institutions openly and with pride in our mutual history and shared potential for the future;

This document was signed by William Oden, Bishop, President of the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church; Peter T. Mitchell, Ph.D., President of the National Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities of the United Methodist Church; and Roger W. Ireson, Ph.D., General Secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church.

Religious life at Birmingham-Southern, then, exists to support and enrich the education the College offers. As a historically United Methodist college, Birmingham-Southern has a Christian chapel in the heart of campus, a United Methodist chaplain, a United Methodist campus ministry, and strong ties to the Church—whose North Alabama Conference headquarters is located on the campus. At the same time, the College does not require students to attend chapel nor mandate doctrinal uniformity among its faculty. Perhaps B-SC’s particular contribution today is to encourage students of various religions and no religion together to wrestle with questions of meaning, purpose, and vocation in a religious climate that is open and diverse.

Toward that end, the chaplaincy at Birmingham-Southern is an endowed appointment for a United Methodist minister. The Chaplain works to fulfill the historic commitment of the United Methodist Church to higher education. The Chaplain seeks to provide a religious life program of balance, depth, and substance appropriate to and in support of the mission of Birmingham-Southern College. This includes offering to the campus community worship, study, pastoral care, and interfaith dialogue.

Birmingham-Southern’s Office of Church Relations seeks to remind the College it has a Church, and the Church it has a College. The intersections with Admissions and Financial Aid, Advancement, and the Office of the Chaplain are intentional and purposeful, giving opportunity to recruit students from United Methodist Churches, seek financial support and scholarships for those students, and provide resources and programs for the Church. Nurturing the relationship also includes the collaboration with the Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Board of Ordained Ministry, and the Council on Youth Ministry for both the North Alabama and the Alabama-West Florida Conferences and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

POLICIES FOR MINISTRY

In keeping with the high academic standards of the academic environment and the desire to encourage open conversation about religion, the Chaplain of the College and the Office of Student Affairs have established the following policies to encourage the development of campus ministries at Birmingham-Southern College.

Campus ministers

Campus ministers shall normally be

1. nominated and endorsed by a national or regional religious organization prepared to supervise and assume ultimate responsibility for his or her activity
2. ordained and in good standing with an ordaining body and/or professionally trained for religious work
3. experienced in campus ministry or related areas (e.g., youth work, congregational ministry, teaching, etc.)
4. committed to ecumenical and interfaith cooperation
5. equipped and eager to participate in the intellectual life of an academic community
6. able to provide character references and willing to submit to a background check

To maintain recognition as a campus minister, one is expected to

1. attend regular meetings of the campus ministers
2. provide an annual report to the Chaplain including evidence of continuing sponsorship by the authorizing body
3. inform the Chaplain when hiring interns or other staff members
4. participate, when invited, in College worship services
5. be guided by the BSC Religious Life Code of Ethics (see below)

Campus ministers receive no compensation from BSC but are entitled to the following benefits:

1. Birmingham-Southern identification with associated privileges at the library, fitness center, and sporting events.
2. Keys to and use of the chapel offices and limited office space (if available) in Hanson Hall.

Student religious groups

1. Current BSC students may form religious groups by applying to the Office of Student Affairs for recognition as a campus organization as outlined in Title VII of the Student Handbook (see www.bsc.edu/campus/orgs/forms.htm). Once recognized, student religious groups are entitled to reserve space on campus, obtain a student organization account, request funding from the Student Government Association, and sponsor campus events.
2. The officers and advisor(s) of student religious groups must also commit annually to BSC's Religious Life Code of Ethics (see below).

3. The Office of Student Affairs requires that student religious groups must have a member of BSC Faculty or Staff as an advisor. Student religious groups may—with the written permission of the Chaplain—invite an off-campus sponsor to meet with them, if s/he is willing to sign and abide by BSC's Religious Life Code of Ethics (see below).

Off-campus religious groups

Any unaffiliated religious groups from off campus may request permission from the Chaplain to visit campus once per semester. These visits will be restricted to the Norton Polling Booth. Visitors must read, sign, and abide by BSC's Religious Life Code of Ethics (see below).

RELIGIOUS LIFE CODE OF ETHICS

These are the principles of religious community life at Birmingham-Southern College.

