

COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

# ADVANCE

SPRING 2024

MAGAZINE

## CHRIST ABOVE THE CRISIS

---

### CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN A DIVISIVE ELECTION YEAR

Recovering the  
Transcendent Values  
of the Church During  
Tumultuous Times  
p. 18

Nothing New Under  
the Sun  
p. 26

Gen Z and the Politics  
of the Future  
p. 30

THE LEADING VOICE OF CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

# **CCC**CU Upcoming Events

2024



**New Presidents Institute**  
 Carlsbad, California | June 24 - 28



**Legal & Public Policy Conference**  
 West Palm Beach, Florida | September 16 - 18



2025  
**Presidents Conference**  
 Washington, D.C. | January 29 - 31



**Multi-Academic Conferences I & II**  
 Atlanta, Georgia | February 24 - 28



2026



**International Forum & Celebration of CCCU's 50th Anniversary**  
 Dallas, Texas | January 29 - February 1

FROM THE PRESIDENT | **SHIRLEY V. HOOGSTRA, J.D.**

## Christian Colleges Offer a Remedy for Polarization



**SHIRLEY V. HOOGSTRA**  
 President of CCCU



**JOSHUA KAPUSINSKI**  
 Capital Fellow

*This column was written by Capital Fellow Joshua Kapusinski, a graduate of Grove City College, at the request of President Shirley Hoogstra as part of his fellowship opportunity at the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities.*

Our nation faces a time of hyperpolarization. Whatever side of the political aisle you fall on, it seems that one common ground we all share is the lack of common ground at all. Even worse, any solution always seems out of reach. In 1976, Gerald Ford suggested the opposite during his commencement address at Warner Pacific College in Portland, Oregon. During the address, he spoke about what he learned during his time in office, "As president, I'm constantly aware that the ultimate authority of our Republic is not in the White House; it is in the people."

What a transformational understanding of civic life this is for those who embrace it. Each of us can make a difference along the path that God has laid before our feet, even if the fruits of our labor might be invisible for some time. Rather than feel discouraged by the turmoil around us, we can boldly show the world another way to engage these conversations by "speaking the truth in love" as Paul says in Ephesians 4:15.

Civil discourse during an election year is our theme for the spring issue of ADVANCE, and given the year ahead, no topic could be more timely. No institution in our nation is free from polarization, which is why we lead with excellence and embrace challenging conversations with integrity. In Romans 12, Paul encourages us to "Live in harmony with one another" and "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." No matter who sits in the White House, Jesus Christ still sits on the throne. Following his example, we strive to navigate politics while loving our neighbor — and, in fact, motivated by that love. We hold fast to our faith. In his 1976 commencement address, Ford said something similar, "Our national life has reached a point where we must recover transcendent qualities of spirituality and morality." This

rings just as true today as it did nearly 50 years ago. Rather than settle for an amorphous sense of spirituality, we proclaim the trinitarian God who makes himself known to us by his Word. Rather than settle for a relative morality, we proclaim the law of love best embodied by Christ.

**"Our call to civil discourse is not a way of casting aside our convictions, but rather bringing to the world a faith that embodies God's love, wisdom, and truth."  
 — Joshua Kapusinski**

Christian higher education holds the key to recovering these vital spiritual and moral qualities. Your commitment to educating the whole person means a college education does far more than improve the economic mobility of a student. It also fosters the development of their souls. No matter where your graduates go after they pass through your doors, they carry the flame to light a better world. Our call to civil discourse is not a way of casting aside our convictions, but rather bringing to the world a faith that embodies God's love, wisdom, and truth.

You are sowing the seeds of a new generation. They live on your campuses now, but soon they will reveal themselves in the public square. What a great opportunity for us to be salt and light in a world that is hungry for peacemakers. The CCCU is excited to continue working alongside you, shaping more peacemakers for the good of our world and the glory of our God. 🙏



**4**  
FROM THE CHIEF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
OFFICER

**Dr. Amanda Staggenborg**

**6**  
AROUND THE COUNCIL  
News from the CCCU

**10**  
ON SCHOLARSHIP  
Stanley P. Rosenberg

**12**  
ADVOCACY AS A  
WITNESS FOR CHRIST  
(2014 - 2024)

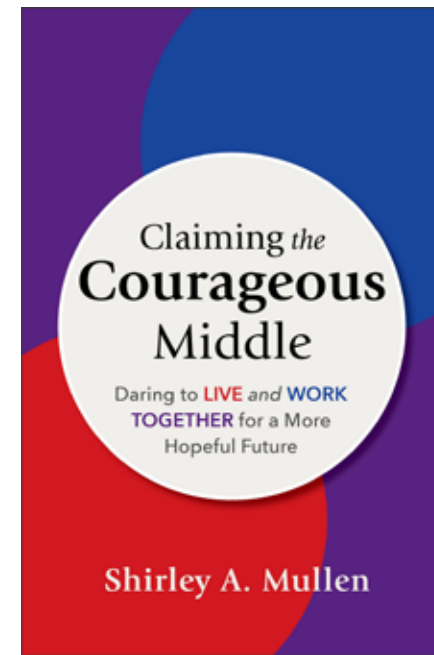
**52**  
SPONSORED  
ARTICLE: CHRISTIAN  
LEADERS NEED A NEW  
STANDARD OF CARE  
Michael Martin

**18**

## RECOVERING THE TRANSCENDENT VALUES OF THE CHURCH DURING TUMULTUOUS TIMES

How President Ford's historic commencement speech at Warner Pacific University is still relevant for Christian colleges and universities today.

**Jennifer Boehmer,  
Trisha Posey, Tyler Castle, and  
Keith Beutler**



**36**

## STEWARDING OUR CALL TO THE MIDDLE SPACE

**Jonathan Schimpf and  
Shirley Mullen**

Shirley A. Mullen

**THE COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES (CCCU)** is a higher education association of more than 180 Christian institutions around the world. Since 1976, the CCCU has served as the leading national voice of Christian higher education. With campuses across the globe, including more than 150 in the U.S. and Canada and more than 30 from an additional 19 countries, CCCU institutions are accredited, comprehensive colleges and universities whose missions are Christ-centered and rooted in the historic Christian faith.

**THE MISSION OF THE CCCU** is to advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education throughout the world.

### DISTRIBUTION

*Advance* is published each year in the fall and spring and is mailed to members, affiliates, and friends of the CCCU. It is also available online at [www.cccu.org/magazine](http://www.cccu.org/magazine). Direct questions and letters to the editor to [editor@cccu.org](mailto:editor@cccu.org).

### ADVERTISING

*Advance* accepts advertising from organizations that serve the students, faculty, or administration of our campuses. For more information and/or to receive a CCCU Media Kit, please email [advertising@cccu.org](mailto:advertising@cccu.org).

### PEOPLE

**Shirley V. Hoogstra, J.D.**  
President

**Amanda Staggenborg, Ed.D.**  
Chief Communications Officer

**Jacqueline Isaacs, M.B.A.**  
Guest Editor, *Advance*

**Bellwether Communications**  
Content Editing

**Bridge & Bolster LLC**  
Graphic Design

**Alan Haven**  
Senior Director of Marketing

**Kalli Mago**  
Communications Coordinator

Stay connected with the CCCU on X, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube.



**26**

## NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

A brief history of presidential elections and American resilience.

**Kermit Roosevelt III**

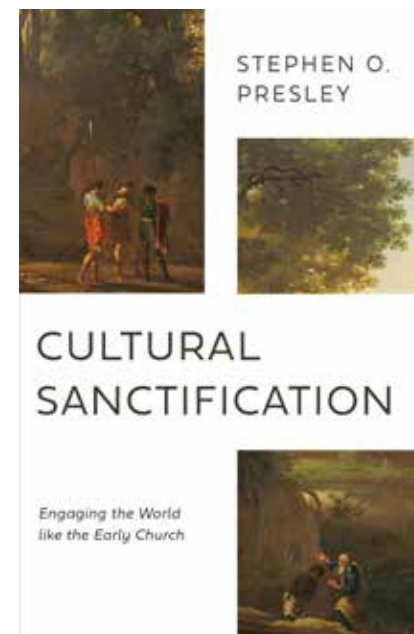


**42**

## RESISTING REDUCTIONISM IN A FRAGMENTED AGE

Weighing the best ways to pursue more holistic flourishing for faculty and students.

**Matthew Kaemingk, Katie Kresser, Justin Ariel Bailey, and David Smith**



**48**

## CULTURAL SANCTIFICATION AND CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

**Nathan A. Finn**



**30**

## GEN Z AND THE POLITICS OF THE FUTURE

A conversation about how Gen Z could change the future of civic discourse.

**Karah Sprouse, Kimberly McCall, and Madison Schomer**



# Meeting the Need for Faith in Challenging Political Times



As the election season rapidly approaches, conflicting emotions surround upcoming political conversations, both publicly and privately, and the cultural and social implications of them. As the political temperature increases, we at the CCCU encourage you to lean into challenging conversations with faith and purposeful unity. Inspiring and engaging in pluralism is the goal of a civilized society, both in and outside of higher education. The CCCU regularly advocates for the commitment to pluralism, the idea that those with varying opinions can respect each other and live together in a just society, as a faithful guide to diverse discussions and viewpoints.

While we may not agree on policy outcomes, we agree on common elements that call us to this conversation. As Gordon T. Smith states in *Courage and Calling*, “We are called to live in submission within Christian community. We cannot effectively function within an organization if we do not acknowledge and live out the reality that someone has to have authority and will probably make decisions we will not always agree with.” Smith also suggests that Christian submission and human compliance are quite different, with “prompts of the Holy Spirit” in one hand and “the voice of human authorities” in the other.

We agree that grace should always lead a discussion, with respect for an opposing viewpoint preventing disagreement from casting a dark cloud that obscures our ability to listen. We agree that our faithful roots lay a foundation for institutional mission, highlighting those who serve each generation with integrity. In 1976, the same year that the CCCU was founded, President Gerald Ford visited Warner Pacific College, now Warner Pacific University. During challenging political times, he delivered the commencement address, stating that we have no less a need for faith than “pioneers in the American wilderness, American colonists who challenged a powerful empire and fathers who found no atheists in their foxholes.” The need for faith is always present.

Throughout this issue, you’ll see that civility is not only possible, but realistically achievable. We are reminded of President Ford’s words at WPU to encourage “moral and spiritual growth” during divisive times. Professor Kermit Roosevelt offers historical context, reassuring us that this time in political history is not necessarily unique. He reminds us that previous elections, such as those in the 1800s, were challenging. He writes that, “In both 1800 and 1876, as elections came down to the wire, states mobilized their militias in anticipation

of violence. In 1800, state legislatures took the choice of electors away from the people — they replaced the popular vote with selection by state legislatures in Georgia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New Hampshire. And in 1860, eleven states seceded rather than accept Abraham Lincoln as their leader.”

*We have been through challenging times and we will again. But our faithful devotion is unwavering. We know to turn to Jesus and the Lord for all of our strength and true guidance.*

Mark Twain once wrote that “history doesn’t repeat itself but it often rhymes.” This may be frightening or exciting depending on the context. But history can be a comfort as well, knowing that what we are experiencing in this modern political and cultural climate is not unique to history. We have been through challenging times and we will again. But our faithful devotion is unwavering. We know to turn to Jesus and the Lord for all of our strength and true guidance. “Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14). As Christian leaders, we not only are rooted in faith but serve as pillars of guidance to the next generation at CCCU campuses. President Ford emphasized that “each generation brings a new spirit of competition, new reservoirs of enthusiasm, new responsiveness to the humanitarian needs of others, and regenerated pride in personal independence.” The words of nearly 50 years ago ring true today, just as they always have.

Christians have found faith, not only in spiritual guidance, but in humanity. The core of a democratic society is the celebration of valuable differences of opinion. As you read this issue, I hope it brings inspiration and hope to all on your campus as we lean into a new conversation. 🙏

**DR. AMANDA STAGGENBORG** is the chief communications officer for the CCCU.



## KEEP UP WITH YOUR CONTENT NEEDS

We work with thought leaders to manage and create content so you can meet your goals. Do you need that kind of support? Let’s get started!



### OUR SERVICES

#### CONTENT STRATEGY

Our team can work with you to develop a complete content strategy or build out specific campaigns.

#### CONTENT MANAGEMENT

Our team can manage some or all of your content, from public relations campaigns to blog articles and newsletters.

#### WRITING & EDITING

Our team can write and edit it all, from web copy to op-ed articles, ebooks to full-length manuscripts, and more!

### OUR MISSION

When we help an individual or an organization position themselves as a thought leader in their space with the right content, their business grows, and their mission succeeds.



Learn more at:  
[www.bellwethercomms.com](http://www.bellwethercomms.com)



See our current rates at:  
[/get-support](https://t.me/get-support)



Contact us at:  
[hello@bellwethercomms.com](mailto:hello@bellwethercomms.com)



## Around *the* Council

### HUNTER V. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Hunter v. U.S. Department of Education lawsuit sought to strip longstanding religious protections from Title IX. Students from Christian colleges and universities filed suit in March 2021, claiming the Department of Education propagated discrimination at those institutions by allowing colleges to claim the Title IX religious exemption. The CCCU filed a motion to dismiss the suit, which was granted on January 13, 2023. The plaintiffs aimed to prevent students from being able to take federal financial aid to the school of their choice, and we are grateful to the court for protecting student choice and religious liberty. However, the plaintiffs appealed the decision in March 2023, and the CCCU responded with our own brief in November 2023. Three amicus briefs were filed in support of our position, from the Jewish Coalition for Religious Liberty, a group of religious colleges led by Brigham Young University, and a group of seven social science scholars joined by Church State Council. The case is ongoing with a ruling possible in 2024 or early 2025.

### THE COLLEGE COST REDUCTION ACT

In January 2024, Representative Virginia Foxx (R-NC), chair of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, introduced the College Cost Reduction Act. The bill features several new accountability measures that would make significant changes to the Title IV student loan programs. The bill eliminates federal loan programs for parents and graduate students, as well as Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and replaces them with a program of performance-based reward payments funded through annual institutional payments that disproportionately affect private colleges. The bill would cap student federal aid at the median cost of college, which includes all types of institutions, both public and private, two-year and four-year. The bill also overhauls the accreditation system, which includes requiring transfer credit disclosures and prohibiting accreditor-based denials. Though the CCCU has serious concerns with the bill, we are grateful for the strong religious liberty protections included. Representative Foxx's staff worked with our Government Relations team, and we were able to help insert good language that accreditors must respect the religious missions of our institutions and not use that mission as a negative factor.

### FINANCIAL VALUE AND GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT REGULATIONS

Last fall, the Biden Administration finalized a set of rules that included a new financial value transparency framework in addition to updates on gainful employment, administrative capability, and financial responsibility, among others. The CCCU filed a comment letter outlining our major concerns with evaluating one's education on purely financial metrics, issues with the proposed debt-to-earnings ratio, and the unreasonable reporting requirements. One key change is to who must sign the participation program agreement, which now could include denominations where 50% of the board must be affiliated with, related to, or appointed by the denomination. The regulations also include requirements for transcript withholding, adequate financial aid counseling, and adequate career services. The final rules go into effect July 1, 2024, though the CCCU and the higher education community have asked for a delay in the reporting requirements.

### CCCU MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

At its latest meeting, the CCCU Board of Directors approved two new members, who join the CCCU's expansive network of more than 180 Christian colleges and universities around the globe:



Soongsil University  
(Seoul, South Korea)



Emanuel University of Oradea  
(Oradea, Romania)

The Board also approved a change in membership status. Columbia International University (Columbia, South Carolina), formerly an associate member, is now a governing member of the CCCU.



# 2024 CCCU AWARD RECIPIENTS



**ANDY CROUCH**  
*Dellenback Global Leadership Award*

The **Dellenback Global Leadership Award** is presented to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to Christian higher education through scholarship, writing, and public influence.

Andy Crouch is an award-winning author, speaker, and cultural commentator. He has authored several books that speak to the values of Christian higher education, including *Tech-Wise Life*, *Strong and Weak*, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*, and *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*.



**LINDY CLEVELAND**  
*Young Alumni Award*

The **Young Alumni Award** recognizes an individual who has graduated from a CCCU member institution within the past decade and whose work demonstrates uncommon leadership or success that reflects the values of Christian higher education.

