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Community Covenant

Preface

Wheaton College is an institution of higher learning, a rigorous academic community that takes seriously the life of the mind. But this description does not exhaust the College's understanding of itself. Wheaton College is also a largely residential community made up of Christians who, according to the College motto, are dedicated to the service of "Christ and His Kingdom."

These features in combination mean that Wheaton College is a complex Christian community of living, learning, and serving that cannot be reduced to a simple model. For example, while the College is not a church, it is yet a community of Christians who seek to live according to biblical standards laid down by Jesus Christ for his body, the church. Or again, while the College is not a religious order, it yet demonstrates some features that are similar to religious orders, communities wherein, for the sake of fulfilling the community's purposes, its members voluntarily enter into a social compact. At Wheaton we call this social compact our community covenant.

For Wheaton's community covenant to serve its stated purpose, it is crucial that each member of the College family understand it clearly and embrace it sincerely. In joining this covenant we are, before the Lord, joining in a compact with other members of the Wheaton College community. If we do not wish to live under the provisions of this compact, we should not agree to it. But if we do agree to it, it should be with the full intention of living with integrity under its provisions.

Our Community Covenant

The goal of campus life at Wheaton College is to live, work, serve, and worship together as an educational community centered around the Lord Jesus Christ. Our mission as an academic community is not merely the transmission of information; it is the development of whole persons who will build the church and benefit society worldwide "For Christ and His Kingdom." Along with the privileges and blessings of membership in such a community come responsibilities. The members of the Wheaton College campus community take these responsibilities seriously.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

— 2 Timothy 3:16

The biblical foundation of Christian community is expressed in Jesus' two great commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," and, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-40). Jesus himself perfectly demonstrated the pattern: love for God, acted out in love for others, in obedience to God's Word. Acknowledging our dependence on the power and grace of God, the members of the Wheaton College campus community humbly covenant to live according to this ideal.

The purposes of this community covenant are as follows:

- to cultivate a campus atmosphere that encourages spiritual, moral and intellectual growth.
- to integrate our lives around Christian principles and devotion to Jesus Christ.
- to remove whatever may hinder us from our calling as a Christ-centered academic community.
- to encourage one another to see that living for Christ involves dependence on God's Spirit and obedience to his Word, rather than a passive acceptance of prevailing practices.

HEARD AT WHEATON

I don't think of our community covenant as a list of rules. It is a statement of holy obligations that we undertake as forgiven sinners, because they are true to the character of our Savior. We are called to humility, justice, truth, and purity because these are the perfections of our Savior himself, as he has demonstrated in giving us salvation. And so, we freely and joyfully choose to live in the light of his holiness and hold each other accountable.

—President Philip Ryken

Affirming Biblical Standards

We desire to build this covenant on basic biblical standards for godly Christian character and behavior. We understand that our calling includes the following:

- The call to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ over all of life and thought. This involves a wholehearted obedience to Jesus and careful stewardship in all dimensions of life: our time, our possessions, our God-given capacities, our opportunities (Deut. 6:5-6; 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 1:18; 3:17);
- The call to love God with our whole being, including our minds, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Christ-like love should be the motive in all decisions, actions, and relationships (Matt. 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10; 1 John 4:7-12);
- The call to pursue holiness in every aspect of our thought and behavior (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:7; Heb. 12:14; 1 Pet. 1:15-16);
- The call to exercise our Christian freedom responsibly within the framework of God's Word, humbly submitting ourselves to one another (1 Pet. 5:5; Eph. 5:21) with loving regard for the needs of others (Phil. 2:3-11; Rom. 14:1-23; 1 Thess. 4:9);
- The call to treat our own bodies, and those of others, with the honor due the very temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17-20);
- The call to participate in the worship and activities of the local church, which forms the basic biblically-mandated context for Christian living (Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:25; 1 Tim. 3:14-15).

Living the Christian Life

We believe these biblical standards will show themselves in a distinctly Christian way of life, an approach to living we expect of ourselves and of one another. This lifestyle involves practicing those attitudes and actions the Bible portrays as virtues and avoiding those the Bible portrays as sinful.

According to the Scriptures, followers of Jesus Christ will:

- show evidence of the Holy Spirit who lives within them, such as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23);
- "put on" compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and supremely, love (Col. 3:12-14);
- seek righteousness, mercy and justice, particularly for the helpless and oppressed (Prov. 21:3; 31:8-9; Micah 6:8; Matt. 23:23; Gal. 6:10);
- love and side with what is good in God's eyes, and abhor what is evil in God's eyes (Amos 5:15; Rom. 12:9, 16:19);
- uphold the God-given worth of human beings, from conception to death, as the unique image-bearers of God (Gen. 1:27; Psalm 8:3-8; 139:13-16);
- pursue unity and embrace ethnic diversity as part of God's design for humanity and practice racial reconciliation as one of his redemptive purposes in Christ (Isa. 56:6-7; John 17:20-23; Acts 17:26; Eph. 2:11-18; Col. 3:11; Rev. 7:9-10);
- uphold chastity among the unmarried (1 Cor. 6:18) and the sanctity of marriage between a man and woman (Heb. 13:4);
- be people of integrity whose word can be fully trusted (Psalm 15:4; Matt. 5:33-37);
- give faithful witness to the Gospel (Acts 1:8; 1 Pet. 3:15), practice good works toward all (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:10; Heb. 10:24; 1 Pet. 2:11), and live lives of prayer and thanksgiving (1 Thess. 5:17-18; James 5:16; Titus 2:7-8).