1. Respecting the College's faith and academic mission. Campus ministers and student religious groups are encouraged to speak openly about their particular faith commitment under appropriate circumstances and to work actively to build their faith community on campus. Likewise, the B-SC religious community should support the College's pursuit of the educational goals which form its foundation.
2. Supporting students. The primary goals of religious life at B-SC are to support the self-actualization, education, and vocational discernment of our students. We can do this by
 - a. Informing ourselves of the variety of religious opportunities available on campus and in Birmingham, so as to assist students in finding the religious tradition of their heritage or exploring other religious options.
 - b. Honoring confidentiality. Campus ministers function as religious professionals and therefore must honor the confidentiality of students and others whom they guide and counsel. Such confidentiality governs unless specifically waived or as covered under specific legal provisions.
 - c. Acknowledging students' relationships with their families. Campus ministers are encouraged to be sensitive—to be as open as possible with concerned parents while respecting the confidentiality of communication and individual autonomy of students as adults.
 - d. Respecting privacy within residence halls. Residence halls are the students' most private space on campus. Religious groups and campus ministers may not
 - i. Visit a student in his/her residence hall room unless expressly invited by that individual student.
 - ii. Canvass, approach or visit an entire residence hall or floor. They may not randomly visit student rooms where no prior relationship has existed, even when the door to a student's room is left open.
 - iii. Place publicity or solicitations on a general, random basis on or under the door of students' rooms.
 - iv. Set up a table or distribute material in the lobby of a residence hall.
3. Publicizing with integrity. Religious publicity must
 - a. Clearly convey the sponsors of the program/event
 - b. Clearly convey the focus of the program/event
 - c. Clearly convey any connections to any on-campus or off-campus religious group
 - d. Not use "Office of the Chaplain" or the name, initials, seal, or motto of Birmingham-Southern College without permission of the Chaplain.
4. Promoting religious freedom.
 - a. Student religious groups must be open to general participation by any interested student.

- b. A student must be able freely to participate in or to leave a religious group without being subject to harassment or procedures that compromise the student's autonomy.
 - c. Proselytizing diminishes the value of one's own beliefs and stifles dissenting opinions; proselytizing is in direct conflict with an atmosphere of open exploration of what we believe. Campus ministers, student religious groups, and off-campus religious visitors may not proselytize at BSC; sincere conversion should not be sought through deprecating other groups. Religious groups and campus ministers should share their faith with others in a manner that avoids harassing, demeaning, or disregarding the integrity and freedom of other persons in making their own decisions in matters of religious faith and identity. They should avoid language that foments hatred or prejudice, or which otherwise undermines the community of respect and trust which is essential to free academic discourse and to a democratic society.
5. Dealing with disagreements constructively. When student religious groups or campus ministers find themselves in disagreement with the College administration, the Chaplain, or their fellow groups/ministers, they should handle this disagreement as an internal matter. Should claims of conscience bring a group/minister to publicly disagreeing with established College policy or procedure, the Chaplain should be notified immediately. If a solution is not reached at this level, the Chaplain may seek the advice or involvement of the Vice President for Student Affairs, Provost, or President.

Name of Organization

Name, please print

Signature

Date

POLICIES FOR FACILITIES

Yeilding Chapel

The Chapel may be reserved for worship services, gatherings of religious groups, and other rituals, including weddings of BSC faculty, staff, alumni, or current students. It has

- 108 seats,
- Shantz organ,
- Yamaha upright piano,
- A/V capabilities (tapes, CDs, DVDs, powerpoint).

The Chapel may be reserved through the Office of Facilities and Events (226-4904).

The following rules apply:

1. No wax candles may be used due to the risk of fire and damage to the building; battery operated candles may be used.
2. No decorations may be used except a small, simple arrangement of flowers on the communion table.
3. No tacks, pins, nails, glue, or tape may be used on the walls, floor, woodwork, or furnishings of the Chapel.
4. No window or door coverings are permitted.
5. No offices and entryways in the Chapel may be reserved or used for any reason. Access to office areas must remain open at all times. Participants in a wedding should plan to dress off-campus or they may use the small restrooms in the Chapel.
6. No food or drink may be served in the Chapel.

The Hanson Loft

The Loft adjoins the Hanson Lobby and Solarium and features 180 degree panoramic views of campus and the Birmingham area. It is shared by the Offices of Multicultural Affairs and Religious Life. Students requiring space for prayer or other religious observances are given access to this room. When it is not in use, the Loft is available for a variety of casual gatherings that may include prayer, study, or fellowship. Food may be served. Religious groups have preference in reserving this room.

POLICIES FOR RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Birmingham-Southern College is committed to the spiritual development of a diverse student body. It is College policy to make every reasonable effort to allow students to observe religious holidays of obligation without academic penalty. Holidays of obligation are holidays during which the observant person, according to religious practice, cannot work.

Follow this process in order to miss class for a religious holiday.

1. Students receive the course syllabus and check for potential religious conflicts.
2. Students notify professors of any religious holidays of obligation within the first fifteen days of the semester.
3. Students and professors make alternative arrangements for the missed work.

Any questions or concerns may be addressed to the Provost or Chaplain of the College.

(Approved by the Faculty in October 2008.)