Lindy Williamson Cleveland, a 2014 graduate of Samford University, serves as the founder and executive director of Unless U, a nonprofit that provides faith-based education and professional training to adults with developmental disabilities.



**ROLLIE & BARB ANDERSON**  
*2023 Philanthropy Award*

At the 2024 Presidents Conference, the CCCU presented an additional award that had been named previously but not yet recognized in person. **Rollie & Barb Anderson**, owners of Anderson Trucking Service, received the 2023 Philanthropy Award, recognizing their impactful use of business and personal resources to advance local and national civic, educational, and religious causes.



**TIM FULLER**  
*Legacy Champion of Higher Education Award*

The **Champion of Higher Education Award** is presented to individuals who have demonstrated strategic vision and unparalleled dedication to the field of higher education.

For more than a decade, Tim Fuller served Christian higher education through his work on the board of the North American Coalition for Christian Admissions Professionals (NACCAP) and Credo, a higher education consulting firm. In 2020, he founded Fuller Higher Ed Solutions, which continued to support Christian higher ed with services focusing on enrollment, strategy, and leadership coaching. Tim passed away unexpectedly in June 2023, but his impact lives on today and into the future.



**DANIEL C. NELSON**  
*Champion of Higher Education Award*

The **Champion of Higher Education Award** is presented to individuals who have demonstrated strategic vision and unparalleled dedication to the field of higher education.

During his 50-year career, Daniel C. Nelson has served Christian higher education through his work at Bethel University (MN), where he is currently the chief institutional data & research officer. He will retire later this year. Dan has surveyed financial aid officers at Christian colleges for 36 years, and his survey results have provided Christ-centered colleges and universities with pivotal information on cost, affordability, financial aid, and other key issues.

*Photo credit: Dr. Amanda Staggenborg*

EXPANDING MINDS AND HEARTS THROUGH GLOBAL LEARNING AND STUDY ABROAD

**Sept. 29 – Oct. 1, 2024**

Join us this fall for the 2024 Best Practices in Christian Higher Ed Conference. Various presentations will highlight high-impact practices within Christian higher education, including a focus on global learning and study abroad. This conference provides an opportunity to network, exchange insights and research findings, contemplate the distinctive qualities of Christian education, and come together in worship.

FEATURED SPEAKERS



MELISSA TORRES



ALEX SOSLER



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
**CCCU**  
[acu.edu/bpche\\_conference](http://acu.edu/bpche_conference)





# Academic Criticism, Civility, Christian Higher Education, and the Common Good



To this day, I am still shaped by my decision not to attend either of my top-choice graduate programs after reading book reviews written by the scholars who would have been my primary advisors. The harsh and cruel judgments they meted out shocked me and led me to reject the offers, with considerable regret. I knew I would have been formed by them. The mimetic (reflective) tradition of medieval pedagogy is, as we know, part and parcel of advanced studies, with supervisees often taking on many characteristics of their supervisors — both the desirable and productive and the undesirable and toxic.

My “no, thank you” to those offers turned out to be a tremendous boon, leading to graduate training that was both academically far superior and positively formative at The Catholic University of America. I’ve been thankful ever since for the grace to say “no” and revelatory moment that led to my “yes.” Visiting CUA’s library for some research, I had an instinct that this university was where I needed to study the Church Fathers. That instinct led to a meeting with the program director that same day. In what became a three-hour meeting, or interview, rather, about the possibility of my studying there, I asked, “How would you as Catholics treat me as an evangelical?” To that less than graceful but honest question, he had the grace and insight to respond, “That’s interesting. I’m Catholic; how will you treat me?” Therein lay a critical lesson in the making of civility!

Scholars regularly face and form civility and its contrary, incivility. The prevailing winds of culture are such now that incendiary comments, inattentive listening, ego-driven and hostile criticism, and polarized political positions have become our regular experience. For scholars, we find this condition not only in the culture at large but also our academic conferences, journals, and conversations. As specialists in offering criticism, we can forget ourselves, or promote ourselves, and quickly move from constructive offerings to destructive incivility. How we handle civility among our colleagues and in our academic communities shapes both us and our students, and so will inevitably inform how we — and our alumni — handle matters in the broader world.

Too often, culture’s image of scholars is the out-of-touch, untouchable, self-righteously critical academic. With 61.8% of high school graduates matriculating in higher education (in 2022; 70.1% in 2010), a vast proportion of Americans have experienced academic criticism with its benefits and its faults. Anecdotes abound and feed public perception that scholars offer harsh criticism, ideological biases, judgments, and pettiness rather than the positive formation of critical thinking historically promised by higher education.

*How we handle civility among our colleagues and in our academic communities shapes us and our students and so will inform how we — and our alumni — handle matters in the broader world.*

Arguably, incivility found in the modern American university has exacerbated the toxicity in our culture and may well have emboldened some of the political backlashes afflicting many institutions recently. Perhaps this has fed into a culture which now, to its own detriment, denigrates expertise (on this self-defeating attitude, see Tom Nichols’ incisive commentary in his work, 2017). The doubt, dismay, and denigration that academics and academies now face are legion. As an enterprise and a community, we must acknowledge how higher education has helped to spawn distrust. Our expertise, where it does not satisfy some personal need, such as a well-engineered smart phone or a coherent transportation system, is dismissed by the culture at large. In the face of such a response it is tempting to criticize more, complain, and/or renege on expressing our vocation as expert scholars and

Photo courtesy of Stanley P. Rosenberg

remove ourselves from the broader culture. Any such reactions are their own breach in trust, and further ruptures the integrity of our academic enclaves. The toxic feedback loop extends itself, expanding the breaches in society.

Into these massive and growing breaches, Christian higher education — CCCU members, other Christian institutions including both Protestant and Catholic, and individual Christian scholars at public or private, non-sectarian institutions — can and should be able to enter, offering a balm to the ails of our society. Given higher education’s arguable contributions to incivility, Christian higher education can and should move toward solving this damaging phenomenon.

A scholarly vocation is a particular form of caring, of expressing love, for our neighbour. To wrongly adopt uncivil forms of attack in place of generously formed criticisms is to fail in the expression of our scholarly vocation and thus to denigrate the gifts of God. Welcoming others into the community of knowledge, rather, requires learning to communicate difficult matters with grace and sensitivity. We welcome others by how we teach and communicate. This is a spiritual enterprise and a form of academic hospitality which is deeply Christian.

But it is also a practical act shaped by methods of communication. A vision for hospitality requires that we open up our understanding to others more broadly. Too often we convey our scholarly findings in a manner requiring trained

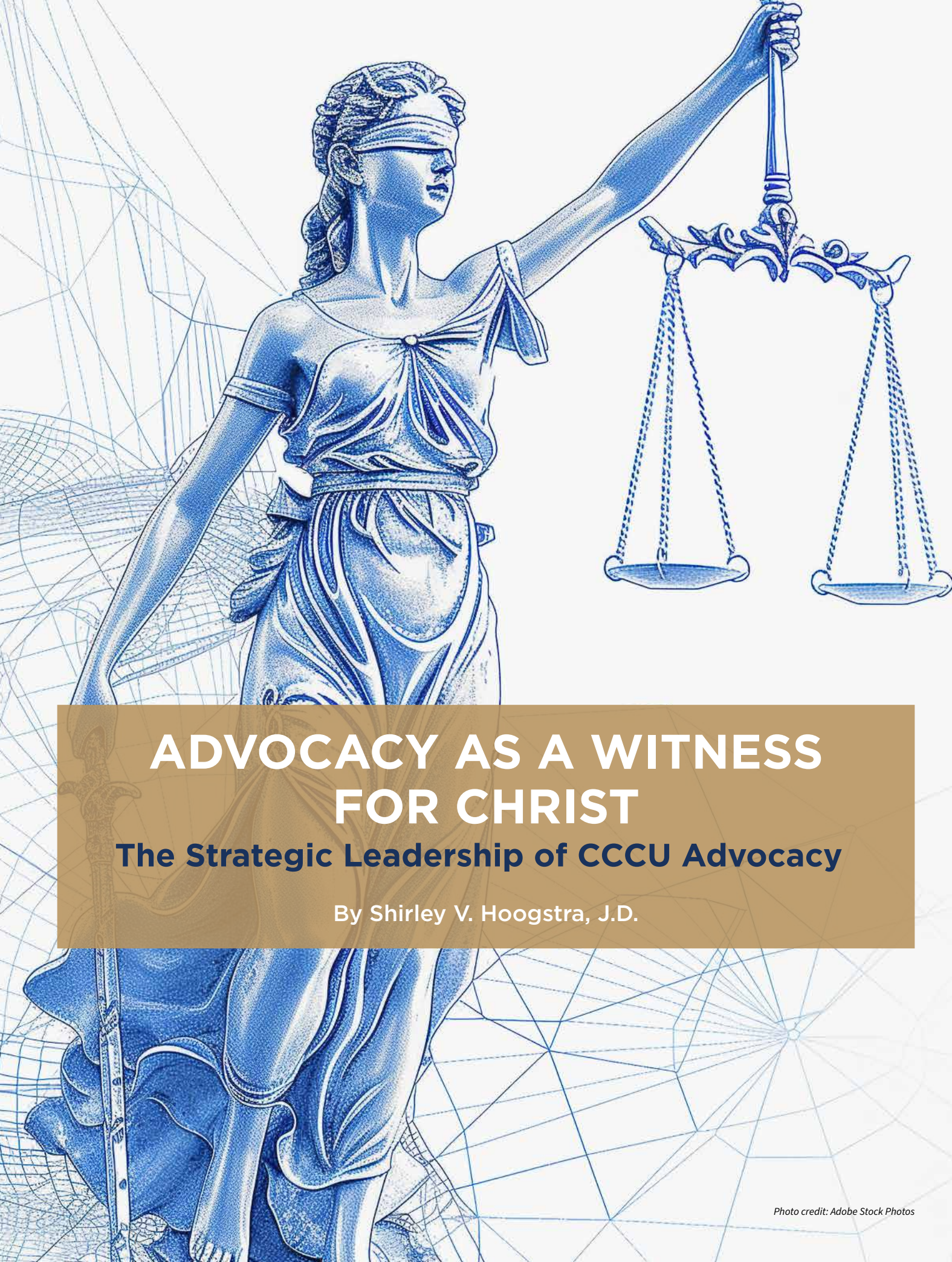
understanding of nuance and highly technical jargon (e.g., I have foresworn talking about “heuristic devices”!). Much of what we learn as scholars is not intuitively obvious, else we would not need the years of training required. Among other things, we can contribute to civility by generously communicating scholarly knowledge in a way that is accessible to a broader audience. Instead of fortifying ourselves in our ivory towers through rarefied language, we must open our doors, inviting understanding and participation.

To invite participation is to model something of the divine life. I write these words during Holy Week when we remember the consummation of God’s work. In the words of Augustine, “God Himself, the blessed God, who is the giver of blessedness, became partaker of our human nature, and thus offered us a short cut to participation in His own divine nature” (IX, 15). Entrusted with the tools and content of knowledge, we are called to welcome others into the community of knowledge. This extends the grace of participation, profoundly reflects the vision of integration, and expresses a vision for the love of neighbour, which sometimes goes by the description of the common good.

STANLEY P. ROSENBERG, Ph.D. is the CCCU’s vice president for research and scholarship and the executive director of SCIO: Scholarship & Christianity in Oxford, the CCCU’s U.K. subsidiary.







# ADVOCACY AS A WITNESS FOR CHRIST

## The Strategic Leadership of CCCU Advocacy

By Shirley V. Hoogstra, J.D.

Photo credit: Adobe Stock Photos

For nearly 50 years, the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities has advocated to advance the cause of Christian higher education. From the outset, the CCCU knew we would have a strong presence in Washington, lending our voice on pressing issues of the day. Former CCCU presidents, including John Dellenback, Myron Augsberger, Bob Andringa, and Paul Cortis, saw their personal contribution and the contribution of the larger organization as vital to the functioning of an excellent higher education sector in the United States.

Of course, the legislative, judicial, and regulatory landscape has altered greatly during that time, with a rate of change that accelerated over the past 10 years. Jim Denison's podcast, *The Denison Forum*, recently hosted Aaron Renn, cofounder and senior fellow at American Reformer. According to Renn's analysis, American culture has undergone three phases in its relationship to religion so far. The first was faith-positive, followed by faith-neutral. But according to Renn, in 2014 we entered a faith-negative phase in our nation's history, as the broader American culture adopted a critical view of religion.

I assumed the role of president of the CCCU in 2014. And in 2015, *Obergefell v. Hodges* legalized same-sex marriage in the United States. This immediately created new territory of conflict within states, regulators, and Congress. Christian colleges and universities in the CCCU hold to a historic understanding of marriage, and since the *Obergefell* ruling, Christian colleges and universities have been at the tip of the spear for many unresolved tension points.

In 2015, our board of directors had to decide how to manage this new cascade of tension points. They decided that the CCCU would be "at the table" for all the discussions that were sure to ensue. That posture required us to form new partnerships. It required us to form deep theological understandings of how to live in a post-Christian society, like Daniel in Babylon. It required new ways of thinking for institutions that had previously enjoyed the positive, and then neutral, attitudes of culture towards Christianity. Now, Christian colleges and universities needed to serve as a light on a hill through their thoughtful contributions in a world where differences had become sharper.

This model has impacted all our advocacy work over the past decade. The CCCU's advocacy always seeks to protect key operational principles for Christian colleges and universities, including:

- the ability to hire, and fire, based on Christian beliefs and mission,
- the ability to maintain policies for students, faculty, and staff that align with Christian principles,
- the availability of funding to organizations with a religious mission, and whether it is being unfairly curtailed in violation of the separation of church and state, and
- exemptions from regulations like Title IX based on an institution's sincerely held religious beliefs and mission.

The staff at the CCCU continually monitors legislation, regulations, and court cases so we can intervene effectively in each of these spheres and beyond. We start by determining whether something will affect the way in which Christian higher education can function with institutional autonomy. Oftentimes, decision-makers do not even

realize how a particular outcome could have an adverse effect on Christ-centered colleges and universities.

In court cases, we utilize a board-approved matrix that indicates when we file an amicus brief, or friend-of-the-court brief, essentially laying out a set of facts and how potential rulings would impact Christian higher education. We consider the importance of the case to higher education and/or religious freedom, the scope of the case, and the exigency of the issue. Many organizations file these amicus briefs so that the court's ruling is well informed, not confined to a limited set of facts.

As one specific example, the CCCU intervened in the lawsuit *Hunter v. Department of Education* in 2021. In this case, current and former students from dozens of Christian colleges and universities sought to overturn the religious exemption to Title IX. Through this case, we successfully represented the good work that Christian colleges and universities do with LGBTQ students without compromising on a historical and biblical view of marriage.

*In the face of these and other challenges, the CCCU remains committed to our first and foremost goal: to serve as a witness for Jesus Christ.*

We developed a group of subject matter experts and compiled primary research which showed that LGBTQ students were better served on our campuses in many aspects than on secular campuses. This is so countercultural to what society believes about clashing viewpoints but demonstrates how Christian colleges and universities can show a way forward in polarized conversations. The judge granted the motion to dismiss the case in January 2023; the plaintiffs appealed the case, which is still ongoing. (Advocacy work related to human sexuality is one small part of our overall agenda. We have addressed new legislation around taxation and charitable giving, regulations around financial aid and accreditation, and court cases around hiring. One area where we find much satisfaction is our advocacy around Second Chance Pell for incarcerated individuals. See the timeline on pgs. 16-17 for more details.)




The CCCU has always been quite aware of this fact: The federal government, which is of course our biggest funder through Pell Grants and other allowable loans, grants, and contracts, can also be the entity that most interferes with Christian higher education. In our legislative work, we conduct scores of visits with representatives and senators each year. The CCCU continually works to create conditions for dialogue and consultation with senators and representatives.

