

COVENANT BETWEEN AUSTIN COLLEGE AND THE SYNOD OF THE SUN OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

Historical Overview

Austin College was founded in 1849 by representatives of the Presbyterian Church and maintained a legal relationship with the Synod and its successors from that date until the mid-1960s. At that time, a redefinition of the legal link between Austin College and the Synod began to evolve. At a meeting of the Board of Trustees in October 1962, the Board considered a proposal that would create a “covenant relationship” between the College and the Synod. As a result of this consideration, a special committee of representatives from the Church and the Trustees reviewed the historical and legal relationship between the two institutions.

In 1966, the Synod approved revisions in the covenant relationship to the College, with the net effect of these changes severing the legal ties between the Presbyterian Church and the Board of Trustees that were reflected in the charter of 1849. It was at this time that the Board of Trustees at Austin College became a self-perpetuating board. At the same time, the Trustees signed a document called the covenant with the Synod that was not legally binding but contained a pledge that the Trustees would “uphold the Christian values of the institution and honor the traditions of Presbyterianism upon which this school rested historically.”

The College continued to maintain a strong commitment to the Church, and during his era of leadership, President John D. Moseley adopted a new slogan, “A College of the Church,” that publicly denoted his commitment to the covenant relationship that he and the Board of Trustees had orchestrated.¹ The College and the Synod in 1982 prepared and agreed upon a document entitled “The Covenant between Austin College and the Synod of the Sun.” This relationship has been articulated through the covenants as they have been revised every six years.

¹ Light T. Cummins, *Austin College: A Sesquicentennial History, 1849-1999*

I. The Nature of the Covenant

A. Definition and Purpose

This Covenant is a continuing agreement between Austin College and the Synod of the Sun to affirm the historic and present relationship in which there is a mutuality of purpose. The term “covenant” is used to express this relationship of mutual commitment. Both the College and the Synod recognize this document as the covenantal agreement describing the primary relationship between the two institutions. It is intended that this Covenant be an expression of the supportive relationship between these two institutions and that other official documents of each institution be consistent with this one.

A covenant statement is needed for several reasons. It is the way in which the College and the Synod affirm mutual trust and concern and assure that each remains steadfast to historic commitments to educational excellence. It brings clarity and precision to the relationship between the College and the Synod. It helps maintain the relationship by providing for regular renewal. It is a means for expressing the relationship between two legally distinct and independent institutions. It can be a vehicle to evaluate the evolution of the relationship and fosters complimentary effectiveness for both parties.

B. Parties to the Covenant and Their Historical Background

The parties to this Covenant are Austin College and the Synod of the Sun of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Austin College came into existence on October 13, 1849, by action of the Presbytery of Brazos, which established Austin College to serve the Presbyterian Church in the field of higher education. The legal basis for the existence of the College, however, is an act of the Texas Legislature on November 22, 1849, granting a Charter directly to the College Trustees. For more than a century, Austin College maintained a significant relationship with the Synod of Texas and later the Synod of Oklahoma (both of the Presbyterian Church in the United States), consciously seeking to relate the Christian faith to the task of providing a liberating education which helps men and women become whole in competence and conscience. In January 1973, the Synod of Texas and Synod of Oklahoma were succeeded by the regional Synod of Red River, encompassing the four former Synods of Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Texas. In June 1983, the Synod of Red River and the Synod of the Sun (of the United Presbyterian Church in

the United States of America) merged to form the Synod of the Sun of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Since 1962, the concept of a covenant has been used to express Austin College's relationship with the Synod of jurisdiction. The College and the Synod have renewed the Covenant every six years to signify their intention to continue to be related because of shared concerns.

II. Responsibilities

A. The Mission of Austin College

Austin College is a private, residential, co-educational college dedicated to educating under-graduate students in the liberal arts and sciences while also offering select pre-professional programs and a graduate teacher education program. Founded by the Presbyterian Church in 1849, Austin College continues its relationship with the church and its commitment to a heritage that values personal growth, justice, community, and service. An Austin College education emphasizes academic excellence, intellectual and personal integrity, and participation in community life. Thus Austin College affirms the importance of

- A community that through its size, diversity, and programs fosters lively intellectual and social interaction among persons of different origins, experiences, beliefs, accomplishments, and goals
- A program that does not discriminate with regard to religion or creed, gender, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, physical disability, age, or economic status
- A faculty that acknowledges teaching, sustained by active commitment to professional growth and development, as its primary responsibility
- A student body of committed learners, actively involved in the programs of the college and in service to the greater community
- A climate of civility and respect that encourages free inquiry and the open expression of ideas
- A non-sectarian education that fosters the exploration and development of values through an awareness of the world's religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions.
- The mission of Austin College is to educate students in the liberal arts and sciences in order to prepare them for rewarding careers and for full, engaged, and meaningful lives.

B. The Mission of the Synod

The Synod of the Sun is a regional body of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) encompassing the eleven presbyteries in Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. As Presbyterians, we understand the nature of God and what God calls us to be and to do as revealed in scripture and interpreted by the historic confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). As Christians, we believe that revelation reaches its fullness in the persona and ministry of Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone of the Church. Guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we recognize the multiform nature of the Church of Jesus Christ as His body and acknowledge ourselves as one part of it.

The Synod of the Sun, remembering the Presbyterian Church's historical commitment to higher education:

- Values its covenantal relationship with colleges and universities within its bounds;
- Supports the colleges and universities in the pursuit of excellence in the intellectual, physical, and spiritual development of their students, faculty, and administration; and
- Endorses the concepts of inclusiveness, diversity, and pluralism in all of life including the life of academic institutions.

