

Becoming Whole and Holy Persons: Covenant for Life Together at Bethel

Introduction

Bethel University is an educational community committed to integrating evangelical Christian faith with learning and life. As people created in the image of the covenant-making God, we covenant together to discover the mind of Christ and to become like Christ. We pursue this mission as people called by Jesus to live holy lives according to the values, expectations, and goals of the kingdom of God. A crucial part of our mission is to develop whole and holy persons who will go into the world to serve others.

To be whole and holy means to be dedicated to God with purity of thought and action. It means that we are to serve God using the gifts and abilities we have been given. Our community has a special calling to discover, teach, learn, and live what is true. We strive to understand the world in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This gives us a distinctive worldview, educational mission, and calling.

Our calling includes a commitment to nurture one another. We strive to elevate kingdom values over personal agendas. We attempt to measure every decision and priority in terms of our loving submission to the lordship of Christ and our commitment to one another. Christ's power within us and a clear sense of our calling give us a joyful freedom to do God's will.

Jesus taught us that right motives and loving relationships are at the core of whole and holy living. His two greatest commands are to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind and to love our neighbors as ourselves.¹ These commands connect serving God with serving others. In grace, Scripture also gives us specific rules to guide us in living. Jesus taught that keeping these rules is an expression of love for God.² The Bible condemns legalistic rule-keeping. It emphasizes loving relationships and pure motives in living out these rules.³

Living a Biblical Lifestyle

The Bible frequently speaks about a holy lifestyle. Such passages are found throughout the Old and New Testaments.⁴ **The Bible describes character qualities and actions that should be present in the lives of believers.** These include prayer, kindness, humility, compassion, forgiveness, hospitality, personal integrity, generosity to the poor, care for the oppressed, study of God's Word, accountability to one another, sharing our faith with others, recognition of the rights of others, commitment to justice, regular gathering for worship, and living in harmony.

The Bible also identifies character qualities and actions that should not be present in the lives of believers. For example: destructive anger, malice, rage, sexual immorality, impurity, adultery, evil desires, greed, idolatry, slander, profanity, lying, homosexual behavior, drunkenness, thievery, and dishonesty.⁵

Special Expectations for the Bethel Community

Because of Bethel's commitment to Christ, our unique calling as an educational community, and our understanding of what it means to live in today's world, we want to state clearly some of Bethel's rules and expectations. These are based on:

- our understanding of the Bible and its authority for our faith and life;
- our desire to promote wellness and health in all areas: social, emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual;
- our theological and cultural heritage;
- our understanding of our mission and calling.

We recognize that not all devout Christians share these rules and expectations. However, certain issues are important for our educational mission and our life together at Bethel. They are designed to facilitate our growth, development, and learning as a community.

We view learning and the pursuit of truth as a special calling.

- We commit ourselves to integrity, excellence, consideration of different points of view, and collegiality in all of our academic work.
- We will not tolerate plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty.⁶

We believe that life is sacred and people have worth because they are created in God's image.⁷

- We will value human life in all its diversity and fullness, recognizing that women and men of all races, ages, and ability levels reflect the creative genius of our Maker.
- We view racism and sexism as sinful and reflective of some of the most harmful aspects of our culture. We will abstain from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, age, and disability. We will also abstain from gossip, deliberate divisiveness, and malicious humor.

We believe that our relationships should reflect our connection in the body of Christ.⁸

- We affirm mutual respect and promise keeping in relationships among students, colleagues, teachers and learners, spouses, and friends.
- We grieve the hurt and destructiveness of broken relationships, especially those involving divorce and abuse. We will strive to be a community where healing occurs.

We believe our minds and bodies should be used in God-honoring ways.⁹

- We will promote the health of our bodies, minds, and emotions.
- We will abstain from illicit or nonmedical use of drugs, narcotics, and other substances. We will also abstain from use or possession of tobacco in any form.

We view sexuality as one of God's good gifts.¹⁰

- We believe that sexual intercourse and other forms of intensely interpersonal sexual activity are reserved for monogamous, heterosexual marriage. We recognize that sexual purity involves right motives as well as right behaviors.
- We prohibit the possession and use of pornographic material. In addition we condemn sexually exploitive or abusive behavior and sexual harassment in any form.

We value the wise stewardship of resources.¹¹

- We believe all human and natural resources are a trust from God. We value work, creative expression, and wise use of time, ability, and money. We believe in wise use of natural resources. We will use them to do God's work and to benefit God's creation.
- We prohibit gambling and vandalism. In addition, we reject materialism and harmful exploitation of natural resources.

We believe that maturity calls for us to exercise discretion in our behaviors.