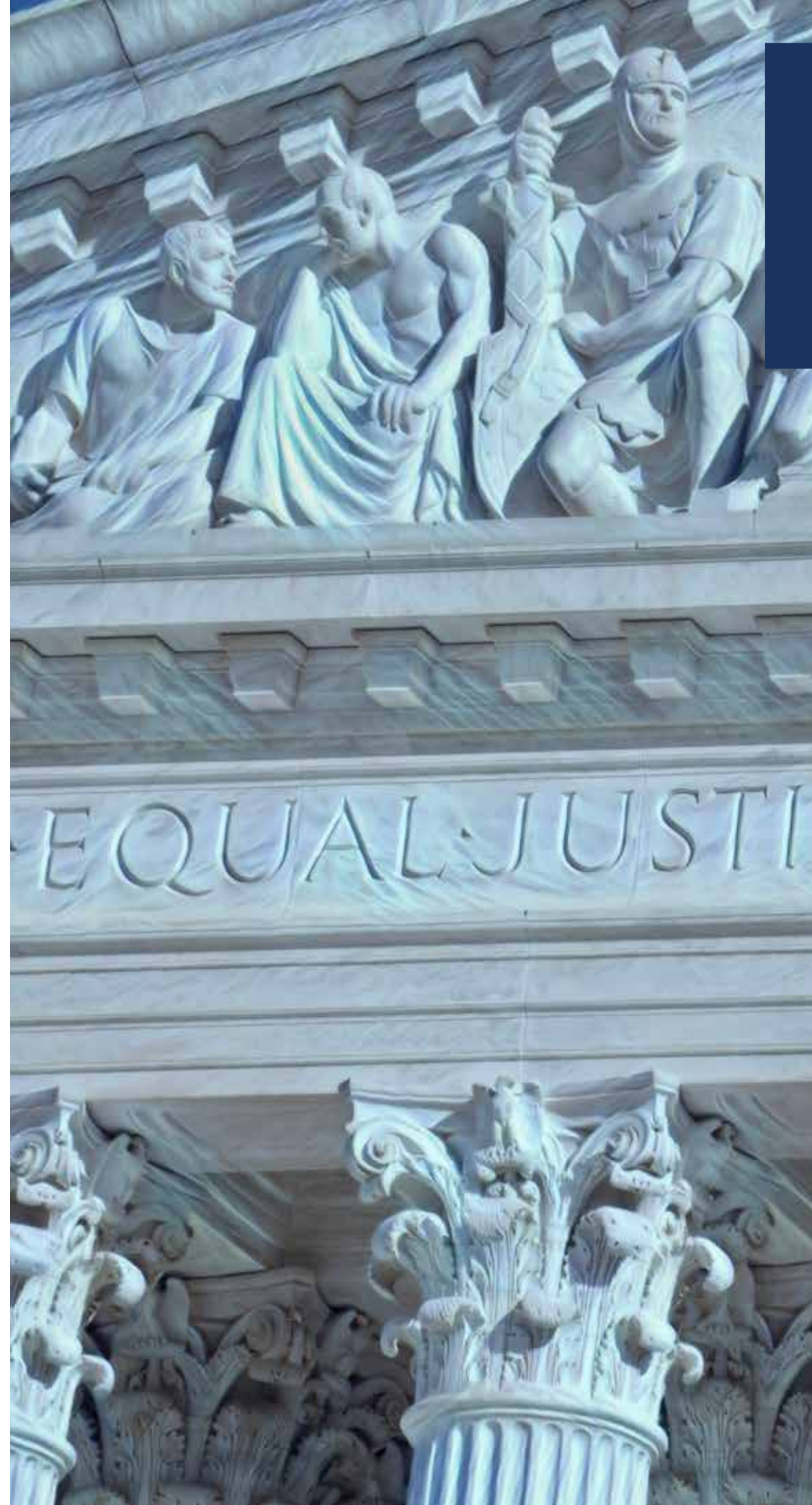
When it comes to the executive branch, the CCCU forms relationships with the staff of key departments — particularly the Department of Education, but also the Department of Labor and Department of Justice. As a nonpartisan organization, we set out believing that the people we encounter in the executive branch, regardless of the administration in power, come to their work wanting to do their best and be excellent public servants. Until we know otherwise, that is our posture towards them. We are determined to be team players and problem solvers around the things that matter to them, and to us.

This work is not always easy. To solve many different problems, we have to sit at many different tables, where we needed to cultivate a breadth of partnerships. Our institutions already had friends at many table settings, but we also had to form working relationships with new allies — in many cases, with people who shared many, but not necessarily all, our viewpoints. Over the years, that has challenged us to think about how to hold strong convictions while working with people with whom we may strongly disagree. We have learned how to unite under a common cause.

Another challenge has been funding our involvement in key court cases. The CCCU strives to be the leading voice for Christian higher education. We have filed scores of amicus briefs over the last 10 years. Our legal strategy requires excellent outside counsel who have been worth the high cost, providing immeasurable value for our legal strategy of vigorous representation and Christian witness on a contentious issue.

In the face of these and other challenges, the CCCU remains committed to our first and foremost goal: to serve as a witness for Jesus Christ. Our advocacy should be effective, but it must also always reflect the person of Jesus Christ through the fruits of the spirit — in particular, through a hospitable and problem-solving approach. Oftentimes advocacy can be characterized as elbows out, sharp, or war-like. But at the CCCU, we believe in making strong, compelling, and effective arguments for Christian higher education without brandishing a spear or conjuring fear in the hearts of our opponents. We confront every issue with the knowledge that both our allies and our opponents are image-bearers of God as we seek his Kingdom here on earth.

No matter how our culture changes in the future, the CCCU looks forward to advocating for Christian higher education over the next 10 years and beyond. 



## **WE PARTNER WITH DOZENS OF ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS, HELPING TO BUILD STRONG COALITIONS AND GAIN A VOICE AT THE TABLE.**

**HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR PARTNERS:**

**The National Association of Evangelicals**

**Evangelical Immigration Table (EIT)**

**Interfaith America**

**Protect Democracy**

**The Charitable Giving Coalition**

**The National Association of Independent Colleges & Universities (NAICU)**

**The American Council on Education**

**The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty**

**Alliance Defending Freedom**

**Orthodox Jewish Union**

**Seventh-Day Adventists**

**Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints**

**The Center for Public Justice**

**The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission**

**First Amendment Partnership**

**Redeeming Babel**



# CRITICAL MOMENTS IN CCCU HISTORY

Over the last 10 years, the CCCU has engaged in extensive advocacy work, submitting approximately 100 amicus briefs and writing 400+ comment letters on key issues impacting Christian higher education. This timeline highlights a few important examples.

**SEPTEMBER 2014:** Shirley Hoogstra becomes the seventh president of the CCCU.

**MAY 2016:** In a win for religious liberty, the Supreme Court ruling on *Zubik v. Burwell* allows institutions to offer health insurance that is compatible with their tenets of faith. The CCCU filed amicus briefs in three cases consolidated under *Zubik v. Burwell*, challenging the Affordable Care Act's contraceptive and abortifacient mandate which required institutions to provide coverage for these services regardless of religious objections.

**JUNE 2017:** After the CCCU filed an amicus brief in *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia v. Comer*, the Supreme Court rules in favor of Trinity Lutheran. This Missouri church applied for a state grant to improve the playground of its public daycare facility, and the grant was denied due to its religious affiliation. The Court's ruling reinforced the principle that faith-based organizations cannot be excluded from otherwise available public benefits because of their faith.

**MAY 2019:** The Equality Act is passed again in the House of Representatives. The CCCU opposed this bill, which would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to provide sweeping prohibitions against discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity without incorporating essential religious liberty protections.

**NOVEMBER 2019:** Following the CCCU's engagement in negotiated rulemaking, the Department of Education issues a final rule that prohibits accrediting agencies from considering an institution's faith-based policies or practices as a negative factor.

**DECEMBER 2019:** Fairness for All is introduced as an alternative to the Equality Act. The CCCU supported Fairness for All because it modeled including religious liberty language in legislation that also adds LGBTQ language in civil rights law.

**DECEMBER 2019:** After more than a year of advocacy efforts by the CCCU and other religious and nonprofit organizations, Congress retroactively repeals the "parking tax," which required churches and nonprofits to pay a 21% tax on parking and transit benefits made available to employees.

**JULY 2020:** The Supreme Court rules in favor of Our Lady of Guadalupe School in *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, reaffirming the ministerial exception. The CCCU filed an amicus brief in the case, which called into question the right of the Catholic school to select its own teachers.

**DECEMBER 2020:** Utilizing the CCCU's input, the Department of Education issues a final rule providing clarity on Title IX religious exemptions, ensuring that all religious schools, even non-denominational ones, are able to assert the religious exemption in Title IX based on their religious mission and sincerely held religious beliefs.

**DECEMBER 2020:** After the CCCU advocated for years to overturn the longstanding ban that prevented incarcerated individuals from receiving Pell grants, the Senate's stimulus package lifts the ban.

**MARCH 2021:** Current and former students at 25 Christian colleges and universities (including 18 CCCU members) file *Hunter v. Department of Education*, seeking to strip longstanding religious protections from Title IX.

**DECEMBER 2022:** The Respect for Marriage Act is passed by the House and Senate, containing religious liberty provisions and findings alongside LGBTQ provisions regarding marriage. The CCCU did not support the bill but worked to ensure it contained strong religious liberty protections, which include a reaffirmation of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the provision that religious nonprofits like Christian colleges do not have to solemnize same-sex weddings.

**JANUARY 2023:** The judge granted the motion to dismiss the case in *Hunter v. Department of Education*, reaffirming the constitutional right of faith-based institutions to live out their deeply and sincerely held religious beliefs. The CCCU filed a supplemental brief citing the Respect for Marriage Act provisions and believes that influenced the court's dismissal of the case.

**MARCH 2023:** The plaintiffs in *Hunter v. Department of Education* appeal the case to the 9th Circuit, and the CCCU files briefs in support of the motion to dismiss. As of spring 2024, the case is still ongoing.



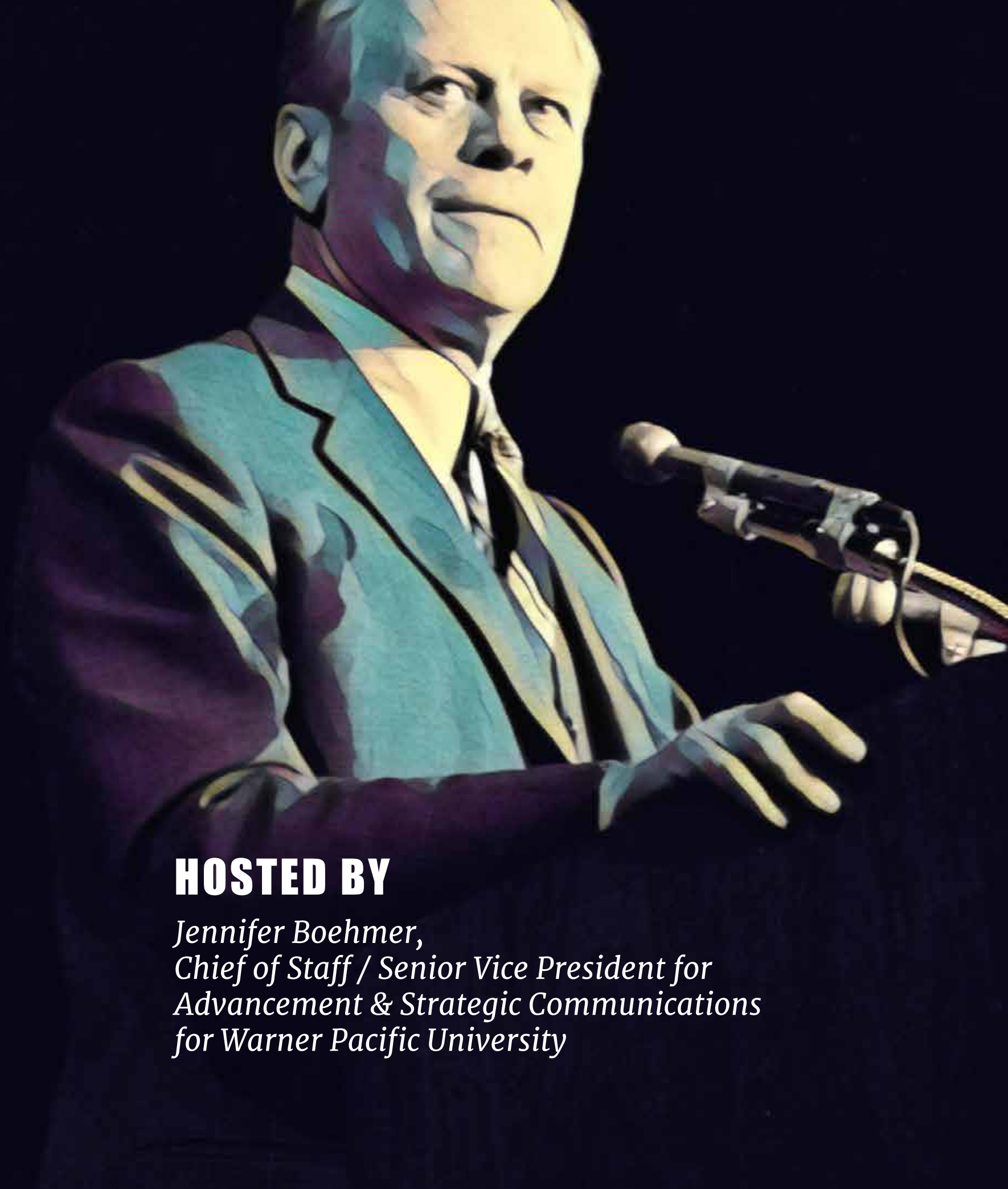
# RECOVERING THE TRANSCENDENT VALUES OF THE CHURCH DURING TUMULTUOUS TIMES

---

How President Ford's historic commencement address at Warner Pacific University is still relevant for Christian colleges and universities today

## HOSTED BY

*Jennifer Boehmer,  
Chief of Staff / Senior Vice President for  
Advancement & Strategic Communications  
for Warner Pacific University*





When President Gerald Ford visited Warner Pacific University (Portland, OR) to speak to the graduating class of 1976, he set foot on a very different campus. Back then, WPU (then Warner Pacific College) was best known throughout the state as a leading launcher of new pastors and worship leaders. Portland was in the national news because of the Trail Blazers, who would go on to win the national championship the following year. And Ford addressed a mostly white audience of listeners — mirroring the significant majority of higher education enrollees in Oregon at the time.

Half a century later, WPU is serving in a new paradigm. Today we operate in a still-beautiful city, but one whose political perspectives are more likely to shape our national reputations than our sports are. WPU's array of degrees has blossomed to master's level programming, online modalities, and adult degree completion options, and graduates hold careers in hospitals, classrooms, and offices, in addition to churches. Most astoundingly of all, we find ourselves in the position of being named the most ethnically diverse institution in Oregon, with nearly 65 percent of our students identifying as people of color. Moreover, we are honored to be the only Christian college in the Pacific Northwest designated an official minority-serving institution (MSI) by the U.S. Department of Education.

However far forward the Lord leads us in our walk of service, an important clarity of purpose links our past to our present: Christ-centeredness as the enduring heart of what it means to truly deliver quality higher education that uplifts all people and cares for the calling as much as the credential. Our outward expressions may look different, but the Lord has consistently led WPU — and certainly many other Christian institutions — toward the role of pioneer, regardless of the terrain.

Likely, our fellow CCCU institutions can relate to huge changes over the past several decades and recent pandemic years, too. It's a perfect moment to reconsider President Ford's historic commencement address and the national context in which it was given and to reflect on similar realities and themes that still reverberate all these years later.

What about Ford's words still rings true, though we may understand them with new vision and clarity? How does Christian higher education meet the moment regardless of the time period? What does it mean to keep an unwavering focus on our missional callings, and how does our Christian faith prepare us to serve students today in a way that no other sector can achieve?

I invited four Christian university leaders to discuss this. Tyler Castle is a graduate of Westmont College (Santa Barbara, CA) and a Ph.D. student in political science at the University of Notre Dame (South Bend, IN); Dr. Trisha Posey is dean of undergraduate studies at John Brown University (Siloam Springs, AR); and Dr. Keith Beutler is professor of history at Missouri Baptist University (St. Louis, MO). Here are their thoughts on the enduring relevance of Christian higher education through the lens of President Ford's speech.

**Jennifer Boehmer:** When President Gerald Ford accepted the invitation to speak at Warner Pacific, he did so amid great national turmoil — a collective reckoning with the Vietnam War, Watergate and Nixon's resignation, and competing perspectives around how to approach the worst economy in four decades. In many ways, today's national context is not dissimilar. For his time, Ford called for an antidote in the "recovery of transcendent qualities of spirituality and morality."