C. The Parties and Their Relationship

In order that their missions be performed fully and effectively, Austin College and the Synod of the Sun establish this covenant relationship as the basis for continuing trust, mutual understanding, and future activity. In establishing and fulfilling this Covenant, the College normally acts through its Board of Trustees. The Synod acts upon the recommendation of its Connecting Committee. Each may delegate responsibilities to others. Both the College and the Synod agree that the life of each will be enriched and made more dynamic by understanding that each party has its own role, and that these roles can be strengthened through the mutual exchange of ideas, resources, and support for the mission of the other.

D. Corporate Integrity of Each Party

Austin College and the Synod of the Sun must be separate, legally independent, and mutually responsible entities if the goals and purposes of this Covenant are to be realized. Article Four of the College's Charter states that in the event of the dissolution of Austin College, the residue of assets would revert to the Synod of the

Sun, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), or its successors, to be used for a like educational purpose, and that any change in article Four of the Charter must have the prior approval both of the Synod and of the College. Nothing herein shall amend Article Four of the Charter of the College.

It is expressly agreed that as long as Austin College is a viable educational institution, neither the Synod of the Sun nor any of its Trustees, officers, agents, servants, or employees shall be liable for any of the debts of Austin College; and neither Austin College nor any of its Trustees, officers, agents, servants, or employees shall be liable for any of the debts of the Synod of the Sun or any other obligations or liabilities of the Synod.

Austin College is governed by a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees whose obligation is two-fold: 1) to the Charter with its corporate responsibilities, and 2) to this Covenant.

The *Policy Manual* of the Board of Trustees contains the standards for Trustee selection. In adopting this Covenant, Austin College pledges to continue to include multiple members the Synod of the Sun and the Presbyterian Church (USA) on its Board of Trustees.

A current copy of the College's Charter, Bylaws, and *Policy Manual* of the Board of Trustees shall be on file with the Synod Clerk. Similarly, a current copy of the Standing Rules and Operating Manual of the Synod shall be on file with the President of the College.

E. Review and Renewal Cycle

There shall be a review and, if necessary, revision of the covenant relationship every six years. The Synod and the Board of Trustees of the College shall see that such a review is accomplished through appropriate committees. These committees shall be appointed by the respective entities. Responsibility for approval of any change in the covenant resides with the Board of Trustees and Synod.

The minutes of the Board of Trustees and the independent audit required by accreditation agencies shall be the responsibility of the Board of Trustees. The audits and minutes shall be available for review by the Synod.

III. Mutual Understanding and Commitments

A. Mutual Concern and Support

Both College and Synod shall demonstrate mutual concern and support for one another. The primary expression of mutual concern and support shall involve program relationships between the Synod and the College in which each provides services for the other.

Continuing communication between the College and the Synod should be encouraged and maintained.

B. The Role of the College

The College shall be a resource to the Synod and its constituencies regarding education, the implications of the development of new knowledge, and the related services of that development.

The College is free to solicit funds for both capital and operating expenses from individual Presbyterians and other persons, congregations, presbyteries, trustees, foundations, estates, and any other sources. However, the College will secure from the Synod approval for conducting major capital campaigns in which the Synod might be expected to have a role in the organization and promotion through presbyteries and congregations.

Relevant to the interests of Synod, the College shall maintain a strong chapel program to provide opportunities for worship, for application of faith through service to the community, and for exploring and strengthening faith and values. As part of its formal approval of this Covenant, the Synod authorizes clergy representatives of Austin College to celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in accordance with the *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as part of the Religious Life Program of the College (see especially *Book of Order*, W-2.4012b).

C. The Role of the Synod

The Synod will encourage support of the College by presbyteries, sessions, and individual Presbyterians within its bounds:

1. By presenting to Presbyterian youth the educational opportunities

- available at Austin College;
2. By encouraging use of personnel, students, and facilities of the College to carry out the mission and work of the Synod;
 3. By providing and encouraging financial support;
 4. By encouraging and interpreting planned giving programs;
 5. By interpreting and advocating the role and programs of the College through Synod and General Assembly related foundations and publications; and
 6. By providing direct access to Synod to interpret the work of the College.
 7. By facilitating connections between Austin College and other Synod covenant partners.

The Synod, through its appropriate agencies and committees, shall continually rethink its role in higher education and communicate its concepts, vision, and challenges to the College. The Synod shall continue to support the College, its faculty, students, and administration with its prayers.

D. Authorization of Other Program Relationships

The Synod and the College recognize the advantages of working relationships between the College and other church governing bodies not inconsistent with this Covenant. Such relationships with presbyteries and sessions allow for mutual responsibilities and resources to be identified and exercised at every level, and the College may have Statements of Understanding to implement program relationships with other church governing bodies.

IV. Formal Approval

This document establishes and contains all the terms of the covenant relationship between the Synod of the Sun and Austin College. By formal action, the trustees of the College and the Synod of the Sun adopt this Covenant and pledge themselves to carry out its provisions.

The original Covenant was approved by the Austin College Board of Trustees, November 11-12, 1982; by the General Council of the Synod of Red River and Sun, November 20, 1982; and officially confirmed at the Meeting of the Synod of the Sun on June 28, 1983. The sixth revision was prepared by the Covenant Review Team, Austin College, Sherman, Texas, on February 23, 2018 and was approved by the Austin College Board of Trustees on May 12, 2018 and the Synod of the Sun on March 13, 2018. This Covenant shall be reviewed by the Synod and the College in 2024.

Shelley Hernandez, Moderator
Synod of the Sun

Steven P. O'Day, President
Austin College