- We believe that God is honored by careful thinking and joyful use of our creativity and imagination. While the media and the arts can be valuable forms of recreation, our commitment to learning calls us to think critically about them and to see them as empowering and liberating ways to understand truth and beauty.
- We believe that certain forms of leisure, entertainment, and recreation are not congruent with holy living. We will make choices that are consistent with our pursuit of holiness in activities such as theatre, dance, and music, or in the use of media and technology such as film, television, radio, and computers.

At times we will need to follow the biblical mandate to sacrifice our individual liberty for the good of the community.¹² When differences arise, we will choose the course that demands greater personal restraint and self-discipline. We will strive to resolve those differences in a gracious and just manner.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT COMMUNITY LIFE

Community life at Bethel should be marked by mutual encouragement, sensitivity, and consideration for others. This is particularly important when dealing with our differences. One of the special values of this community is the opportunity to learn from one another including those within other Christian faith traditions. We celebrate our diversity as well as what we hold in common.

Within committed Christian communities there are diverse views regarding the use of alcohol. Some choose a testimony of abstinence for a variety of legitimate and

honorable reasons while others believe they can use alcohol occasionally and moderately without harm to body, spirit, or relationships with others. As a community that honors Holy Spirit-led diversity among Christians, Bethel University employees and students in the Seminary, Graduate School, and College of Adult & Professional Studies are not prohibited from using alcohol in moderation when away from campus and not engaged in official Bethel University activities. Further, employees are expected not to drink alcohol in the presence of Bethel students. Because of the special community nature of the College of Arts & Sciences and the ages of the majority of its students, students in the College of Arts & Sciences will abstain from the use or possession of alcoholic beverages during the school year or while participating in any Bethel-sponsored activity.¹³

Living out the call to whole and holy living is challenging. No one does it perfectly. Community members who struggle to follow Bethel's lifestyle expectations and who would like help in living within them are encouraged to talk with appropriate Bethel personnel to seek help in changing.¹⁴

As a community we recognize that worship, fellowship, spiritual nurture, and Christian service are all essential to our growth in holiness. As members of the Bethel community we are expected to participate in these types of activities regularly. Chapel stands out among these opportunities because it is a unifying spiritual experience for our Christian community. All students, faculty members, and administrative leaders are expected to attend chapel regularly. Chapel is a learning experience that is enriched by the diversity of background and worship styles within the community.

As we join the Bethel community we accept these responsibilities and conditions of membership. We agree to live according to this document and other stated expectations as they are applied to us in the student and employee handbooks. If we find ourselves unable to honor these commitments, withdrawal may be in order. We recognize that we have an obligation to hold each other accountable to biblical standards and to the commitments we have made. Appropriate action will be taken to teach, influence, discipline, or even dismiss those who disregard these community expectations. We will strive to have all disciplinary procedures characterized by Christian love and a redemptive spirit.

As we celebrate this covenant calling to whole and holy living, we encourage and challenge each other with these three verses.¹⁵

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Because of its crucial role in influencing the ethos of the school, this statement of expectations is subject to change only by action of the Board of Trustees. The board holds these standards to be binding for all who voluntarily choose to become a part of the Bethel community.

¹ Matthew 22:37-40

² John 14:15, 21

³ Micah 6:8; Matthew 23:23-24

⁴ Examples of such passages are: Exodus 20; Proverbs 6:16-19; Matthew 5-7; Galatians 5:13-25; Ephesians 4:22-5:21; Colossians 3:1-17

⁵ Colossians 3:5-8; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Employees will not practice, advocate, or affirm these and other biblically proscribed behaviors.

⁶ Exodus 20:15; Romans 13:9; 1 Corinthians 13:5-6; 1 Peter 1:22

⁷ Genesis 1:27; Ephesians 4:1-7, 15-16; James 2:1-13

⁸ Romans 12:3-21; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4

⁹ Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:14-15; 1 Timothy 4:8

¹⁰ Genesis 1:27-28, 2:24-25; Exodus 20:14; Song of Songs; Matthew 5:27-30; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, 7:3-5

¹¹ Genesis 1:28-31

¹² Romans 14:1-23; 1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:23-24

¹³ Ephesians 5:18

¹⁴ See the College Student Handbook for information on Bethel's Non-Disciplinary Policy. College students may find the staff in the Office of Student Life, the Office of Campus Ministries, and the Counseling Center to be particularly helpful. Seminary students may find help in the Office of Student Life. In addition, many faculty are willing and able to assist. Employees may find help from peers, the Office of Human Resources, and administrative staff.

¹⁵ Colossians 3:15-17