**From your vantage in Christian higher education, how relevant is Ford's premise today? And what does it mean to cultivate spirituality in our students that is truly "transcendent" in this politically divided moment in American history?**

**Dr. Trisha Posey:** Ford's premise is extremely relevant today. We may not have the same crises that Ford faced in 1976, but we live in a period of instability similar to what Americans faced in the mid-1970s.

Americans today, like those in the 1970s, are losing trust in institutions like government, education, church, and business. This loss of trust extends to our neighbors as well, as political divisions have hampered our ability to come together in a shared effort to address our most pressing problems, including the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our students are both participants in and keen observers of these trends, and an important role of Christian higher education is to disrupt the cynicism that accompanies a lack of institutional trust by pointing our students to the "transcendent qualities of spirituality and morality" that Ford highlights. This means that, at our institutions, we understand that education is not only about gaining knowledge and skills, but also having conversations about human flourishing and how to participate in the redemption of the broken systems and institutions around us.

We do this work with the example of Christ constantly before us. Jesus was no stranger to great turmoil — the peace of the "Pax Romana" was hardly peaceful for those who lived under the constant pressure to conform to the pagan values of Roman rule. In the midst of this, however, Jesus demonstrated to his followers how to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ can serve as our spiritual lodestar as we carry out the work of educating the next generation of Christian leaders.



Scan this QR code to read President Gerald Ford's full address to the Warner Pacific University class of 1976.



**Tyler Castle:** As I write this response, we are in the midst of Holy Week. I cannot help but think of Jesus's words to Pontius Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world." We all know these words, but accepting them is another thing entirely. This has always been the case. Immediately following the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate, the crowds raucously call for the release of Barabbas in place of Jesus. Who was Barabbas? A Jewish revolutionary who sought to bring about a kingdom that was very much of this world.

We continue to wrestle with the same temptation and the same choice today. To cultivate "transcendent" faith means to set our hearts on the heavenly kingdom, not on any earthly kingdom; to accept our status as pilgrims in this world. This is not to say that we should escape from "immanent" life, or from politics. But it does mean that they are always penultimate for us. They are not where we find our hope or our fulfillment.

Transcendent faith therefore gives us the freedom to act in turbulent times with confidence, peace, and charity, rather than fear or malice. To use Ford's words, it instills a "spiritual richness" in our hearts, which enables us to endure the sorrows and imperfections of human life, especially political life. As a result, we are empowered to do good in the world without needing to be successful (and despairing when we're not). I propose, and I think Ford would agree, that these are exactly the sort of citizens our country needs today.

**Dr. Keith Beutler:** As poignant as in the Bicentennial year of 1976, President Ford's call to embrace transcendent moral and spiritual qualities resonates today on the cusp of the United States' 250th anniversary. From the standpoint of biblical anthropology, which is to say, telling the truth about human nature, such a call will always be relevant. Every generation in every society participates in original sin, as it has come down to us from Adam. Every nation and person, we confess, needs redemption from our shared heritage of sin and to be reconciled to "transcendent... spirituality and morality."

As Christian educators, we accept that if it depended upon us to acquire it, the true, lasting, ultimate spiritual and moral rescue we require would forever remain problematically transcendent, entirely beyond our reach. But Jesus Christ, God himself, has graciously come down to us. He has "walked among" us, as the scripture says, seeking to "draw all" people to himself, and to be our "Great Physician."

**Boehmer:** Ford talks about a spirit of individualism as essential — but also makes clear that organizations such as churches, schools, and communities must play a role. How can we best inspire our students to see their personal callings as both inextricable and valuable to community success? How are you preparing students to be freely all they can be as individuals while also applying their gifts in service to the Kingdom and to the greater good? Why is Christian higher ed especially equipped to accomplish this in today's world?



**DR. TRISHA POSEY**  
Dean of Undergraduate Studies at John Brown University (Siloam Springs, AR)



**TYLER CASTLE**  
Graduate of Westmont College (Santa Barbara, CA) and a Ph.D. student in political science at the University of Notre Dame (South Bend, IN)



**DR. KEITH BEUTLER**  
Professor of History at Missouri Baptist University (St. Louis, MO)



**JENNIFER BOEHMER**  
Chief of Staff and Senior Vice President for Advancement & Strategic Communications at Warner Pacific University (Portland, OR)



**Posey:** Ford mentions two aspects of individuality as important — individual expression and individual opportunity. Both are key to supporting our students in pursuit of their callings.

As image-bearers of God, our students have been gifted with unique abilities that allow them to pursue their calling as co-creators with God. We need to provide opportunities for our students to understand these gifts and to consider the spaces to which God might be calling them for his use. Moreover, we ought to work against whatever barriers prevent them from pursuing their giftedness. This is why Ford's focus on individual opportunity is also important. There are many things that keep our students from freely pursuing their callings — personal doubts, social barriers, and financial limitations, to name just a few. I hope the work we do at Christian colleges and universities helps our students address these limitations so they might fully lean into their vocational callings.

In the classrooms of my university, especially in our first-year seminar course, students often hear faculty quote Frederick Buechner: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." I appreciate how Buechner recognizes the deep interconnection between individual calling and community service. As we train future teachers, engineers, historians, nurses, and pastors, we are preparing them for lives of service to the world as expressions of God's deep love for the world, a love they discover as they begin to understand God's work in their individual lives.

Christian education is particularly well equipped to accomplish this in today's world because the church has been doing this from the beginning. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presented a social ethic rooted in care for the poor, love for our enemies, and a pursuit of peace that also requires personal transformation into Christlikeness. These things cannot be separated. As we follow Christ's teaching in educating our students at Christian colleges and universities, we are able to recognize the interrelated nature of our

*To cultivate  
"transcendent"  
faith means to set  
our hearts on the  
heavenly kingdom,  
not on any earthly  
kingdom; to  
accept our status  
as pilgrims in this  
world. This is not  
to say that we  
should escape from  
"immanent" life, or  
from politics. But  
it does mean that  
they are always  
penultimate for us.  
They are not where  
we find our hope or  
our fulfillment.  
— Tyler Castle*

individual call to follow Christ and our pursuit of human flourishing in our communities.

**Castle:** The church is made up of many unique parts that together form one body in Christ. This implies that the uniqueness of the parts is essential to the wholeness of the body. (A bunch of hands and no feet wouldn't make for a very appealing — or functional — body!) Moreover, unlike the ideologies that Ford decried, the Christian worldview importantly holds that individuals contribute to the whole without ever being subsumed by it.

In light of this rich theology, Christian institutions have always been especially equipped to promote the goodness of individuality alongside the goodness of community. Christians affirm that each person has individual giftings and something special to offer the world, a unique mode of serving that will answer a need in a way no one else could.

We should therefore encourage the development of our students' individuality, knowing that the wholeness of our community is dependent upon them being uniquely themselves. After all, a mosaic with many different colored tiles is always more beautiful than one with just a few, as long as each tile remembers it is part of the whole and not complete on its own.

**Beutler:** Ford came from a generation of "joiners," who, for all their disagreements, came together time and again to meet common challenges, most famously in the Great Depression and World War II. Nearly 50 years ago, Ford found it necessary to call for a spirit of individualism, perhaps in part because, from the mid-1960s into the mid-1970s, there was a sense among many younger Americans that their elders had taken lockstep acquiescence in politics and society too far.

At the same time, many in Ford's generation thought of Baby Boomers as too counterculture, excessively free-spirited, and dangerously anti-institutional. At Warner Pacific in '76, Ford spoke, as he did so often during his presidency, in a spirit of reconciliation. He addressed both

generations. He acknowledged the value of collective institutions and enterprises so meaningful to the generation already in power: their churches; their government; and what he called America's "reach to the moon," NASA's massive, expensive, lately concluded, but by then retrospectively controversial Apollo program.

Yet, in the same address, Ford spoke pointedly in defense of the integrity and value of the individual, a recurrent imperative in youth culture by the mid-1970s. He expressed concern that in a technocratic age, the seemingly "endless agencies" his generation of leaders had formed might "reduce human beings to computerized abstractions and program people into numbers and into statistics."

Fifty years on, Ford's insistence that Americans consider how they relate to their technology and their institutions is relevant again. In our era of corporate mergers, mega-churches, and popular euphoria over generative AI, the integrity and place of the individual is again contested.

As a cultural historian and a Christian, it strikes me that, in sharp contrast to the dehumanizing reductionism against which Ford presciently warned, the Christian tradition offers well-developed alternative understandings of self and society: such as the "body politic" paradigm, the view championed in early America, however imperfectly, by the Puritans — a vision of social relations consciously derived from Paul's organic description of Christians as the body of Christ, with each member of society meant to live in vital union with every other person in society, irreducibly and irrefutably precious, created alike "in the image of Christ."

**Boehmer:** Ford speaks eloquently about enlarging personal freedom, placing a high premium on "creativity, originality, and your right to differentiate yourself from the masses." But in 1976, not everyone had the same opportunities to

succeed. We've made progress, but we still grapple today with challenges stemming from racial disparity, economic disparity, and a general lack of access to education. How are you actively working to include all students in the opportunity to pursue a calling and be who God placed it in their hearts to become, and to see the value in Christian higher education?

**Posey:** I'm glad you highlighted this reality because it's something we need to be attentive to in Christian higher education. The first step in including all students in the pursuit of their calling is taking an honest look at the historical barriers that have kept some from doing so. Many of these barriers are external, but some are internal to our institutions. Taking stock of our own histories and practices is uncomfortable but necessary work.

At my institution, we try to look at all aspects of our students' educational experience — from the recruitment process through graduation — to understand the challenges to student success. For example, in the past few years, we've changed our recruitment practices to more effectively support students from our Latino communities and their families who want to give them access to Christian higher education. We recognize that recruitment isn't enough, though. We provide support through peer mentoring and affinity group gatherings, chapel services and celebrations that are culturally diverse, and conversations about the challenges that students face in our classrooms.

Including all students in educational opportunities at our institutions requires intentionality, constant attentiveness to student needs, and a commitment to including a variety of voices in the decision-making at all levels. There are always opportunities to improve in these areas, but I'm grateful for the ways in which Christian colleges and universities have leaned into this important work.



McGuire Auditorium at Warner Pacific University

Photo credit: Warner Pacific University

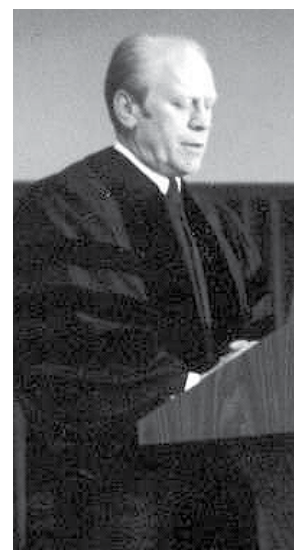


**Castle:** We have not always lived up to it, but I think Christians ought to possess a unique capacity to see beyond racial, socioeconomic, and political divides. Echoing a previous question, we should be able to acknowledge the transcendent truth that we are all members of one human family even when there are visible, temporal barriers that appear to divide us. In academic environments where members of marginalized groups often do not feel welcome, Christian faculty members and administrators have a special responsibility to make them feel like they do belong and to affirm the immense value that they bring to the classroom and the broader community.

**Beutler:** I think that acknowledging the unfinished work is key, and not pretending that we are simply in a maintenance stage, as if these disparities have already been wholly overcome. It is fine and good for us to debate as academics, say, the relative rectitude of the science of the moment, how capital should accumulate and circulate, or the value of nation-states. Yet as Christian academics, we must always acknowledge that we are not ultimately looking to any social “isms” — not to scientism, not to capitalism, not to nationalism — but only to the Lord Jesus Christ for ultimate deliverance.

Let’s be sure then, that in laboring to overcome historical disparities, in reaching out to those who need help to access Christian higher education, we do not make idols of staying slavishly true to any of those “-isms.” Rather, Ford’s well-chosen citation of Proverbs 3:5-6 in his wonderfully modest address might serve to remind us: as Christian educators, we must be willing to set aside our own provincial, politicized, culture-laden ways and understandings to trust the Lord’s.

**Boehmer:** The verse that Ford chose for his swearing-in is so deeply and famously beloved by many. Institutionally, as Christian education continues to face challenges locally and nationally, what does it look like for your institution to trust the Lord and “lean not on our own understanding”? How does holding this philosophy of faith set our institutions apart?



*As a congressman, I have always felt that keeping my door open was a duty. I learned a lot from the people who have passed through it. Both from those who agreed with me and those who didn't.*  
- Gerald R. Ford, 1973

President Gerald Ford giving a commencement speech at Warner Pacific University in 1976

**Castle:** God often works mysteriously. His ways are above our ways! Trusting that he governs all things for our good allows us to navigate challenging seasons with hope, even when his ways are inscrutable to us. It should also cause us to hold things lightly — including our five-year institutional plans and even our institutions themselves.

Father Walter Ciszek, a Catholic priest who spent 23 years in the Soviet gulag, beautifully describes the freedom that comes when we surrender ourselves to God’s will. He writes, “For what can ultimately trouble the soul that accepts every moment of every day as a gift from the hands of God and strives always to do his will?” No matter what comes, for ourselves and our institutions, a posture of surrender and trust will enable us to accept every moment (including the hard ones) as gifts from our loving God, gifts by which he intends to bring us all closer to himself.

**Posey:** Christian colleges and universities express a commitment to following scripture as the authoritative source of truth in all that we do. This commitment is what sets us apart from other institutions, and it allows us to transcend what Ford calls “the monolithic threat of sameness in our society.” We must battle the temptation to make decisions based on cultural, social, or political whims. Rather, we should submit all that we do to the authority of scripture, the wisdom of tradition, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

This is not always easy. Enrollment pressures from all sides would have us stray from our mission, but we refuse to make decisions for the sake of expediency. Instead, fixing our eyes on the Author and Perfecter of our faith, we follow the example that Christ has given us. This means bathing decisions in prayer, following the narrow way even when doing so might come at a cost, practicing transparency in all our dealings, and holding tightly to our mission. Indeed, one gift that we have as Christian educational institutions is a shared mission among all members of our community. This shared mission allows us to work together, even in disagreement, toward common goals.

**Beutler:** It means that we teach intentionally to please God, and to bring his mercies and common grace to our students. That higher trust in the Lord entails kindness on our part, as God is kind, but it also follows that we, as Christian educators, will not merely cater to what industry, politicians, our own evangelical subculture, or even students-as-customers might be demanding at a given historical moment. In fact, it often means that we have to put to death our own preferences in favor of Christ’s Lordship.

**Boehmer:** Ford’s visit to Warner Pacific is a deeply cherished event in our institution’s history — how beautiful that a sitting president would travel to a small college on the other side of the country to speak to our graduates and affirm the relevance of our Christ-centered mission. How do these moments in your institutional history shape and support a throughline of missional continuity among your alumni? How do you continue to inspire future graduates with external validation?

