

## **Wesleyan Influence at Anderson University**

### **What does the Christ-centered campus look like in the context of Anderson University?**

While we have often said our Church of God and Wesleyan theological heritage is a wonderful context for doing higher education, our story, and our message has often been unclear to others, and sometimes to us. At times our church has suffered a lack of clarity. This has been true when so much of our clergy history has been marked by a lack of formal theological education and has often expressed views skeptical of the value of education in general.

The Movement, as we like to call our denomination, has been in favor of Holy Spirit leadership and leery of an emphasis on educational standards for ministerial preparation. There still are no educational requirements for ordination, though many states now express a strong preference for a seminary education.

Conversation on the campus about Wesleyan theological issues is often mixed with Anabaptist themes. The blending of these perspectives is the filter through which both the Church of God and Anderson University view our institutional culture. Within a church group born out of anti-denominational and even anti-institutional passions, making clear connections on the historic denominational tree has often left the Movement and the University with a softer voice than her work and influence should have permitted.

## **REVITALIZATION**

The university, caught in this conversation needed to find her way beyond numerous issues, to clarity of mission and identity. In the past 4 or 5 years, we have pursued a process we call Revitalization. This effort has brought a clearer understanding and the basis for BRANDING work we call OUR STORY.

Richard Harrison Bailey (RHB), a highly regarded branding consultant based in Indiana, worked with us to develop what we have called the “We Don’t Believe” campaign. They heard us describe a “NON-CREDAL CREED.” They were right. They fed back to us a list of “We don’t believe” statements lifted from focus groups. Faculty, staff and students added others. The work became a curious set of expressions rather unique for the Christian university. The idea is to lead to the question, “Then what do you believe?” We used the lines on campus, in print media with publications and marketing pieces, on billboards and in regional television ads. Three commercials have been running across certain seasons during the last two years in the Indianapolis market with these themes:

### **Commercial #1:**

We Don’t Believe....

- That excellence comes easily.
- The real world waits until graduation.
- Students can truly learn without service
- Face-to-face mentoring is outdated.

## **Commercial #2:**

We Don't Believe....

- In selling a student a university that is different when they enroll.
- In a campus that is dominated by concrete.
- Professors should be unwilling to learn from their students.
- Tough questions should frighten us.

## **Commercial #3:**

We Don't Believe....

- That our president should have a reserved parking space.
- That all students share the same gifts or challenges.
- That the quest for truth ever ends.
- That faith and science are incompatible.

***Each commercial closed with my single line on camera saying,***

***“We Believe in Christ and We Believe in Our Students.”***

The list of *We Don't Believe* statements continues the conversation....

## **WE DON'T BELIEVE...**

- **That college educations – or college graduates – are manufactured.**
- **That conformity is the goal.**
- **That students start at the same places in their educational journeys – or that they have the same needs, challenges, gifts and talents.**
- **That face-to-face teaching and mentoring by faculty members is outdated or irrelevant.**

- That academic excellence and Christian humility are at odds.
- That students come to us as students only.
- That learning – or faith – is dry, stuffy, or stale.
- That wisdom exists without integrity.
- That “personal responsibility” is a tired cliché.
- That leaders can emerge without the experience of service.
- That giving means losing.
- In the boundaries of artificial conventions.
- That freedom exists without responsibility.

## **A DISTINCTIVE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY STORY**

**Our theme seeks to show the Distinctive Christian university as a place for “true freedom”.**

In our marketing work we have seen the need to make branding deliver appropriate actions and decisions on the part of our prospective students, particularly those who have made application. To achieve this goal we have turned to another consulting firm, **BRAND INNOVATION GROUP (BIG)**, out of Ft. Wayne, IN. who has worked with both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. They have fully embraced the “We don’t believe...” theme as **ARRESTING**. They have brought a fresh marketing focus to this work and are supporting our admissions marketing efforts into next year. The campus has been intrigued by the theme ideas and has continued the conversation.

Some of our faculty have said, “Why are you doubling down” on a negative message that seems to support those who question whether Anderson University is “Christian enough.” BIG responds that what we have been doing has not delivered the growth we have wanted. So we see this theme as a fresh approach that is gaining attention in a unique way and we will see if it delivers the expected and hoped for results.