By contrast, Scripture condemns the following:

- pride, dishonesty (such as stealing and lying, of which plagiarism is one form), injustice, prejudice, immodesty in dress or behavior, slander, gossip, vulgar or obscene language, blasphemy, greed and materialism (which may manifest themselves in gambling), covetousness, the taking of innocent life, and illegal activities (Prov. 16:18; 1 Cor. 6:10; Exod. 20:7; Rom. 13:9; Col. 3:8-9; James 2:1-13; Gal. 3:26-29; Rom. 13:1-2; 1 Tim. 2:8-10; Heb. 13:5-6);
- hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and legalism, understood as the imposition of extra-biblical standards of godliness by one person or group upon another (Acts 15:5-11; Matt. 16:6; 23:13-36);

sinful attitudes and behaviors such as "impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like" (Gal. 5:19-21); sexual immorality, such as the use of pornography (Matt. 5:27-28), pre-marital sex, adultery, homosexual behavior and all other sexual relations outside the bounds of marriage between a man and woman (Rom. 1:21-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31).

Exercising Responsible Freedom

Beyond these explicit biblical issues, the Wheaton College community seeks to foster the practice of responsible Christian freedom (Gal. 5:13-14; 1 Pet. 2:16-17). This requires a wise stewardship of mind, body, time, abilities and resources on the part of every member of the community. Responsible freedom also requires thoughtful, biblically-guided choices in matters of behavior, entertainment, interpersonal relationships, and observance of the Lord's Day.

"You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."
— I Corinthians 6:20

Of particular concern in a collegiate environment are those issues related to alcohol, illegal drugs, and tobacco. While the use of illegal drugs or the abuse of legal drugs is by definition illicit, and the use of tobacco in any form has been shown to be injurious to health, the situation regarding beverage alcohol is more complex. The Bible requires moderation in the use of alcohol, not abstinence. Yet the fact that alcohol is addictive to many, coupled with the biblical warnings against its dangers, also suggests the need for caution. The abuse of alcohol constitutes by far our society's greatest substance abuse problem, not to mention the fact that many Christians avoid it as a matter of conscience. Thus the question of alcohol consumption represents a prime opportunity for Christians to exercise their freedom responsibly, carefully, and in Christ-like love. The Wheaton College community also encourages responsible freedom in matters of entertainment, including the places where members of the College community may seek it, such as television, movies, video, theater, concerts, dances and the Internet. The College assumes its members will be guided in their entertainment choices by the godly wisdom of Philippians 4:8: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things."

Embracing College Standards

To foster the kind of campus atmosphere most conducive to becoming the Christian community of living, learning, and serving that Wheaton College aspires to be, the College has adopted the following institutional standards. These standards embody such foundational principles as self-control, avoidance of harmful practices, the responsible use of freedom, sensitivity to the heritage and practices of other Christians, and honoring the name of Jesus Christ in all we do.

Wheaton College and all Wheaton College-related functions will be alcohol-free and tobacco-free. This means that the possession or consumption of alcohol or the use of tobacco in any form will be prohibited in, on, or around all campus properties, owned or leased. The same prohibition applies to all Wheaton College vehicles, whether on or off campus, and to all Wheaton College events or programs, wherever they may be held.

While enrolled in Wheaton College, undergraduate members of the community will refrain from the consumption of alcohol or the use of tobacco in all settings.

Other adult members of the College community will use careful and loving discretion in any use of alcohol. They will avoid the serving or consumption of alcohol in any situation in which undergraduate members of the Wheaton College family are or are likely to be present.

On-campus dances will take place only with official College sponsorship. All members of the Wheaton College community will take care to avoid any entertainment or behavior, on or off campus, which may be immodest, sinfully erotic, or harmfully violent (Eph. 4:1-2, 17-24; 1 Tim. 5:1-2; Gal. 5:22-23).

Conclusion

We, the Wheaton College community, desire to be a covenant community of Christians marked by integrity, responsible freedom, and dynamic, Christ-like love, a place where the name of Jesus Christ is honored in all we do. This requires that each of us keeps his or her word by taking the commitment to this covenant seriously as covenant keepers, whatever pressures we may face to do otherwise.

The issue of keeping one's word is for a Christian an important one. Being faithful to one's word is a matter of simple integrity and godliness. "Lord, who may live on your holy hill?" asks the Psalmist. "He who keeps his oath, even when it hurts" (15:4), comes the reply. Christian integrity dictates that if we have voluntarily placed ourselves under Wheaton's community covenant, we must make every effort to fulfill our commitment by living accordingly.

Keeping our covenant may also on occasion require that we take steps to hold one another accountable, confronting one another in love as we work together to live in faithfulness both to God's Word and to our own word. Such loving acts of confrontation are at times difficult, but when performed in the right spirit (Gal. 6:1), they serve to build godly character for both the individuals involved and the community as a whole (Matt. 18:15-17). Only in this way, as we are willing to speak the truth in love, will we "grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, . . . And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

— Colossians 3:16-17

Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version.

Wheaton College intends for the text and spirit of its Community Covenant to also serve as a resource for other institutions. As such, the Community Covenant may be used, adapted, or reproduced entirely or in part. In so doing, please cite Wheaton College as the author of the original document.