Photo credit: Warner Pacific University

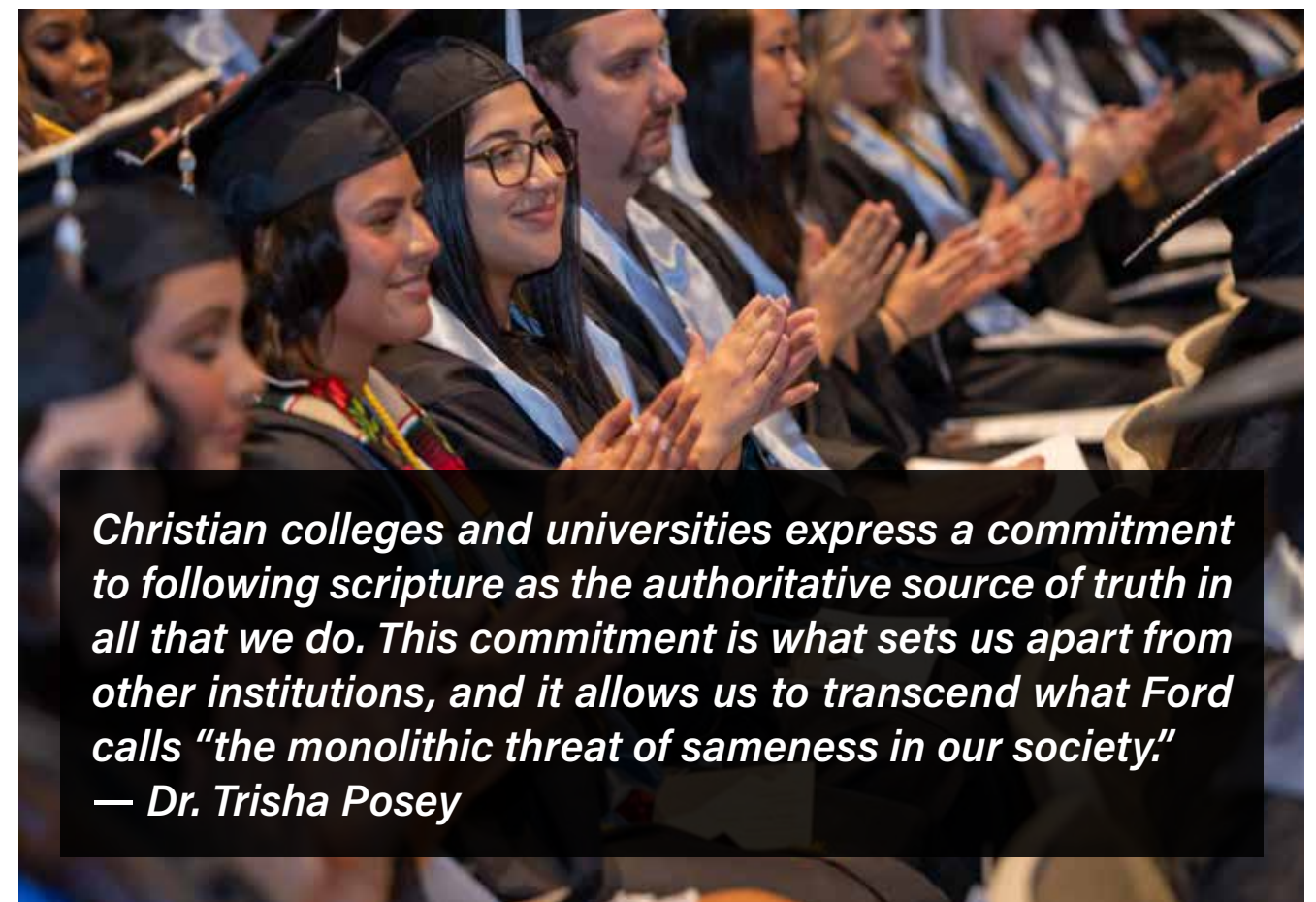
**Posey:** John Brown University has had several moments in our institutional history that have shaped our common understanding of our identity. Probably the most well-known is the visit by Billy Graham to our institution in 1959. We have a tangible reminder of this visit in an annual scholarship that we give to students. More importantly, though, we have a shared memory of this visit, which serves as a reminder of our identity as an institution that places the Gospel at the center of our mission.

Outside of these historic moments, JBU also has other ways of affirming our Christ-centered mission. We have two institutional mottos: “Christ over all” and “Head, Heart, and Hand.” Every member of our community knows these mottos, and we constantly refer to them in the work that we do.

The “Head, Heart, and Hand” approach to education comes directly from our founder, who sought to weave together intellectual development, growth in practical skills, and spiritual formation in a holistic educational experience. This commitment has served as a throughline for our institution, and it continues to shape the majors we offer, the cocurricular activities we pursue, and the ways in which we manage our policies and procedures. At our institution, we love to share stories of our community members, both near and far, who live out this ideal. Our first-year seminar students hear about those who have come before them, women and men who have been at John Brown University and continue to serve as exemplars of the faith.

We also share stories of God’s faithfulness to our institution during difficult times. During the recent very challenging years, we often have turned to moments of our institutional history as a source of strength and encouragement. We have recalled times when finances were lean, when domestic or international conflict affected our own campus in deep, painful ways, or when tragedy struck our community. We have physical markers to remember these events on our campus: trees planted in remembrance of those who have passed, plaques honoring the lives and service of community members who have modeled Christ’s sacrificial love for others, and photos in the hallways of exemplary faculty members whom we have lost. These markers give us a sense of both gratitude and humility as we go about our work.

**Beutler:** Increasingly in my classes, and as a community at Missouri Baptist University, we have been affording alumni, and leaders in the wider world who have appreciated our graduates’ contributions, opportunities to testify on the record about how their Christ-centered, excellence-demanding educative experiences at our Christian university have motivated and equipped MBU students to “shine on” to the glory of God in the service of others. What we are seeing is that these testimonies remind our entire community of just how eager and faithful the Lord is, and has always been, to equip us to serve. 🙏



Warner Pacific University students on graduation day

*Christian colleges and universities express a commitment to following scripture as the authoritative source of truth in all that we do. This commitment is what sets us apart from other institutions, and it allows us to transcend what Ford calls “the monolithic threat of sameness in our society.”*  
— Dr. Trisha Posey



# NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

A Brief History of Presidential  
Elections and American Resilience

By **Kermit Roosevelt III**





The 2024 presidential election is shaping up to be a disaster. Or so many people think. And there are plenty of reasons they can point to. One candidate is under indictment and could conceivably be convicted of a crime by the time of the election. Both candidates are old, raising concerns about their health and ability to serve out a full term if elected. The partisan divide is so sharp that supporters on both sides seem primed to deny the legitimacy of the outcome if their favored candidate loses. The contest seems, as of now, so close that there may well be substantial doubt about who won. Each side will probably accuse the other of cheating. And, lest we forget, just weeks ago the Supreme Court had to decide whether one candidate could even appear on the ballot after some states sought to disqualify him.

It's a lot to handle, especially for an electoral system as old and — as some may say — poorly designed as ours. (That's my position, at least, but the defects of the Electoral College are the topic for another essay.) Despite it all, the good news is that we've been through most of this before. Not all at once, admittedly, but sometimes in more extreme circumstances than those we face now. Our nation has faced each of the concerns listed above during previous presidential elections — sometimes multiple. And America has survived.

That's no reason for complacency. America survived because Americans worked together to ensure it would. And as we'll see, sometimes the cost was terribly high. But there is every reason to think that if we face up to the challenges ahead, and especially if we can put country before party when the moment comes, we will get through this election too.

It's hard to know where to start with the list of concerns I raised above, but let's try the beginning. Never in American history has a current or former president been charged with a crime, but it's not unprecedented for candidates to be charged — or even convicted.

In 1918, socialist leader Eugene V. Debs gave a speech in Canton, Ohio, opposing U.S. participation in World War I and urging resistance to the draft. "You need to know," he told his audience, "that you are fit for something better than slavery and cannon fodder." He was prosecuted for sedition on the grounds that his speech might interfere with military recruitment and — though the speech was constitutionally protected according to the modern view of the First Amendment — he was convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison. The Supreme Court unanimously upheld his conviction, and when Debs went to prison in 1919, violent riots broke out in Cleveland.

All that was prologue, though, to the 1920 presidential election. The Socialist Party nominated Debs, and he campaigned from his prison cell, promising to pardon himself if he won. He didn't win, of course, but he received almost a million votes. If a third-party

candidate had drawn the same percentage of the vote in the 2020 election, they would have received about 6 million votes; a stronger showing than any third-party candidate since Ross Perot in 1992.

So we've seen candidates run for president from prison. And if the people choose a candidate under indictment, or one who's been convicted — or even one, like Debs, who's been incarcerated — that is their choice, and that person becomes president. Debs said that he would pardon himself; that is impossible for crimes under state law, but the pardon is probably unnecessary, at least as far as the office of the presidency is concerned. The president possesses whatever immunities are necessary to allow them to execute the duties of the office, so it's my view as a constitutional law professor that a person who was elected president while incarcerated would be released at least for their presidential term. (The Supreme Court has never considered the question.) Criminal trials might affect voters' views of a candidate, but they could not stop that person from serving.

But what if an elected candidate is too old to serve a full term under the demands of the presidency? Again, our system has survived similar challenges. Eight presidents have died in office — four were assassinated, and four died of natural causes. William Henry Harrison survived only one month into his term, and Horace Greeley — the Liberal Republican candidate in 1872 — died after the election but before the meeting of the Electoral College. His electors voted for other candidates, and those who didn't saw their votes discounted. Dead people cannot be elected president. But death in office, or even death during the election, does not stop the system from functioning.

What if people refuse to accept the result? We witnessed some of that on January 6, 2021, and it was alarming. People worry that history may repeat itself. But January 6 was already history repeating itself — not precisely, but as Mark Twain supposedly said, it rhymes. Past elections have already shown us what happens when losers refuse to concede.

In both 1800 and 1876, as elections came down to the wire, states mobilized their militias in anticipation of violence. And in 1860, eleven states seceded rather than accept Abraham Lincoln as

their leader. That didn't end well, of course. It cost three-quarters of a million American lives to restore the Union. Although the prospect of election-related violence is real, I don't think we face any real threat of secession.

Lincoln provides a good opportunity to address the issue of candidates not being on the ballot. You might have heard, back when people were talking about the pros and cons of excluding candidates, that Abraham Lincoln wasn't on the ballot in 10 of the states that ended up seceding. That's true, sort of. Not a single vote was recorded for him in those states, so no ballot with his name was submitted. But that's not because he was excluded from some official ballot. There were no official state ballots in the 19th century. Instead, parties would distribute ballots with only their candidates, and voters could vote the ticket just by submitting those ballots. The Republican party — aware that Lincoln had no chance in certain states and that people distributing Republican ballots would be in real physical danger — simply didn't distribute their ballots. And so Lincoln received zero votes.

*History gives us reason to be confident in the ultimate resilience of the American project of democratic self-governance, and understanding the mistakes of the past can smooth the path forward. Democracy will last as long as we remain dedicated to it.*

The phenomenon of official state ballots featuring different candidates has also occurred. In fact, it's occurred in every modern election. In 2020, there were three candidates on the Pennsylvania ballot (the Democratic candidate, the Republican candidate, and the Libertarian candidate, Jo Jorgenson), there were six candidates in Michigan (the same three, plus the Green Party, the Constitution Party, and the Natural Law Party), and there were seven in Florida (similar to Michigan, but excluding the Natural Law Party and including the Reform Party and the Party for Socialism and Liberation). So the idea that a candidate might appear on the ballot in some states but not others is nothing to worry about — it happens every time.

What about close elections, confusion, and dirty tricks? We've seen those before too, and on a scale that, thankfully, is unlikely to repeat. In the past, people who cared (maybe too much) about the outcomes of elections have done everything they could to affect those outcomes. They've worked within the law, and they've worked outside the law, and they've even resorted to murder.

In 1800, many state legislatures took the choice of electors away from the people — they replaced the popular vote with selection by state legislatures in Georgia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New Hampshire. The American people prize democracy more today, and it's unlikely any state legislature could get away with seizing the presidential election from the people in a modern election.

In 1868, 1872, and 1876, political violence marred the elections in the aftermath of the Civil War. Thousands of black people and Republicans were killed as the elections neared, and thousands more intimidated away from voting. Ballot boxes were destroyed and votes switched. Despite, or perhaps because of, all the misconduct, the 1876 election was too close to call and several states submitted dueling slates of electors, one pledged to Democrat Samuel Tilden and one to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. The cost of resolving that conflict was the Compromise of 1877, which abandoned the racially integrated governments of the Reconstruction South to overthrow white supremacists. It was a steep price to pay, but America survived.

History gives us reason to be confident in the ultimate resilience of the American project of democratic self-governance, and understanding the mistakes of the past can smooth the path forward. Democracy will last as long as we remain dedicated to it.



**KERMIT ROOSEVELT III** is the David Berger Professor for the Administration of Justice at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School. He is the author of numerous law review articles and several books, most recently *The Nation That Never Was: Reconstructing America's Story*. Before joining the Penn faculty, he clerked for U.S. Supreme Court Justice David Souter. In 2021, he was selected by President Biden to serve on the Presidential Commission on Supreme Court Reform. He is also the author of two novels, *Allegiance* and *In the Shadow of the Law*. Professor Roosevelt is a graduate of Harvard University and Yale Law School.





# GEN Z AND THE POLITICS OF THE FUTURE

---

*A conversation about how Gen Z could change  
the future of civic discourse*

KIMBERLY MCCALL, KARAH SPROUSE, AND MADISON SCHOMER



The CCCU and its institutions have served numerous generations in the classroom. While each generation is unique, the one currently shrouded in the most mystique is Gen Z. The first generation of digital natives, they've grown up in a world of complete connectivity, which has shaped how they see the world and the values they bring as they seek the common good.

But how do members of this generation see the world? What are their values? How are Gen Zers beginning to reshape civic discourse as they graduate college and enter the workforce?

The following conversation tackles these questions and more. Moderated by Associate Dean of Lipscomb University (Nashville, TN) Kimberly McCall, the conversation explores what makes Gen Z unique from other generations, the strengths Gen Zers bring to civic participation, and what barriers they face as they enter the office, the classroom, and the political sphere.

Karah Sprouse is a generational engagement consultant and assistant professor of business at Cumberland University (Lebanon, TN) who has conducted award-winning research on Gen Z. She earned her D.B.A from Liberty University (Lynchburg, VA) where her dissertation focused on Gen Z in the workplace.

Madison Schomer is a senior at Lipscomb University studying law, justice and society, and public relations. She conducted her senior capstone project on the influence of social media campaigning on Gen Z college students.

**Kimberly McCall: Why are you interested in Generation Z?**

**Karah Sprouse:** My interest and curiosity surrounding Gen Z began when they first stepped foot on college campuses everywhere about eight years ago when I was only a couple years into teaching in higher education.

Prior to that, I had worked in the corporate world managing large-scale projects and project teams. However, I began to notice that the business students in my classroom seemed to communicate and be motivated differently than the employees or students I had encountered thus far. I decided to see what research existed about this generation and found out as much as I could about them so that I could better connect with the students in my classroom.

As my students continued to grow up, I discovered there was a lack of workplace-focused studies, which led me to study Gen Z in the workplace for my dissertation in 2021. I wanted to gain a holistic perspective of how Gen Z was assimilating and how older generations were receiving them.

I interviewed generationally diverse teams to gather Gen Z's perspective on their older colleagues and the older generations' observations about their youngest teammates. Fast forward to today, I now share and present this research with organizations across the United States to help them better understand, engage, and empower Gen Z, creating environments where all generations cultivate one another.



**KIMBERLY MCCALL**

*Associate Dean of Academics and Director of Fred D. Gray Institute for Law, Justice & Society, Lipscomb University*



**KARAH SPROUSE**

*Assistant Professor of Business, Cumberland University*



**MADISON SCHOMER**

*Senior Law, Justice & Society, and Public Relations Student, Lipscomb University*

This work is close to my heart because I have seen this generation grow from my classroom to their careers, and I wholeheartedly believe that they have so much to offer!

**Madison Schomer:** My interest in Generation Z and their interaction with social media campaigning emerged from a combination of personal curiosity and academic pursuit. As a member of Gen Z myself, I've always been intrigued by the way my peers and I engage with politics and current events through digital platforms that have been so widely accessible to us for most of our lives.

During an election year, I noticed a surge in social media campaigning efforts targeted specifically at Gen Z voters. This phenomenon piqued my interest and led me to question the impact of these campaigns on voter turnout among my generation. Eager to explore this further, I sought out opportunities to conduct research under the guidance of professors at Lipscomb University.

Through my research project, I delved into the intricacies of social media campaigning, its ethics, and its influence on Gen Z voter behavior. This experience not only deepened my understanding of my generation's unique characteristics but also reinforced my belief in our potential to effect change through civic engagement.

**McCall: How can our academic communities foster better political discussion with our Gen Z members? Have you observed any specific examples?**

**Sprouse:** Academic communities can foster better political discussion with Gen Z students by creating classroom and other organizational environments that foster connection and trust. While older generations tend to observe certain formalities in their workplace and classroom communication, Gen Z commonly communicates in a more relaxed, casual manner.

Gen Z interview participants explained that they do not understand why older generations act in a "suit and tie" manner which, from their perspective, hinders authentic and honest connection. Gen Z deeply desires to understand and connect with others, pushing past surface-level interactions with both leaders and peers. Without this personal connection, they tend to distrust organizations and figures. For Gen Z, frequent, informal, and genuine interaction with their professors, other leaders, and fellow students helps create an environment where they feel safe to engage in challenging conversations.

