

## The Covenant between Lyon College and the Synod of the Sun, Presbyterian Church (USA)

This covenant is the basis for the commitment of the Synod of the Sun (hereafter, “the Synod”) to Lyon College as a college of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (hereafter, “the Church”). In adopting this covenant, the Synod affirms its commitment to higher education as a part of the Christian mission within its bounds, and thus recognizes an obligation to Lyon.

This covenant is also the basis of Lyon’s commitment to the Synod as the regional governing body of the Church. In adopting this covenant, the Lyon College Board of Trustees (hereafter, “the Board of Trustees”) affirms its commitment to the Church, accepts responsibility for representing the Church in higher education, and thus recognizes an obligation to the Church.

The word “covenant” reminds the Church and Lyon of God’s promises to God’s people. A covenant is an opportunity as well as a commitment. It requires mutual accountability between the covenant parties.

The College and the Church enter this covenant willing to search for particular standards of excellence and to deal with the question of what a church –related college is and why the College makes a difference. The Church and the College need to be sensitive to the particular possibilities of Lyon College to become a creative and faithful representative of the Church and the particular opportunities presented by Lyon College from its own history and development. The historical legacy of Lyon College and all parts of this covenant should be seen in this spirit of covenant. This covenant joins the Church and the College in the spirit of Jesus Christ to strive toward high goals and visions.

### 1. Historical Legacy

Presbyterians founded Lyon College as Arkansas College in 1872. In that same year the College was granted a charter by the State of Arkansas. (The institution changed its name to Lyon College in 1994 to honor the extraordinary service rendered to it by Frank Lyon family of Little Rock.) Lyon, therefore, owes its founding and historical character to the Church, and its authority to educate and to grant degrees to the State. Without the former it would not exist today. Without the latter it would have no legal corporate standing. As the oldest independent institution of higher

education in Arkansas still operating under its original charter, Lyon is a tribute to the early vision of Presbyterians in Arkansas and a living example of the American system of independent higher education.

The essential link between church and state, which gives Lyon its character and its corporate identity, is its Board of Trustees. In associating themselves together under the corporate name of “the Trustees of Arkansas College,” in accordance with an act passed by the Legislature of the State of Arkansas on March 27, 1871 (Act No. XLII, “An Act to incorporate institutions of learning”), the College’s founders applied for and were granted a charter by the Secretary of State of Arkansas. The amended charter provides that the Board of Trustees shall have the power to recommend to the Synod individuals to fill vacancies occurring in its membership. In addition, if at any time the charter becomes void, all of the property, privileges, and powers of the Corporation known as the Board of Trustees of Lyon College shall vest in the Synod.

Throughout its history Lyon has chosen, voluntarily and intentionally, to maintain a vital relationship with the Church at the local church, presbytery, synod and national level. The most tangible symbol of that relationship is the covenant with Synod and the process by which it is re-examined and renewed every five years. As amended by the Board of Trustees on October 26, 1983, and accepted by the Secretary of State of Arkansas, the charter now explicitly states that the “Synod” is the “Synod of the Sun in connection with, and constituting a part of, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).”

## 2. Mission of the College

Lyon College offers a liberal arts education of superior quality in a personalized setting. A selective, independent, undergraduate, residential teaching and learning community affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Lyon encourages the free intellectual inquiry essential to social, ethical and spiritual growth. With a rich scholarly and religious heritage, Lyon develops, in a culture of honor, responsible citizens and leaders committed to continued personal growth and service.

As independent church-related institution of higher learning, Lyon draws on its relationship with the Church to fulfill its obligations to the students it serves. It takes advantage of its independence and its church heritage to commit itself to such Christian values as hope, peace, servanthood, community, and reconciliation. In

accordance with this commitment to Christian values, Lyon seeks to continuously improve its academic and co-curricular programs; is open to students from a variety of economic, social, and cultural backgrounds; and provides generous financial aid to students evincing need. It offers an environment in which Christians of varied backgrounds and persons of other faiths may find encouragement and support for their pursuit of the holy in their lives.

Lyon College intends to remain accredited by all appropriate accrediting bodies. It is committed to creating an environment in which teaching, learning, and intellectual inquiry can flourish; serving the changing needs of its students; fostering excellence and innovation in all facets of its operation; and taking advantage of its location in an area of great natural beauty.

Lyon College shall maintain a vital relationship with the Church at the local church, presbytery, synod, and national level. It emphasizes its receptivity to the concerns of the Church by serving as a resource whenever possible and by:

- a. Representing the Christian gospel to the College community, while remaining hospitable to people of other faiths.
- b. Creating an environment in which individuals may develop deeply-held values; form themselves into a community marked by tolerance, respect, and openness; and become connected to the wider world.
- c. Encouraging racial, gender, cultural, and ethnic diversity among students, faculty, the administration, and the Board of Trustees.

