

## **RELIGIOUS LIFE AT BIRMINGHAM-SOUTHERN COLLEGE**

**Title:** Religious Life Policies and Code of Ethics

**Policy Abstract:** The mission of Religious Life is to encourage students of various religions and no religion to wrestle with questions of meaning, purpose, and vocation in a climate that is open and diverse. Religious Life supports a United Methodist campus ministry, coordinates other campus ministries, and maintains strong ties to the United Methodist Church. These policies allow Religious Life to fulfill this mission.

**Responsible Office:** Religious Life

**Official** Rev. Julie Holly, Chaplain

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**Applies to:** Students, Faculty, Staff, Campus Ministers, Student Religious Groups, Off-Campus Religious Groups, and Faith Representatives.

**Effective Date:** Approved by President's Council August 12, 2013

**Revision Dates:** October, 2008; Fall 2003;

## **INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

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, and 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 a 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.

## **PURPOSE**

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 President’s Council have established the following policies to protect the integrity of the institution and all persons involved. The following policies are meant to encourage the development of campus ministries at Birmingham-Southern College.

## **POLICIES FOR MINISTRY**

### **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 two character references and willing to submit to a background check.
7. invited and approved for ministry on the campus by the Chaplain.

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 continued sponsorship by the authorizing body.
3. obtain Chaplain's approval when hiring interns or other staff members.
4. assume responsibility for the actions of all off-campus guests invited by the campus minister and their adherence to the BSC Religious Life Code of Ethics.
5. uphold all policies of Birmingham-Southern with regards to professional conduct (HR), use of space (Facilities and Events), and the Provost's office.
6. 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. use of Religious Life spaces as available, including Yeilding Chapel, offices, and storage space (see below).
3. access to self-identified student demographics as it relates to their ministry.
4. access to public areas of campus with ministerial intent.

### **Off-campus religious groups**

Off-campus religious groups shall normally be

1. non-student religious groups with an authoritative body located off-campus. These include congregations, parachurch organizations, non-profits of religious motive, and any denominational authority not represented by a campus minister.
2. invited by an on-campus department, organization, or employee willing to accept responsibility for the invited group. Otherwise,
3. non-affiliated off-campus religious groups are able to request permission from the Chaplain to visit campus once per semester. These visits will be restricted to designated communal spaces in conjunction with the Office of Religious Life and other relevant departments.
4. expected to commit to BSC's Religious Life Code of Ethics (see below).

### **Student religious groups**

Student religious groups shall normally be

1. student-led religious groups approved by the Office of Student Development as a campus organization (see <http://www.bsc.edu/campus/orgs/forms.cfm>). Once recognized, student

religious groups are entitled to reserve space on campus, obtain a student organization account, request funding from the SGA, and sponsor campus events.

2. advised by at least one BSC Faculty or Staff.
3. able to request from the Chaplain permission for an off-campus sponsor to meet with them and work with the Office of Religious Life during group meetings.
4. led by officers and advisors who commit to 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. They uphold and maintain the integrity of individuals and the diversity and plurality of the many faith traditions represented at Birmingham-Southern College. It is understood that this code applies to the entire BSC community. By signing below you agree to uphold these principles as a “faith representative” of yourself and any affiliated organizations. Failure to do so may result in a review of privileges by the Office of Religious Life.

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 BSC 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 BSC 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, faith leaders, and employed representatives of religious organizations 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. Faith representatives 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. Our integrity depends on abiding by all policies set forth by Residence Life. Also, faith representatives 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 or 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 groups.
  - d. use “Office of Religious Life” or the name, initials, seal, or motto of Birmingham-Southern College with permission of the Chaplain.
4. **Promoting religious freedom.**
  - a. All religious groups and gatherings must be open to general participation by any interested student.
  - b. A student must be able to freely participate in or leave a religious group without being subject to harassment or procedures that compromise the student’s autonomy.
  - c. Faith representatives may not proselytize at BSC. Proselytizing diminishes the value of one’s own beliefs and stifles dissenting opinions. It is in direct conflict with an atmosphere of open exploration of what we believe and is a detriment to our community.