Gen Z is also more comfortable with conflict than older generations. In my research, Gen Z participants commonly discussed the importance of getting to the

root of conflict by deeply understanding the other person or group's perspective. This may mean that conversations get emotional and difficult, but Gen Z feels it is necessary for both parties to be genuinely heard and understood.

Academic communities can also foster better political discussion with Gen Z students by helping them understand the impact of such discussions. Gen Z wants to know that their input matters! They do their best when they believe that those around them truly value their perspective and will implement it, and when they have the opportunity to offer a fresh and different perspective. They become quickly disengaged when they feel like they are being asked to share their input and it is not valued, or that it is an exercise to check a box.

Lastly, Gen Z embodies a more diverse and inclusive mindset than ever before! Inclusivity and diversity have become increasingly valuable among this age group. Therefore, professors and other leaders need to be especially mindful of their students' respect and empathy for those who are different from them when facilitating challenging conversations.

**Schomer:** Academic communities can foster better political discussion with Gen Z by prioritizing a posture of care and empathy.

**"Gen Zers bring notable strengths to this conversation, particularly our eagerness to learn and our creative problem-solving abilities. Growing up with unprecedented access to media from a young age broadened our perspectives and tolerance for diverse viewpoints, which goes beyond any other generation."**

**— Madison Schomer**



While opening the floor to discuss current events is a positive step, it's essential to go beyond surface-level discussions. Community leaders and educators should encourage students to explore deeper questions about their beliefs and engage critically with opposing viewpoints. By asking hard questions and examining the best arguments from all sides of the political spectrum, academic settings can cultivate an environment that promotes understanding, empathy, and respectful dialogue.

For instance, I've observed professors who incorporate structured debates into their classes, encouraging students to research and defend diverse perspectives on contentious issues. These experiences not only deepen students' understanding of complex topics but also foster the development of critical thinking skills and the ability to engage constructively in political discourse.

**McCall:** What particular strengths does Gen Z bring to the conversation?

**Sprouse:** Gen Z has grown up as global citizens. They have never known a world without smartphones and easily accessible Wi-Fi, which has allowed them to be connected 24/7 all over the world. Gen Z is likely to know their peers in other countries. Older generations might have had a pen pal or two from another country, but Gen Z has always been able to personally interact with anyone, anywhere.

This has led them to be the most globally connected generation to date, with a genuine concern for others and an appreciation for diversity that outpaces any other generation. Because of their connectedness, Gen Z is extremely empathetic and cause-oriented. They passionately seek solutions to help others. This is one of Gen Z's greatest attributes!

My research also fully supports Madison's points on Gen Z's creative problem-solving skills, which I agree is a major strength of this generation. Gen Z is very pragmatic and self-sufficient. They have been accustomed to finding clever solutions and processes on their own. When they have the space to be creative, they can provide fresh perspectives and effective solutions.

**Schomer:** Gen Zers bring notable strengths to this conversation, particularly our eagerness to learn and our creative problem-solving abilities. Growing up with unprecedented access to media from a young age broadened our perspectives and tolerance for diverse viewpoints, which goes beyond any other generation.

We're adept at connecting with information from around the world, which has instilled in us a sense of empathy and a willingness to advocate for those leading lives much different from our own. This global awareness uniquely positions us to engage in meaningful dialogue and address complex issues with innovative solutions. This willingness to break down social barriers will be critical for the future of our world.

**McCall:** What obstacles to civic participation and political discourse will Gen Z need help overcoming? What solutions might be feasible to alleviate these barriers in our academic communities?

**Sprouse:** Gen Z is the first generation with access to information in a real-time manner. Gen Z has never known a world where they couldn't just "Google" or, better yet, "YouTube" the answer to anything. They can even just ask Alexa!

However, while they can find an answer to almost any question imaginable, they sometimes need guidance in disseminating, interpreting, and applying information. As with any generation, Gen Z can richly benefit from the experience and wisdom of older colleagues and leaders as they continue to navigate civic participation and political discourse as well as their academic, professional, and other life pursuits.

Another obstacle Gen Z faces is their tendency to become apathetic when they feel like their voice is not being heard or respected or when they do not perceive that their actions will be impactful. Some recent research suggests that Gen Z feels some apathy toward voting in this year's presidential election because they feel like they do not have a candidate to actually believe in and instead have to choose who they disagree with the least.

While Gen Z's desire to be impactful is one of their best qualities, it can also be an obstacle when they have unrealistic expectations or do not understand how their actions are being valued, particularly when they cannot see immediate results. Gen Z has grown up in a world where so much happens almost instantaneously, so they may disengage before there has been ample time for them to learn enough or act enough to see positive change come to fruition.

**Schomer:** Gen Z faces many obstacles to civic participation and political discourse, such as online algorithms, political echo chambers, and a lack of knowledge about the civic process, such as voting procedures. My peers desire to be involved in political discourse and the civic process but are unsure where to start or if they "know enough" to be hypothetically invited to the table.

At Lipscomb University, initiatives like our Election Hub provide essential resources to educate students and facilitate their participation in the democratic process. By promoting

media literacy, fostering civil dialogue, and offering practical guidance, academic communities can empower Gen Z to overcome these barriers and engage meaningfully in political discourse and civic participation.

**McCall:** How do you predict that the Generation Z voter group might change politics and political discourse in the future?

**Sprouse:** While my research did not specifically address Gen Z's political influence, I cannot help but root for them with their sense of empathy and willingness to advocate for those leading much different lives than their own.

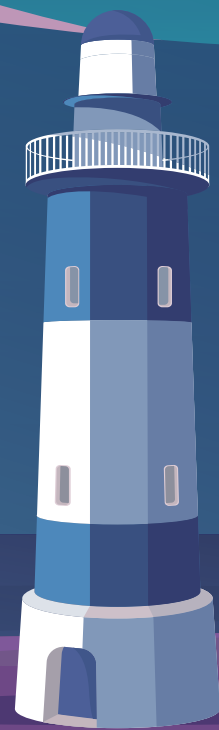
Gen Z holds themselves as well as organizations of all shapes and sizes accountable for helping others and making the world a better place. This generation's passion for helping others combined with their global connectedness cannot help but be a powerful influence on politics in the future. 🗳️

**"Gen Z deeply desires to understand and connect with those around them and push past surface-level interactions with both leaders and peers."**  
— Karah Sprouse





# STEWARDING OUR CALL TO THE "MIDDLE SPACE"



An Interview with Shirley Mullen on  
*Claiming the Courageous Middle*

As our nation grows more polarized, the damaging effects invade even our most sacred spaces. With competing ideologies pushing and pulling Americans to opposing sides, finding common ground is an act of courage. President emerita of Houghton University and author, Shirley Mullen, calls this space of exercising humility and seeking truth on both sides the “courageous middle.”

Dr. Shirley A. Mullen has served the students of CCCU institutions for four decades, first in residence life at Bethel (St. Paul, MN), then as a professor at Westmont (Santa Barbara, CA), and finally as president at Houghton (Caneadea, NY). Growing out of her academic preparation in the fields of history and philosophy, she seeks to cultivate in each student a boldness for God’s calling in service to the common good.

This same calling led her to author *Claiming the Courageous Middle: Daring to Live and Work Together for a More Hopeful Future*. In her book, Dr. Mullen explores how embracing this middle ground can help us navigate a polarized nation and find truth amidst chaos.

Jonathan P. Schimpf, the CCCU’s government relations fellow and a graduate of Covenant College, interviewed Dr. Mullen about her new book, which was published on April 16, 2024.

**Jonathan Schimpf:** Can you remember when you knew you needed to write this book?

**Shirley Mullen:** The notion of the “courageous middle” came to me in 2012 as I realized how the Wesleyan tradition of Houghton College did not allow us to fit into either the “right” or the “left” of the growing polarization in our society. Our heritage of commitment to both concerns of personal wholeness and biblical justice required us to join in dialogue with those on both wings of the political spectrum.

Out of this realization, I came to see the particular calling that rests on us to be agents of active hospitality in a middle space — hosting conversations of “translation” and “bridge-building” that allow those on either pole to see each other as fellow human beings and not enemies or abstractions. Ultimately, the hope is that these conversations lead to imaginative action for the common good that would not happen as long as the two sides remain entrenched in their self-contained framing of reality.

While the initial notion of the “courageous middle” grew out of the Wesleyan context, I soon came to understand that it also applied more broadly to the work of Christian higher education. As believers who are entrusted with the tools of higher education, we also bridge aspects of the current polarization within our culture.

Various members of the Houghton community asked me to develop more fully the notion of what it would mean to be a college of the “courageous middle” — not so much that we would always lead with that phrase, but that we would operate with that stance. But the catalyst that resulted in my decision to embark on the project came from someone in the broader evangelical world with whom I happened to be speaking about this notion. He said, “You have to write on this,” and even went to the trouble of determining whether the term had already been used on the Internet. I credit this person — and he knows who he is — with my taking on the challenge to write.



**DR. SHIRLEY A. MULLEN**  
President Emerita,  
Houghton University



**JONATHAN P. SCHIMPF**  
CCCU Government Relations Fellow,  
Graduate of Covenant College



**Schimpf:** Can you discuss any pushback to the ideas in the book and how you navigated them?

**Mullen:** The toughest aspect is unquestionably the word “middle.” The “middle” is often viewed as a position of timidity, intellectual and moral confusion, inaction, and a lack of courage. We also have such powerful passages as the text in Revelation 3 that remind us about the spiritual dangers of “lukewarmness.” Both as an American culture and as a Christian subculture, we tend to associate “taking a stand” with choosing one side or the other. Even to advocate listening to the other side seems as if we are “going down the slippery slope” to unacceptable compromise.

We are not trained well in bringing together moral and spiritual conviction with either intellectual or moral complexity. We do not have well-honed skills in holding seemingly incompatible goods or values in tension. For fear of being viewed as wishy-washy, we often do not hold space for enlarging our understanding of a topic around which we have convictions; we do not leave room for intellectual curiosity or personal humility, let alone consider our own finiteness and fallenness.

These capacities, which should be the mark of Christians in general, and especially those Christians with the tools of higher education, are often suspect in a time of polarization.

To make it even more complicated, it is absolutely true that someone remaining in “middle space” can be guilty of the stereotypical charges of moral and intellectual irresponsibility. My claim is simply that this middle space need not be a space of spiritual, moral, and intellectual laziness, and can be a place of courage.

**Schimpf:** You write in a way that could draw people from all over the political spectrum. Did you have a specific audience in mind when writing? How do you hope different audiences respond?

**Mullen:** As a lifelong educator in Christian higher education, I have a special burden to pass along the call to steward “middle space” to graduates and students of CCCU institutions. Each of us has been given tools and experiences that empower us to be “bilingual” in the terms of today’s cultural polarization. We have the skills to be translators and interpreters between audiences who would not otherwise have any hope of understanding each other.

Furthermore, it is almost inevitable that we would know people on both sides of the political spectrum and would find ourselves not quite fitting on either side. That is, as graduates of CCCU institutions, we often find ourselves already in the “middle space.” It then becomes a question of how we steward this space, whether we, for example, hide the complexity of our own stories or draw on these complexities for God’s redemptive purposes.

So, I wrote with the audience of CCCU students and graduates in mind. But the more I speak with individuals, the more I see the potential value of the book for group discussions in adult education classes within churches. I have even had someone suggest that the book might be helpful to those outside the conservative Christian world who want to understand more fully how to interact with thoughtful conservative Christians.

**Schimpf:** What steps would you recommend to others called to work in higher education that could foster a spirit of conviction rather than passive timidity on their own campuses?

**Mullen:** The first step is to understand one’s own context. No two persons in the “company of the courageous middle” will look exactly alike. The “middle” can be a space in the political world, in the theological world, in the world of intellectual debate in one’s academic discipline, or even in one’s own family.

The two “sides” will also look different depending upon one’s situation. So, if we want to work as an agent of hope and redemptive imagination in “middle space,” we need to listen to the questions that are being asked and observe where an institution or a community is paralyzed by binary polarization.

We need to know our own convictions and be grounded in our own identity as God’s children, both as members of God’s image-bearing human community in Creation, and as members of God’s Kingdom in the story of Redemption. It is from this grounding in our identity that we can listen and learn with humility and invite others into conversation.

Then we need to ask, as individuals or as institutions, what communities do I bridge? Who do I have on both “sides” of an issue? With whom have I built trust on both sides of an issue sufficient to invite them into a difficult conversation with others who might think differently?

“Courageous middle” efforts are more like the work of salt, and light, and yeast. They are powerful agents of change but often remain behind the scenes and out of sight.

**Schimpf:** You discuss the courage of facing the unknown. What does it look like to sit in the spaces of ambiguity? How do you differentiate between humility and complacency?

**Mullen:** This may be the hardest question — how we cultivate the humility to operate as a person of the “courageous middle.”

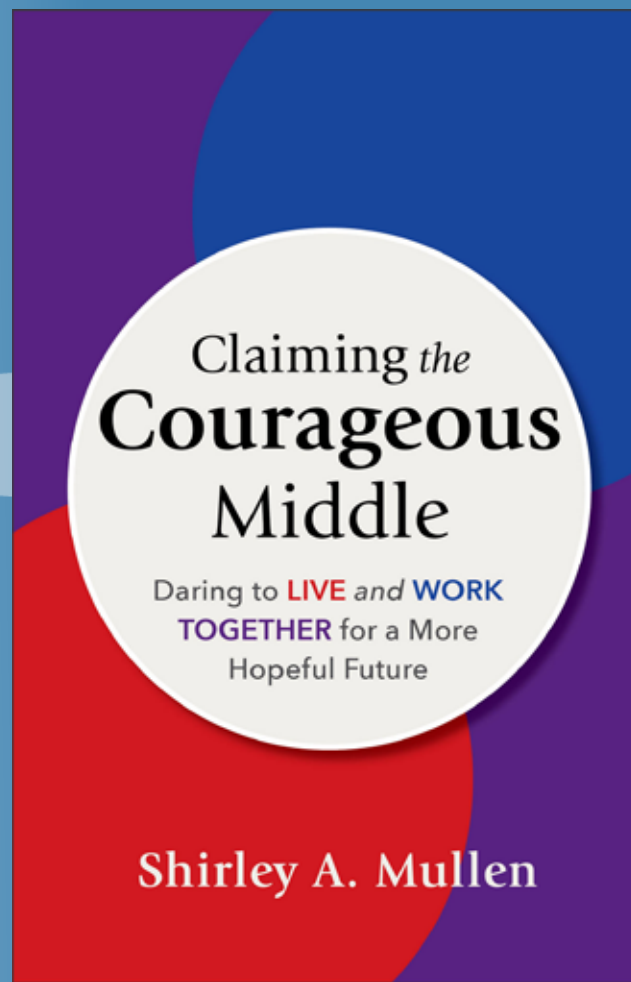
Sometimes humility means that we must dare to speak out, standing by what seems true to us, but also being open to further knowledge or insight. Assuming we have done our homework on an issue, humility certainly does not mean standing back until we have complete or perfect knowledge, even assuming we could know as finite human beings when we had that.

Sometimes humility means holding back, not because we feel intellectually inadequate, nor ashamed of what we must share, but because our audience does not seem ready to receive what we have to share. Speaking too soon can result in squandered trust and limit the opportunity for long-term engagement with a person or audience. We are called to be humble about ourselves and our own reputations but bold about the Truth.

In all this, it is vital to realize that we are not operating on our own or for ourselves. We are working in league with the Holy Spirit, who is at work in the world, always leading us into a fuller understanding of the Truth, and always at work in those with whom we are interacting. Our call is to

***“Courageous middle” efforts are more like the work of salt, and light, and yeast. They are powerful agents of change but often remain behind the scenes and out of sight. — Shirley Mullen***





*If our culture is going to change, it is going to happen because bold individuals have chosen to risk working from a platform of courage and hope rather than fear.*  
— Shirley Mullen

be passionate servants of Jesus Christ, in whom are hidden all “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). When this is our motivation in mediating what we believe, our reputation and the integrity of our character is not in our own hands.

**Schimpf:** You dedicate a portion of the book to the concept of imagining options for moving forward that acknowledge convictions from both sides, prioritizing truth over being right. What would it look like for our culture to reorient itself around truth and engage in civil dialogue? Is significant cultural transformation necessary to return to a place where civil discourse can thrive?