Some underlying Wesleyan and Church of God heritage concepts that have been in our self-understanding and that inform the way we think of what it means to be a DISTINCTIVE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY include:

- No formal, written creed other than Scripture. “The Bible is our rule of faith, and Christ alone is Lord,” says a heritage hymn.
- No formal or voted membership. “We reach our hand in fellowship to every blood-washed one.” “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47)
- An open search for truth – asking how God may be speaking to us in our times.
- Holy Spirit leadership. Vocation, or a calling is a highly valued premise.
- Holiness as a Christ-honoring piety sometimes thought of as a definite instantaneous experience, or by some, as a progressive process that summarizes one’s growth in Christ, toward perfect love in accord with God’s perfect will.
- Salvation is a cleansing, redeeming gift of God through Christ and an experience of the heart. It is not just a process of settling on the correct beliefs.

- Sin is not the manager of one's life. By God's grace, and the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit, it is possible to experience a perfect love and to live beyond the bondages of sin.

Many of these doctrinal issues have been discussed in writings of gifted and theologically trained scholars of the church and university, including:

- John W.V. Smith
- Merle D. Strege
- Barry L. Callen
- Gilbert Stafford
- James Earl Massey
- Suzie Stanley
- Cheryl J. Sanders

This work often clarified and expanded upon earlier writings around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of D.S. Warner, generally regarded as the founding visionary evangelist of the Church of God and editor of the movement's publishing efforts; and E.E. Byrum, and F.G. Smith, among others.

Across the years our faculty has had sessions, heard papers, and on-going seminars to consider how teaching can be informed by the Wesleyan and Church of God perspective. Some of the most considered advocates for this inclusion into the academic life of the institution were those who came from and continued to worship in a wide range of churches.

So where do we come out in our story? What ideas shape our life and experience—our campus culture?

**It begins with a clear and compelling mission:**

**“The mission of Anderson University is to educate for a life of faith and service in the church and society.”**

**The Anderson University School of Theology mission is “...to form women and men for the ministry of biblical reconciliation.”**

A very important word, with roots in our notion of Holy Spirit leadership is this idea of **DISCOVERY. Christian and Academic Discovery** is our tag line, used in a number of media for several years.

Another theme in the character of both our university and church legacy is the idea of **FREE AND OPEN INQUIRY LEADING TO DISCOVERY**. This notion is tied to questions we are free to consider and to academic freedom.

In Michael Lindsay’s study, *Faith in the Halls of Power*, he indicates that many in the academy have little regard for the integrity and legitimacy of the Christian college because many such colleges require faculty and sometimes students to sign a statement of faith and offers the thought that true scientific inquiry is undermined by a predetermined conclusion implied by apriori faith claims. A free and open inquiry is a part of the church’s long held perspective on a search for all truth, and is reflected in the traditions of the university.

Free and open inquiry has supported a comfort with the scientific method. We have never had an argument with evolution in the creation controversies. At the same time our church members and university scholars hold to a high view of scripture, and would describe the Bible as inspired and authoritative. Many hold to the idea that scriptural truth is found in the story of the biblical narrative.

Metaphorical and poetic sources for meaning, given to us within the varied ways biblical truths are conveyed, along with historical and prophetic expressions, are all sources of truth. More literal and fundamentalist views that insist on commitments to words like “inerrancy”, and “infallibility” have long been outside the views of most faculty on our campus. Biblical criticism has been taught since the 1930’s and our university scholars have contributed to the Revised Standard Version and to articles in the Interpreter’s Bible.

Institutional Values have emerged in these discussions and we have settled on five that collect many other institutional virtues:

Excellence,  
Integrity,  
Servant Leadership,  
Responsibility, and  
Generosity.

These are a balanced part of our vision for the student experience and form curricular development.

Wesleyan and Church of God influences have brought to Anderson University a confidence and clarity to which we can align our efforts and express our nature as a Distinctive Christian University. We can hold these views and share these experiences and remain true to our covenants with the Church of God and with such organizations as the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU).



Free and Open Inquiry sets a tone for diverse views and faith histories both in the faculty and in the student body. Students who might not fit into other Christian universities may find a broader place to live and to learn. While we hold the burden of laying out behavioral and community expectations as serious and absolute, we can meet the standards of our values even as we seek to make them an unavoidable part of the student experience.

Anderson University has been blessed by the rich contributions of those from many faith traditions and denominational perspectives on the campus and from those who come to lecture and preach in our chapel from time to time. The diversity within both the faculty and the student body is experienced as a strength. Many who come from other traditions continue to worship in their churches. And many both understand and articulate this Church of God heritage in their classrooms across the various disciplines.

Our goal is to BE A DISTINCTIVE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY offering superb academic experiences in a Christ-centered campus culture that transforms lives and extends the mission of Christ through a higher education.

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