Sincere conversion should not be sought through deprecating other groups. Religious groups and faith representatives should share their faith with others in a manner that avoids harassing, demeaning, manipulating, or coercing individuals. This disregards 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 faith representatives find themselves in disagreement with the College administration, the Chaplain, or fellow groups/ministers, they should handle this disagreement as an internal matter. Should claims of conscience bring a group/minister to publicly disagreeing with the 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 of Student Development, Provost, or President.

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**Name of Organization**

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**Name, please print**

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**Signature**

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**Date**

## **POLICIES FOR FACILITIES**

### **Religious Life Offices**

The Religious Life Offices are located in the Norton Center, Room 120. Within are employee offices, space for student socialization, and a small kitchen. Use is given at the discretion of the Vice President of Administration and the Chaplain.

### **The United Methodist Center**

The United Methodist Center is located in the heart of Birmingham-Southern College's campus. It houses the Office of the Bishop, the Conference Staff, and two District Offices. While BSC is fortunate to have the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church located on campus, the Office of Religious Life has no authority over the use of the United Methodist Center. Any requests for more information can be directed to the Conference at (205) 226-7950.

### **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 80 seats, Shantz organ, Yamaha upright piano, A/V capabilities (tapes, CDs, DVDs, powerpoint).

The Chapel may be reserved through the Office of Religious Life (226-4760).

The following rules apply:

1. No wax candles may be used due to the risk of fire and damage to the building;
2. No decorations that may cause permanent damage.
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. Access to office areas must remain open at all times.
6. No food or drink may be served in the Chapel sanctuary.

By reserving the Chapel you or the organization are expected to return the Chapel to its previous state of cleanliness and set-up. Failure to comply may result in a cleaning fee assessed by the Office of Religious Life.

### **The Hanson Loft**

The following rules of use apply:

1. Use of the room is by reservation only through the Office of Religious Life. Students are expected to "sign" for responsibility to these policies.
2. No tacks, pins, nails, glue, or tape may be used on walls, floor, woodwork, counter-tops. Damage to the Hanson Loft may incur a fee for repair or cleaning.
3. No window or door coverings are permitted.
4. No furniture may be moved into or out of the room. If furniture is rearranged to accommodate your program, a chart on the back of the door shows you how to return the furniture to its appropriate arrangement.
5. Food may be served, but the reserving party must provide all paper goods including paper towels for clean-up and garbage bags. ALL trash and garbage must be removed after your event.
6. All countertops and surfaces where food or drink is served must be cleaned.
7. Any foodstuffs or beverages left in the refrigerator are understood to be common property.

8. Any items left in storage in the Hanson Loft are understood to be common property.
9. No candles are permitted except by special permission for religious observances.
10. Failure to comply with these policies (for students) may prevent reserving party from using facility in the future, or result in Social Council action.

## **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.

Students may 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.)

## **DEFINITIONS**

**Religious Life:** Office of the College consisting of a Chaplain/Director of Religious Life, Director of Church Relations, the Bishop-in-Residence and an office assistant. The office oversees the religious life at the College, plans and implements weekly and one time events for students, staff and faculty and provides direction to the campus ministers, student religious groups, off-campus religious groups.

**Campus Minister:** Representative from and ordained by a Religious Organization that meets the requirements of these policies to minister to students, staff, and faculty of the College. Campus ministers are understood to operate under the authority of the Chaplain, thus, are approved and vetted by the Office of Religious Life.

**Student Religious Groups:** Student-led religious groups approved by the Office of Student Development as a campus organization, compliant with the Religious Life Code of Ethics, and advised by BSC faculty or staff.

**Off-Campus Religious Groups:** Non-student religious groups with an authoritative body located off-campus. This designation includes denominational administrators, local congregations, parachurch organizations, and nonprofits of religious motivation.

**Faith Representative:** Representative of a religious group that knowingly interacts with faculty, staff, or students with intent to minister to or interact with persons on the campus. Can be a campus minister, clergy, student, staff, faculty, or other member or employee of an authoritative body not affiliated with BSC.

**Religious Organization:** a faith based group that has its own system of organization and an authoritative body

**REFERENCE:**

**“An Education Covenant of Partnership”** Passed by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, May 2000.