**Mullen:** This is a large and multifaceted question. I certainly do not believe that our culture is suddenly going to become hungry for truth, nor will individuals magically become willing to give up the comfort of wanting to feel that they are “in the right.”

For many reasons — economic, political, intellectual, religious, and cultural — individuals today are desperate for certitude, something they can hang onto when it seems that everything secure in their world is being shaken. It is a time of great fear and uncertainty about whom to trust, all exacerbated by the recent pandemic and multiple centers of international turmoil.

Culture will not change because of any top-down or centralized effort, especially at a time when trust in institutions of any sort is at a low ebb. If our culture is going to change, it is going to happen because bold individuals have chosen to risk working from a platform of courage and hope rather than fear. It will also happen incarnationally as individuals embody hope, humility, and grace in working with each other as concrete human beings, rather than wielding arguments in the form of abstractions.

This will be costly. This is a major theme of the book. And, interestingly, it is one of the first things that most people say to me when speaking of the “courageous middle.” “You will get hit from both sides,” as if they are the first to have thought of this. “Yes, of course” — that is part of the deal. But in this fallen world, all wholeness comes at someone’s cost. Ultimately, that is at the core of the great cosmic exchange we as Christians celebrate at Easter.

**Schimpf:** How can the CCCU continue to embrace the ideals captured in this book as we advocate for our institutions? As a nonpartisan organization, what does it look like to engage in a partisan climate for policies that are inherently political, such as immigration reform and religious liberty?

**Mullen:** The CCCU already embodies many of the principles of this book in the ways it operates as a coalition of individual institutions and as an advocate for this association in the large, diverse world of higher education and an even larger pluralistic culture.

The CCCU serves a fairly wide range of institutions within the spectrum of Christianity. It seeks to cultivate a culture of mutual respect and appreciation, learning and listening within itself,

ensuring that the full range of voices is represented in programming and allowing for open discussion of controversial issues within the membership.

The association also embodies the work of the “courageous middle” as it seeks to interpret the commitments and the contributions of conservative Christianity to the larger world of American higher education and those in the various branches of government.

Furthermore, the CCCU has often found itself serving as a bridge-builder between conservative Christians and larger civil society, affirming both the constitutional legitimacy of conservative Christian values within the overall fabric of American democracy and that our enjoyment of religious freedom is not only for ourselves but part of our overall commitment to the common good.

The CCCU seeks to support the flourishing of American democracy — it also seeks to cultivate the flourishing of all citizens of our civil society, not just those who share our faith commitments.

It has been a privilege to have served the CCCU as a professor, administrator, and board member in various seasons over the past 40 years, and to be a graduate of one of its institutions. I believe more than ever that this sector is a rich and utterly unique treasure for both the church and civil society in this country and around the world. May God continue to enlarge our imagination as an organization, and as individuals within the organization, of what is possible when we dare to steward the tools God has made available to us for the creative and redemptive work of his Kingdom. 🙏



Earn your **Master of Arts** in  
**Higher Education Leadership**

Experience the academic distinction of a nationally ranked Christian university.



**APPLY TODAY**

[messiah.edu/highered](http://messiah.edu/highered)

Online | Flexible | Affordable





A close-up photograph of several hands in business attire carefully assembling a complex mechanism of interlocking gears. The gears are made of a light-colored material, possibly wood or metal, and are mounted on a dark surface. The hands are positioned around the gears, some pointing at them, others touching them, suggesting a collaborative and precise task. The background is dark and out of focus, emphasizing the hands and the gears.

# RESISTING REDUCTIONISM IN A FRAGMENTED AGE

*Weighing the best ways to pursue more holistic flourishing for faculty and students*

A conversation with Matthew Kaemingk, Katie Kresser,  
Justin Ariel Bailey, and David Smith



**C**hristian institutions of higher education seek to do more than just fill their students' heads with facts and figures. Those are important, but the faculty and staff at these institutions are dedicated to shaping the whole of their students — helping them integrate their faith into their academics, family life, communities, personal interests, and more.

That can be difficult within a culture that constantly reduces people to one facet of their identity, narrows abstract outcomes to sole measurements, and confines complex concepts like flourishing to a single, material definition. That's why this year, for their 10th annual conference on teaching and learning, the Kuyers Institute is teaming up with the International Network for Christian Higher Education (INCHE) and the de Vries Institute for Global Faculty Development to ask, "How do we honor the coherence of the Christian faith and life in teaching, learning, scholarship, and service in a reductionist age?"

The conference, which takes place from October 10 through October 12 at Calvin University (Grand Rapids, MI), is currently accepting paper proposals until June 14. To highlight the conference and its theme — integrated education in a reductionist age — Kuyers Institute Director David I. Smith spoke with plenary speakers Matthew Kaemingk, Katie Kresser, and Justin Ariel Bailey about the pressures reductionism places on students and teachers, ways to resist those pressures, and where to find hope that we can overcome reductionism in pursuit of more holistic flourishing.

Dr. Matthew Kaemingk is the Richard John Mouw Assistant Professor of Faith and Public Life at Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, CA).

Dr. Katie Kresser is a professor of art history and visual studies at Seattle Pacific University (Seattle, WA).

Dr. Justin Ariel Bailey is associate professor and chair of the theological department at Dordt University (Sioux Center, IA).

**Dr. David I. Smith:** Our conference theme highlights a range of pressures that push us toward reducing education to some limited facet. Where do you see the most danger? Which of the various stresses on education most has your attention right now?

**Dr. Matthew Kaemingk:** There are, of course, many different cultural forces contributing to educational reductionism in our world today. For the moment, I will limit myself to four which are currently top of mind.

First, economics. Educators are being forced to narrowly focus their educational goals toward equipping students for lives of economic power and progress. According to this reductionism, the "successful" graduate is the one who can achieve economic independence.

Second, measurement. While a powerful educational experience involves thousands of intangible, imperceptible, and unmeasurable elements, educators are increasingly forced to measure, notate, and evaluate their educational outcomes using numbers, graphs, and piles of administrative data. Empowering educators to lead with imagination, relationality, agility, and a variety of soft skills is being lost in the name of measurement.

Third, religiosity. In the realm of Christian education, pedagogical goals can become reduced to mere religious recitation. Here the "successful" graduate is measured by their ability to recite a selected canon of Bible verses, church history figures, and Christian doctrines. Rather than introducing them to a complex Christian imagination and way of thinking, being, and feeling in the world, the faith is reduced to a cognitive mastery of facts and doctrine. And this leads us to the fourth reductionism.

Fourth, mastery. Here education is reduced to a command over knowledge. Herein the "successful" graduate is the one who can exercise dominion over the intellectual life; they are a steward of informational power. With this reductionism students fail to learn how to relate to knowledge with a posture of service, reconciliation, wonder, and imagination.

**Dr. Katie Kresser:** As I write this, I think about all the responsibilities I have to fulfill in the next week, including work responsibilities, church commitments, managing my kids' extracurricular activities, and trying to stay in relationship with people I care about... not to mention doing academic writing and research! I'm pulled in so many directions that I want a reductive shortcut for answering this question right now!

The availability of desirable "goods" out there today means we're all trying to do a lot of things shallowly, myself included. I know my students are in this boat, too. They have a sport or consuming hobby. They have a job. They have an internship. They have a demanding, carefully curated (and, of course, reductive) social media identity they have to maintain. And increasingly, they have heavy family commitments. There is simply no time to do anything properly — to just soak with something and let it nourish you. The very idea is almost absurd.

There's also FOMO (fear of missing out), and just the extreme chaos of the times in terms of purpose and priorities. In fact, the FOMO and the chaos work together. When you don't have your priorities straight, "fear of missing out" becomes a lot more intense. The thing you're neglecting could be the one mysterious thing you deeply, existentially needed!

In a climate like this, to deeply invest in something is risky. Being attentive in a classroom, instead of frantically (but discreetly) multitasking on your various devices, feels like a bad investment. The threads of your whole world — the whole world — are coming loose, and you have to

hold onto as many of them as tightly as you can for as long as you can, at every moment. Otherwise, it all unravels.

Sadly, one way to reach these overcommitted students is through reductionism — waving your arms and saying something simply and loudly so people sit up and pay attention. The reductive is easy. It smacks you in the face with something immediately comprehensible and actionable. It doesn't feel as risky as the pedagogical "soak," because the mental effort it requires is minimal and the payoff is quick.

Thus, education becomes like everything else in our culture: something to check off so you can say "I've done that," even while you quickly move on to the next thing. And teachers — mindful of how busy their students are, and of how much debt their students are racking up — get swept up in the transactional flow.

The state of being I'm describing has emerged from a lot of complex causes: a centuries-old, "modernist" idea that you can apply assembly-line logic to human development; the breakdown of families and institutions; the overwhelming marketplace for goods and information; the rising cost of higher education; the easy availability of addictive time-wasters and distractions (both virtual and physical); and a decline in social skills that makes young people unable to effectively connect and contribute, among other things.

But most of all, I think it's a lack of clear purpose, of trustworthy values. We are "all dressed up with nowhere to go." There are so many choices, so many options, and no trusted wisdom for discerning how to choose.

**Dr. Justin Ariel Bailey:** Not long ago, when discussing a controversial topic, I had a student say, in all seriousness, "I don't know what that is, but I know I'm against it!" I worry a bit about this anti-intellectual sentiment, but I'm more worried that the educational spaces where we give patient attention to complex issues are shrinking.

Many of my students are so afraid of saying the wrong thing that they are silent in the moments where they need to learn how to speak. To use language from John Palfrey, in the effort to make safe spaces, we have neglected to cultivate brave spaces, where ideas can be handled responsibly.

**Smith:** What is one resource within the Christian faith that might help us resist reductionism and push for "holistic pursuit of student and teacher flourishing?"

**Kaemingk:** I will be speaking at the conference on our need for a more multifaceted Christian understanding of educational flourishing. The primary resource Christians have for this is obviously scripture. Therein we find a multifaceted understanding of creation, human persons, and Christ himself. All three of these elements stubbornly resist simplistic reductionism throughout scripture. Scripture simply will not allow us to reduce them.

**Kresser:** The more than two-millennia-long Christian tradition has repeatedly emphasized the necessity to "be in the world but not of it." Jesus and his disciples, and later the first apostles, owned nothing and moved independently from place to place. Many of the great saints of the first Christian centuries left the chaotic cities of the late pagan world and founded monasteries.

About a millennium later, St. Francis of Assisi renounced his family fortune to become a wandering preacher. But there is a stream in Christian culture that pushes back against that separationism — maybe especially in American Christian culture. Seattle Pacific University (Seattle, WA) had a longtime tagline that went, "engage the culture, change the world." A lot of folks at SPU had a problem with that tagline that went, "engage the culture, change the world." A lot of folks at SPU had a problem with that tagline because it seemed to suggest that "the culture" was a thing separate from both the university and the Christian community.

Why, they wonder, can't the university be part of "the culture" — in fact, be a leading element within the culture? Why did the (Christian) university have to sit apart from "the culture" and seem to judge it from the outside? Isn't "all truth God's truth"? So shouldn't the Christian university be at the center of whatever "works," whatever is innovative, whatever is influential? At the very least, the posture of sitting outside "the culture" seemed dreary and uncool.



*When the pressures around you are so big, loud, violent, omnipresent, insistent, confident, and unavoidable, you have to get free of them. You have to figure out how to disentangle yourself. Only then can you walk freely. Only then can you see, think, and choose freely.*

— Dr. Katie Kresser



I think what we're realizing today, though, is that Christian asceticism by which I mean the type of come-outism exemplified by the early apostles, the desert mothers and fathers, and mendicant preachers like Francis of Assisi — had nothing to do with being dreary and judgmental. It was all about freedom. When the pressures around you are so big, loud, violent, omnipresent, insistent, confident, and unavoidable, you have to get free of them. You have to figure out how to disentangle yourself. Only then can you walk freely. Only then can you see, think, and choose freely.

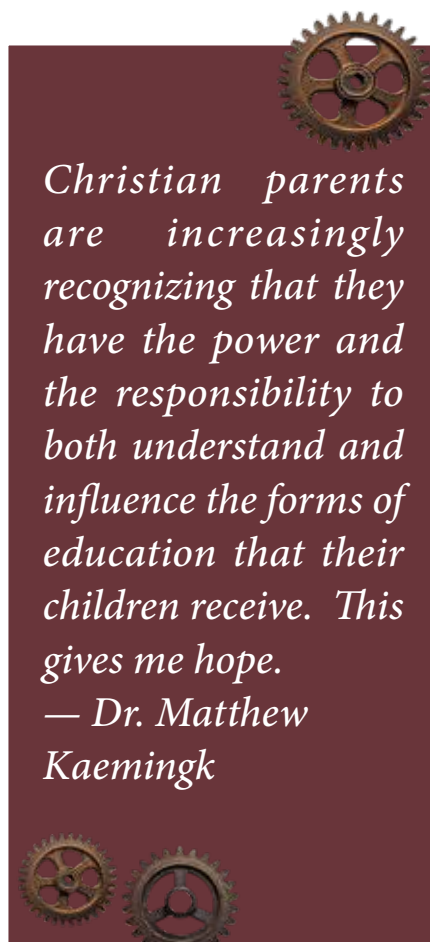
Today, we are not free. We are so inundated by demands, temptations, implicit expectations, and threats (veiled or overt, social or physical) that we have absolutely lost our spiritual freedom. From a spiritual perspective, we can't tell up from down, left from right. We are trying to hear the "still small voice" of God in what amounts to a hurricane plus a rock concert plus a street brawl plus a semi-violent political rally.

We have to get out. Like Jesus, the apostles, the desert mothers and fathers, and the medieval mendicants, we have to find a way to get out and get free. This doesn't mean we have to literally wander off into the desert. But it does mean we have to be intentional and sacrificial, drastically limiting what we consume (both in terms of goods and information) and seeking time to be silent before God. Whatever it takes to find silence, we have to do it. And then we have to grapple with what the silence shows us about our compulsions, our fears, and our wounds in order to find an even deeper freedom.

**Bailey:** I would point to the biblical vision of what it means to be human, which is irreducible to power dynamics, biology, economics, or any other aspect. I like the way Andy Crouch puts it, based on the Shema: "Every human person is a heart-soul-mind-strength complex designed for love." A technological society tends toward reductive visions of humanity, and if we don't continually work to rehumanize education, our work will increasingly feel like a series of transactions. We need to work to keep this holistic vision at the center as best as we can.

**Smith:** What is one concrete practice that might help us live out the "holistic pursuit of student and teacher flourishing"?

**Kaemingk:** I would argue that one of the best practices available to Christian students and educators to resist the forces of reductionism is that of wonder. Cultivating a curious awe for the multifaceted beauty of the world, its complex suffering and groaning, and all of the pluriform ways in which God is moving. This is one of our best communal weapons, wonder.



*Christian parents are increasingly recognizing that they have the power and the responsibility to both understand and influence the forms of education that their children receive. This gives me hope.*  
— Dr. Matthew Kaemingk

**Kresser:** First, I think it's good to toss the syllabus sometimes and just check in with people and see how they're doing. I do this in the classroom, as a group (while being wise about people's sensitivities). When you hear a classmate's personal story, you're likely to quit sneaking glances at your device. A space opens up that attracts hearts eager for connection. And then moving forward, when course content gets folded back in,

you're likely to care more about how your peers are responding to that content. An environment of attentiveness and respect is fostered, along with openness to how the course content impacts people's lives.

Second, I also think it's good to get out of the classroom and go on field trips, even if they're just walks. These kinds of activities can break up stale patterns (uncoupling people who always sit next to each other, for example, or silencing that one person who always talks from the front row).

By creating a new setting in which people can move and flow, the field trip can help some students feel more emboldened to participate in ways they haven't before. Maybe a student walks next to someone they've never talked to. Maybe the sunny day makes a shy kid feel like saying something for once. Personalities unfurl and people begin to see each other differently.

**Bailey:** The practice I will select is pilgrimage. The idol of efficiency compels us to get more done, faster. Efficiency has its place, but an efficient institution is not always an effective one, especially if its mission is defined in terms of holistic formation and service. And many of the most important Christian practices move us towards doing less, more slowly.

