

Moral Compass Summons

With a troubling loss of faith in institutions, a growing lack of confidence in leaders, and increasing polarization in our society, the CCCU reaffirms the distinctive mission of Christian colleges and universities to care deeply about institutions, leaders, and society at large through the lens of faith in an unfailing and trustworthy God. The challenges and crises in moral leadership have not suddenly or recently surfaced. They have not been generated by a single event, decision, or cause. They emerge out of destructive flaws in character that fester, expand, and are enabled when people in a society, especially its leaders, lack a moral compass. A moral compass is an internalized set of values that guide a person in judging between right and wrong and acting accordingly. Possession of a moral compass is crucial for the development of persons and the stability of society. It is a foundation for virtuous leadership, sound moral decision making, living a good life, and working for the common good. The CCCU presents a call and issues a summons to our constituents and colleagues, more specifically to our presidents, to affirm the priority of moral education and to be intentional about developing students with a moral compass.

Throughout the history of the church, Christians, in commending the way of Jesus, have supported ministries of education believing that learning is appointed and conserved by God as essential to the fulfillment of human destiny. A Christian education has the dual focus of forming students to be faithful citizens of a Kingdom whose builder and maker is God, while also teaching them to be constructive and responsible members of the communities where they live and work. Education has the power to civilize and bring people to an aspirational and advanced stage of social and personal development. It promotes critical thinking and intellectual examination by championing the life of the mind. It seeks objective knowledge which is essential in the quest for truth. An education that promotes faith and learning is a bulwark against baseless assertions, dark fantasies unsubstantiated by evidence, and destructive falsehoods that imperil our safety and stability. The temptation to fall from uncertain truth to certain untruth is a constant in human experience. Education is an indispensable means for resisting this temptation.

Christian colleges and universities are uniquely suited to address the crisis of moral leadership in our society and the decline of social capital. They possess a qualitative advantage in pursuing their mission of educating students. CCCU schools are communities of moral development. Learning is more than gathering facts, amassing information, and cultivating marketable skills. Our campuses are not merely settings or stages for our work. They are places that shape our lives and that are deliberate about the formation of character. Our mission statements, advertising materials, and campus practices reflect this commitment. This is our spiritual heritage that demands careful and consistent stewardship. In a past era when there seemed to exist a widespread consensus on a shared moral infrastructure and common ethical standards, our work was less complicated. The surrounding culture was more accepting and supportive of our values. We can no longer assume or take this for granted.

The mission of Christian higher education is transformational, and not merely transactional, instrumental, or utilitarian. The most formative years for humans are early

childhood, but another fruitful period of development is young adulthood when we have an unparalleled opportunity to impact our students' lives forever. Studying and graduating from a CCCU college or university should be a life-changing experience. Christian formation does not occur by the osmosis of values or the transpiration of truth from the surrounding campus ethos. We must be intentional in our plans for the moral formation of our students by cultivating effective habits and modeling time-tested practices that build character. What we teach is a lived reality. Through our teaching, learning, and life together, we bear witness to the living example of the Christ's character and teaching in the specific contexts and circumstances of life.

With the conviction of truth built upon faith and knowledge, our institutions of learning make it a priority to develop students into virtuous people. Christian educators find themselves in a larger academic world where truth is often dismissed as a subject of moral knowledge and where our voices on these matters are not as likely to be heard. Well ensconced within a secular frame of reference, many are skeptical about the reasonableness or possibility of making moral claims. "You have your truth and I have mine," is a widely accepted maxim. The prevailing attitude is that no one has the right to impose a view or confront others with moral claims. In our time, people pursue the good as they define and seek it, if it seems right to them and doesn't hurt anyone else.

The Bible, the source of our faith, authority, and practice, is central to the pursuit and process of developing the moral compass. Holy Scripture reveals the character, beauty, and reality of God, who is the main subject of the Bible. It also tells the story of God's people, set apart with a special calling to be salt and light in the world. Their mission is to bear witness to the truth, proclaim the Gospel, and embody God's transforming love and grace in Christ. In so doing, they are called to live virtuous lives reflecting this truth and reality.

The purpose of developing a moral compass is to be a good person who is grounded in the grace and love of God. The orientation of the moral compass is the love of God, which is the proper object and ordering of our loves, and it finds expression in loving our neighbor. This love seeks the well-being of others and compels us to value and serve them. It fosters humility, has a penchant for listening, and encourages an openness to learning. Through the love of God, the good person seeks the common good in his or her respective areas of life and spheres of influence. Christians understand the promotion of human flourishing from the perspective of the Shalom of God or the manifestation of the reality of the Kingdom of God among us.

In issuing this summons to the member schools of CCCU, we have an opportunity to work as partners and collaborators in developing a moral compass in our students and reaffirming the importance of moral education in our academic communities. We call upon our members to inventory the kinds of initiatives on your campuses and share how you are developing the moral compass in your students. These may include specific courses of study, learning outcomes in the curriculum, internships and mentoring programs, pedagogical approaches, and high-impact learning experiences. The accounts may also highlight formative practices like Bible study, prayer, worship, spiritual direction, devotional reading, service, and others. In consultation with colleagues on campus, each president may identify an aspect of their moral compass work that is promising or share best practices that may be useful for other schools

to consider. The goal is for CCCU to compile this information in a presentation at the CCCU International Forum in Dallas, February 10 – 13, 2022.

Our role as Christian educators is to capacitate habits of inquiry, physical wellness, aesthetic sensibility, spiritual vitality, and ethical responsibility. Our noble cause requires a pedagogy of patience and persuasion, and the deliberate use of time-tested and honored traditions that are formative. Developing a moral compass in our students is central to our purpose as faith-based institutions of higher education. As learning organizations, we can assist each other in seeking a more excellent way as we strive to fulfill our missions of preparing students for purposeful lives and meaningful service in the world.

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