



ANDERSON

UNIVERSITY

Commentary on Sexual Identity and Civility

June 28, 2022

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. – Colossians 3:12

Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. – Ephesians 4:15

Today there are diverse opinions held on LGBTQ+ issues by both Christians and non-Christians. This is not an easy subject to discuss in a time of ideological polarization in American culture. Nothing said about this topic will be understood and accepted by all. Indeed, significant disagreements in worldview, perspective, feelings, and opinion exist, yet there are principles upon which civil society is established and that we must continue to practice if we wish for our world to flourish.

While we do not expect this commentary to necessarily change an individual's personal opinions or convictions on these issues, Anderson University believes it is important for students, parents, employees, and interested members of the public to understand the University's biblically based convictions on marriage and human sexuality. We also want everyone to know our heartfelt convictions on pluralism, civility, kindness, and love for all persons. It is perhaps even more significant, no matter one's perspective, to try to understand and appreciate the relationship between these convictions and principles that give Christianity the unique distinction of balancing truth and grace.

Recent events have brought to our attention several misunderstandings regarding our policies and convictions. It is important to make clear that there are different expectations and policies relating to our students, to our faculty, and to our staff. Faculty members are charged with teaching through a traditional Christian perspective and accordingly agree to respect and not undermine the University's Statement of Faith. When a faculty member is unable by conviction or chooses not to do so, the faculty member will be unable to teach in accordance with the University's religious tenets and therefore forfeits his or her opportunity to teach. It is entirely the faculty member's choice. Selective hiring decisions and performance based on a good fit with an institution's religious purpose has always been and still is a sacred duty and normal function of a scripturally grounded Christian university. Students, while still expected to adhere to the University's behavioral policies on sexuality, are not held to the same standard because they are not serving in a teaching or ministry role. **Further, regardless of status, all individuals are protected from harassment based on their sexual identity through Title IX and the University's harassment policies.**

We have also had the opportunity to meet with a group of students seeking clarity on Anderson University's position on these issues and its conduct policies as they relate to sexual identity and campus diversity. We discussed the fact that as an intentionally Christian institution in the South Carolina Baptist tradition, Anderson's view of human sexuality is rooted in and consistent with a traditional interpretation of Scripture. We also talked about the fact that there are members of our campus community who identify as LGBTQ+ and discussed how we should reconcile these two realities in a genuinely Christian manner that expresses our love for one another and for all the members of our family.

Obviously, sexuality is a prominent issue of discussion, debate, and public policy formation today. Few current issues are as important and as divisive as sexuality. Another reality is that many individuals have family and/or friends who are members of the LGBTQ+ community. The University is not insensitive to the important questions and emotional struggles people on all sides of this issue experience.

There are two main points we wish to make clear in this communication:

The **first** point is that since its founding in 1911, Anderson's position on human sexuality and marriage is based on scripture and orthodox biblical teaching. We believe these principles are established by God's Word and supported by the teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As scripture states, we believe that it is God's intention that sex should be shared by one woman and one man in the context of marriage. The

University's Statement of Faith affirms this belief. Kindly and respectfully, it is non-negotiable. We ask and expect all students and employees to respect the University's policies related to sexual expressions and relationships.

The **second** point is that Anderson is a family of biblical truth, faith, and love that has a genuine desire to accept others as human beings. Anderson seeks to be a kind, graceful, and civil academic community in which all are valued and treated respectfully and professionally. Harassment, bullying, and other inappropriate behaviors based on an individual's sexuality do not have a place on our campus or in our community. Every person is God's creation, worthy of the same human dignity and respect God endows to all persons. As such, we ask and expect the members of our entire campus community to treat one another with mature, Christlike love and dignity, even when we may respectfully disagree about human sexuality.

We believe God's truth is uncompromising and God's grace is astonishing. God balances both perfectly. For the rest of us, balancing truth and grace is often exceedingly hard because they are often like strands of DNA running in opposite directions and yet, it is not humanly impossible to balance the two in a Christlike manner (Randy Alcorn, *The Grace and Truth Paradox*.)

As one person expressed, our culture has accepted two huge lies. The first is that if one disagrees with another's lifestyle, that person must be feared or hated. The second is that to love someone means that one must agree with everything that person believes or does. Both are untrue, false assumptions. One doesn't have to compromise convictions to be loving and compassionate.