Pilgrimage is just this sort of practice. Not long ago, a group of our faculty went on a pilgrimage to visit and learn from one of the elder statesmen of our tradition, Dr. Richard Mouw. We intentionally tried to create a shared experience that would require something from us intellectually, physically, emotionally, and relationally. It required faulty bandwidth to reimagine professional development, and institutional support to find funding for it. But it was the most meaningful professional development experience I've ever had.

**Smith:** What gives you hope for the future of Christian teaching and learning?

**Kaemingk:** Christians in North America are starting to realize that there is no such thing as a spiritually neutral or agnostic form of public education. Every educational

system is shot through with moral commitments, spiritual values, and a set of values, priorities, and commitments that drive them. Every system has an "ideal graduate" they are trying to form. Christian parents are increasingly recognizing that they have the power and the responsibility to both understand and influence the forms of education that their children receive. This gives me hope.

**Kresser:** The educational landscape can't continue as it is. I think people at universities everywhere — teachers and students, religious and secular, wealthy and belt-tightening — are unhappy. As particular knowledge sets and skill sets become more easily acquirable through the internet (and just as easily pushed into obsolescence), and as utopian theoretical structures continue to change through ever-more-disillusioning boom-bust cycles, the nature of higher education — of all education — is going to have to change.

Our digital-native students are good at picking up technical skills and trendy concepts, but they are not socially confident, they don't have a healthy respect for institutional structures of delegation and mutual accountability, and they don't have a driving sense of purpose. This is a recipe for civilizational collapse.

Moving forward, I think there is going to be a tremendous need for ever-more character development in educational spaces. Not as regards believing the right things, necessarily, but simply as regards being a responsible person in the world. This includes exercising self-discipline. Respecting others and honoring agreements with them. Following through on commitments even when the going gets rough. And above all, achieving freedom — from FOMO, from the addictive lures surrounding us everywhere, from the ego-mangling torture chamber of social media, and from the constant goad to "click and buy."

Educational institutions need to be free spaces. And in that sense, maybe they need to be almost monastic spaces. Only someone who has achieved a measure of inner freedom can actually go out and truly "engage the culture and change the world."

**Bailey:** This line from the old hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," comes to mind: "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing." My hope is that God has not abandoned his creation to corruption but continues to be present and active; He is making all things new. My hope is that despite all the ways that we try to reduce ourselves, there is a creational structure with norms that keep reasserting themselves, pulling us in better directions. If they can help it, healthy humans do not tend to stay long in unhealthy, inhumane structures, and this often leads to reformation and renewal. ♻️



**DR. JUSTIN ARIEL BAILEY**  
Associate Professor and Chair of the Theological Department at Dordt University (Sioux Center, IA)



**DR. KATIE KRESSER**  
Professor of Art History and Visual Studies at Seattle Pacific University (Seattle, WA)



**DR. MATTHEW KAEMINGK**  
Richard John Mouw Assistant Professor of Faith and Public Life at Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, CA)



**DAVID I. SMITH**  
Director of the Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning at Calvin University (Grand Rapids, MI)



# CULTURAL SANCTIFICATION AND CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

By Nathan A. Finn

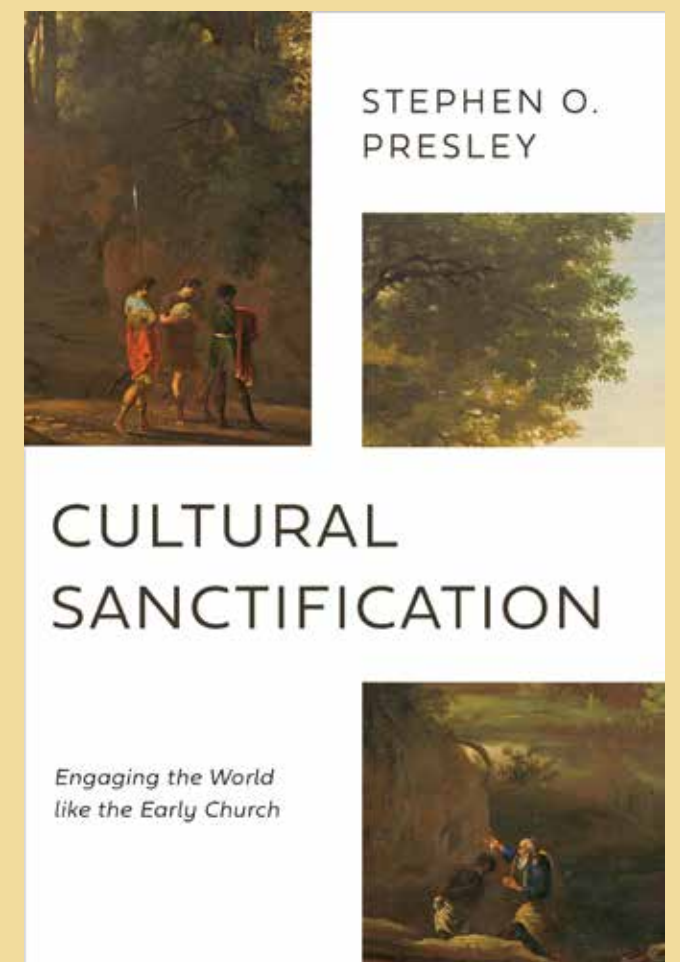
*Cultural Sanctification: Engaging the World Like the Early Church* offers a timely exploration of Christian engagement within a post-Christian context. In the book, Stephen O. Presley, Ph.D., Senior Fellow for Religion and Public Life at the Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy, advocates for a nuanced approach to cultural engagement, promoting a model of cultural sanctification which, rather than retreating, warring, or accommodating, encourages Christians to engage with their culture in a manner that pursues sanctification while acknowledging the intrinsic forms and features of their contemporary environment.

In his review, Nathan A. Finn, Ph.D., underscores the book's significant contribution to understanding Christian cultural engagement in a time marked by profound ethical shifts and the erosion of traditional Christian values. Finn evaluates the implications of Presley's book for Christian higher education and broader societal engagement.

In the contemporary West, public perception of Christianity has declined significantly over the past generation. Many people, including a growing number of cultural elites, believe Christianity is both intellectually deficient and morally bankrupt. Ethical sensibilities, once shaped deeply by Christian virtues, increasingly lack grounding beyond individual preference. Concerns about politically engaged Christians are legion, especially those who affirm traditionalist positions on contested ethical issues.

Patristics scholar Stephen Presley, a 2001 graduate of Baylor University (Waco, TX), believes Christendom has ended and the West is now post-Christian in its sensibilities. But that is only half the story. The post-Christian world, increasingly divested of Christian cultural influence, echoes the pre-Constantinian world, before such influence was normative. Thus, the challenge facing Christians today isn't modernist religious skepticism but rather postmodern neo-paganism.

In response to neo-paganism, some Christians advocate cultural retreat and others focus upon cultural warfare, while still others simply accommodate cultural shifts. In his new book *Cultural Sanctification: Engaging the World Like the Early*





*Church* (Eerdmans, 2024), Presley commends a model that combines the posture of the pre-Christendom church with the insights of missiologist Andrew Walls. Presley argues, “Cultural sanctification recognizes that Christians are necessarily embedded within their culture and must seek sanctification (both personal and corporate) in a way that draws upon the forms and features of their environment by pursuing virtue” (12).

Presley doesn’t argue for a nostalgic reappropriation of Patristic Christianity, but rather a contextual application of ancient Christian priorities. Unlike the pre-Constantine church, we must contend with the legacy of Christendom. This begins with both grieving the decline of Christian influence in the public square as well as lamenting the many sins and shortcomings associated with Christendom. We must also recognize that, even as we’ve lost ground culturally, we are still blessed with many freedoms — often rooted in Christian reasoning — that the early church never experienced.

Presley commends five postures that characterized the early church. First, he calls for a recommitment to cultivating a Christian identity through the means of a more robust (and perhaps extended) process of conversion, a commitment to catechesis, and the importance of liturgy. Presley believes the contemporary church should recover an emphasis on the Rule of Faith to reinforce sound doctrine and the Way of Life to promote Christian virtue. Irenaeus and the Didache are held up as exemplars of this posture.

Second, he recommends a rethinking of Christian political theology in line with the early church. This includes three core assumptions: “a firm conviction in divine transcendence and providence, a belief that God granted political authority to certain

earthly rulers, and an active citizenship that proceeded from political dualism” (58). Our devotion to God matters more than our programs for cultural transformation, and thus should be at the heart of our political witness. Polycarp, Clement, Tertullian, and the Epistle to Diognetus serve as role models for this posture.

Presley next commends the early church’s understanding of public theology, which originated from a position of cultural weakness and focused upon apologetics and ultimately evangelism. Patristic intellectuals such as Justin Martyr and especially Origen critiqued pagan philosophy and ethics, defended the uniqueness of the Christian gospel, and demonstrated how the latter was morally praiseworthy and contributed to authentic human flourishing. Apologists appealed to unbelieving minds in order to till the soil of unregenerate hearts.

The public life of the early church evidenced in their ethics and activities comprises a fourth aspect of cultural sanctification. Upon baptism, believers had to learn to navigate the pagan world while pursuing personal holiness and devotion to Christ. According to Presley, “They had to undertake a process of resocialization, cultivating a cultural discernment in every aspect of their own spiritual lives” (116). This is where Andrew Walls’s pilgrim principle is on full display as Christians practiced personal ethics committed to personal separation from sinful patterns embedded in the culture while also pursuing a social ethics that benefited their pagan neighbors. To use a more modern phrase, the early church was a counterculture for the common good.

The final posture Presley highlights is the virtue of hope, which was rooted in a kingdom eschatology. Hope was especially important in times of persecution and martyrdom. Early believers

emphasized two themes. First was salvation history, wherein they found their own stories to be in continuity with the grand narrative of scripture.

The second theme was “resurrection and the blessed life that the faithful resurrected would enjoy” (149). Through it all, the early church recognized that present faithfulness anticipated future flourishing, following the return of Christ, the new creation, and eternal life in the presence of God.

*Cultural Sanctification* offers a compelling vision for Christian cultural engagement during a post-Christian era. It avoids the compromises of cultural accommodation, the quietism of cultural retreat, and the pugilism of cultural warfare models. Yet, it also leaves room to acknowledge the presence of common grace in neo-pagan culture, the importance of discerning separation from pagan practices and priorities, and the importance of offering a prophetic critique of pagan worldviews and ethics. While we shouldn’t abandon the best insights of our respective ecclesial

traditions when it comes to the intersection of faith and culture, it’s helpful to also retrieve pre-Christendom voices (as well as anti-Christendom voices, such as the Anabaptists). The Christian intellectual tradition is expansive and diverse, and every part of it belongs to the wider body of Christ.

Christian colleges and universities are in a unique position to embrace the cultural sanctification model as an extension of our respective missions. Presley’s five Patristic postures could be incorporated into existing frameworks of faith-learning integration. The pre-Christendom sensibilities of the cultural sanctification model lend themselves to fruitful dialog with different confessional contexts and ecclesial traditions. The emphasis on human flourishing also intersects with a promising conversation already underway within the Christian academy. For all these reasons, *Cultural Sanctification* would make an excellent choice for either faculty reading groups or upper-level courses on faith and culture.



**"CULTURAL SANCTIFICATION OFFERS A COMPELLING VISION FOR CHRISTIAN CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT DURING A POST-CHRISTIAN ERA. IT AVOIDS THE COMPROMISES OF CULTURAL ACCOMMODATION, THE QUIETISM OF CULTURAL RETREAT, AND THE PUGILISM OF CULTURAL WARFARE MODELS."**

**— NATHAN A. FINN**



**STEPHEN O. PRESLEY**

Stephen is senior fellow for religion and public life at the Center for Religion, Culture, and Democracy and associate professor of church history at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is also the author of *The Intertextual Reception of Genesis 1-3 in Irenaeus of Lyons* as well as numerous articles and essays that look to retrieve ancient wisdom for modern Christians.



**NATHAN A. FINN**

Nathan is professor of faith and culture at North Greenville University, where he also directs the Institute for Transformational Leadership. He serves as co-editor of *Integration: A Journal of Faith and Learning*, is a book review editor for *Christian Higher Education*, and is a senior fellow for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.



# CHRISTIAN LEADERS NEED A NEW STANDARD OF CARE

BY MICHAEL MARTIN

Leading a Christian ministry like a college or university is a high calling. Even when the sun is shining and the wind is at our backs, it is a job that requires strength, stamina, and steadfast reliance on the Lord. That is especially true when the clouds roll in.

I took my post as president of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) in 2020. You learn fast as a senior leader in that environment. Am I right? Everyone is alarmed. Everyone is feeling uncertain. And everyone is looking at you. Everyone: your organization's students, alumni, staff, board — not to mention the community around you. How are you going to guide the institution? How are you going to meet needs and mitigate fears?

When a pandemic — or an election — drives passions high or when a community is in crisis, that is when our organization needs us to stand up and step out with the leadership gifts God has granted us. In fact, this is the exciting calling for a leader at any time. A leader is privileged to care for her or his ministry.

But who is caring for the leader?

## Leader Integrity Undergirds Ministry Trust

The ECFA seal is the gold standard for donors seeking accountable organizations that share their Christian values, and we take our mission of enhancing trust in churches and Christ-serving ministries very seriously. In that spirit, we recently announced a new leadership integrity standard — the most revolutionary update to our accreditation standards in 45 years.

Specifically, we are working to ensure ECFA-accredited organization boards are purposefully coming alongside their organizations' senior leaders to **establish biblical character expectations** and to be **proactive in offering them care**. All the details, including the full commentary and FAQs, are available at [ECFA.org/LeadershipStandard](https://ecfa.org/LeadershipStandard).

The reason for this is very simple. ECFA surveys show that 94 percent of our members believe leader integrity failures are having a negative impact on community and giver trust. In fact, such failures pose one of the greatest financial risks to churches and ministries today.

Leading pastors and presidents too often face intense pressures in isolation, which increases the likelihood of burnout, drop out, and tragic breaches of trust. Those failures have costs. Many are impossible to quantify, but tangible financial consequences often include major unbudgeted expenses and slowed giving. Organizations may then need to cut back programs due to declining finances or even close their doors completely.

## Leader Care Supports Ministry Effectiveness

ECFA's new standard of care is a sensible next step to promoting healthy leadership. Leaders are ultimately responsible for their own health and integrity, but church and ministry boards can help in an environment of strong, Christ-centered governance. We can carry each other's burdens in the spirit of Galatians 6.

I so appreciated Northwest University President Joseph Castleberry's comments on the need for this new standard: "Governing boards have an important role in proactively contributing to the well-being of their CEO in personal, financial, spiritual, and moral dimensions as well as in professional development areas."

President Castleberry knows because his board is already taking steps to support him with intentional care through an established Committee on the President.

CCCU President Shirley Hoogstra, too, had strong words of support. I love how she said, "Staying firm in one's faith is not an individual endeavor but a team sport: people who pray for the leader, who encourage the leader, who stride side by side with the leader." Leaders need someone "who picks the leader up, who asks the leader hard but loving questions."

ECFA's standard undergirds "governance practices that ensure that a leader will be fit in faith and life," she said.

President Hoogstra's allusion to fitness is powerful. We have seen what happens when leaders' health erodes. But imagine where Christian leaders can take their institutions and the communities they serve as they lead from a position of holistic strength.

The time is now for this new standard of care, and I invite you to be part of this integrity movement. Will you join us in supporting healthy leadership and enhancing trust as we reach the world for Christ?

Please learn more by visiting [ECFA.org/LeadershipStandard](https://ecfa.org/LeadershipStandard).



**MICHAEL MARTIN**  
President and CEO, ECFA



# Maintaining trust so ministries can triumph.

ECFA members do incredible work in the name of Christ. As the only accreditation organization helping ministries achieve and maintain a superior level of financial accountability, responsible governance, and trust, ECFA stands beside members as their trust-building partner, assuring donors that their support is going to the right place. Let us help you maintain a trusted reputation so you can focus on reaching the world for Christ.



[ecfa.org](https://ecfa.org)





20 M Street SE Suite 350 | Washington, DC 20003

# IMMERSE YOURSELF IN ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

---

Continuing the faithful tradition of academic excellence at the CCCU's Scholarship & Christianity In Oxford (SCIO).



## STUDY ABROAD IN OXFORD

Encourage your students to enroll now for semester and summer terms.



[www.cccuglobaled.org](http://www.cccuglobaled.org)