It should trouble us when someone has been mean or hateful to another human being because of that person's sexual identity. Yet it happens anytime an LGBTQ+ individual is the object of a heartless or disrespectful joke or prank, a rude or uncivil message, or mean-spirited exclusion or isolation. Every person has feelings and everyone deserves to be part of a community filled with friends, kindness, encouragement, and grace. We love all members of our campus community and we want everyone to feel welcome and an integral part of our campus family.

It should, however, not come as a surprise that we ask and expect our students and employees to understand and respect the University's charter to have a religious purpose that is set apart from secular interests and viewpoints. As an intentionally Christian university, it is the University's responsibility to adopt policies that conform to its religious tenets, which are grounded in scripture. Expressions of biblical truth that are shared sincerely, respectfully, and with grace are not intended to be hateful or

condemning and are offered to hopefully be received in the spirit in which they are shared. Speaking the truth in love is about the way truth and love go hand-in-hand. Because we love one another, we must speak the truth. Because we know the truth, we must be people characterized by love.

Society constantly places Anderson and universities like ours in an aggressive tug of war, ideologically speaking. Many people believe what the Bible teaches is true and absolutely accurate, while many others believe it is open to progressive interpretation and qualification. Because we adhere to biblical truth, nurture intellectual honesty, and allow our students a great deal of freedom to be young adults, we are viewed as more conservative by some, and not conservative enough by others. We “get it” (take criticism) from all directions and yet, we are resolved to try our best to be a place of truth AND grace—not one or the other. We also continuously monitor ourselves to make certain that we are in compliance with all laws that pertain to the institution. We are not and do not intend to be legalistic, but we strongly believe it is unreasonable to ask or expect us to compromise scriptural teaching for political or cultural popularity or conformity.

Anderson strives to express love and grace to our LGBTQ+ students in accordance with the teachings of Christ. Anderson has provided LGBTQ+ students with millions of dollars in scarce institutional financial aid and offers all students a competitive education. This will not change. Anderson has also supported and encouraged employees and students who openly love and care for LGBTQ+ individuals. This will not change. Anderson will not allow any student or employee to be harassed. This also will not change. We will continue to explore and consider other ways we can support and love our LGBTQ+ students.

Living in a *community* involves limitations and restrictions. No person is forced to become a member of the Anderson University community. All students enroll and employees choose to work *voluntarily*, fully knowing that Anderson is an intentionally Christian university held together by Scripture, historic Christian tradition, and a commitment to present an active and authentic witness to the person and gospel of Jesus Christ. When one chooses to be a student at Anderson University, by that action that person also agrees to respect and abide by the University’s policies, even if the individual personally disagrees with some policies and the rationale behind them. By enrolling or becoming an employee, individuals subordinate their personal interests with humility and selflessly agree to abide by University policies. That commitment is an indication of personal maturity and sacrifice and is an essential part of community life.

In practice, we observe that most of our LGBTQ+ students are indeed largely understanding, tolerant, and respectful of our religious purpose and religious freedom.

We are grateful for their commitment and contributions to the campus community. Moreover, we love them and want the best for them. We also observe that most of our students, regardless of perspective on this issue, are people of mutual respect, grace, and civility. Yet, we observe that there are always a few individuals in our university community who disagree with and choose to not abide by campus principles and policies, just as there are always a few persons who are unwilling to offer others grace. For these few people who refuse to adhere to our policies, acknowledge our religious purpose and culture, and/or who cannot treat others with basic human dignity, we respectfully suggest that Anderson University may not be their ideal institution of higher learning.

We believe that campus community is strengthened when members:

- Live with integrity.
- Practice confession, forgiveness, and humility.
- Attempt to live in reconciled relationships.
- Accept responsibility for their actions and words.
- Submit to biblical instruction.

Anderson University has become a leading, academically selective institution of choice for those who desire an intellectually rigorous education informed by the Christian faith. As ever-maturing men and women of Anderson University, we do not ask one another to be perfect people or people who agree on every issue, but rather to be people in active pursuit of integrity, growth in intellectual maturity and Christlikeness, in dynamic relationships with the living God and with others in the community.

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