### 3. Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is composed of forty persons. Thirty-three are individuals nominated by the Board's Committee on Trusteeship, approved by the Board, and elected to four-year terms by the Synod. Three are alumni or alumnae of Lyon College who are elected to three-year terms by the Lyon College Alumni Association from a slate of candidates approved by the Committee on Trusteeship. Three are ordained Ministers of the Word and Sacrament who serve within the Presbytery of Arkansas, who are nominated by the Committee on Trusteeship and elected to three-year terms by the Presbytery. The remaining member is the President of the College, who is elected by the Board of Trustees and serves at its pleasure.

By electing the majority of members of the Board of Trustees, the Synod entrusts to the Board the authority and responsibility for the governance and oversight of Lyon College. Upon election, trustees become subject to the laws of the State of Arkansas under which the College's charter was granted. The trustees are understood to be free under the charter and the College's by-laws to exercise their best judgment in the discharge of their duties. Specifically, while the Synod may advise or request the Board of Trustees to take or to refrain from taking a particular action, the Synod cannot require or instruct the Board to do so. The relationship between the two bodies is one of mutual trust.

Trustees will be elected on the basis of their willingness to commit their time, talents, influence, and resources in the service of the College and its mission in church-related independent higher education. A majority of trustees shall be members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and some will be ordained Ministers of the Word and Sacrament. All trustees will be persons of religious commitment, high moral standards, and exemplary character.

#### 4. Board of Church Advocates

The Board of Church Advocates is an advisory board to the president of the College with responsibility for nurturing the relationship between Lyon and institutions of the Church, including the Synod. It is comprised of ordained Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and lay members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The purposes of the Board of Church Advocates are:

- a. To advise the president on issues that are relevant to the College's mission in church-related higher education and its relationship with institutions of the Church.
- b. To interpret and articulate the mission and current priorities of the College to the presbyteries and churches of the Synod, and to serve as ambassadors for the College.

The Board of Church Advocates will meet annually, and will submit an annual written report to appropriate Church agencies and to the Board of Trustees.

#### 5. Covenant review

This covenant shall be reviewed every five years by a covenant review team comprised of representatives appointed by the president of the College and

representatives appointed by the Synod. The College and the Synod will share with the review team such information as it deems necessary to complete its work. The review team will present a written review and evaluation of the current covenant, including any proposed revisions to the covenant, to the Board of Trustees and the Synod for their review and approval. The revised covenant will become effective upon approval by the Board of Trustees and the Synod.

In addition to the regular five-year process, the Board of Trustees or Synod may request a revision of the covenant at any time. Any proposed revisions to the covenant will be presented to the Board of Trustees and the Synod for their review and approval. The revised covenant will become effective upon approval by the Board of Trustees and the Synod.

## 6. Covenant Commitments

In fulfillment of its obligations under this covenant, the Synod:

a. Understand Lyon College to be an expression of the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition in higher education, and thus a part of the mission and program of the Synod; and agrees to continue support of the College by cooperation, communication, and the encouragement of the particular historical legacy and opportunity which are represented by Lyon College.

b. Will encourage the members of the Synod's churches to enroll at Lyon.

c. Will promote Lyon in the following ways:

(1) Publishing an annual feature article in the Presbyterian SUN.

(2) Providing information about the College to each presbytery resource center.

(3) Encouraging the use of the Lyon campus and the resources of the College for Synod- and presbytery- sponsored events.

d. Will provide financial assistance as follows:

(1) Making grants from the Synod's budget each year.

(2) Giving permission to the College to seek wherever it will for individual gifts and students.

(3) Giving permission to the College to initiate proposals for financial support from the particular churches and constituent presbyteries of the Synod in whatever manner the College deems fitting and proper.

(4) Giving permission to the College to make a general approach to the constituency of the Synod in a major capital funds campaign, with prior approval from the Synod.

In fulfillment of its commitments under this covenant, Lyon College will continue to reflect the insights of the Judeo-Christian heritage by:

- a. Providing opportunities for the practice of the Christian faith on its campus through worship, study, and service.
- b. Adhering to the highest moral and ethical standards in its policies and institutional behavior.
- c. Making its personnel available for instruction and leadership to the wider Church.
- d. Providing a theological resource for the wider Church.
- e. Representing and teaching the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition of thought, work, and worship.
- f. Making the College available as a resource for activities of the Church.
- g. Keeping the Synod and all appropriate Church agencies informed of its work and development on a regular basis.
- h. Helping to implement the priorities chosen by the Synod in its planning processes.
- i. Providing an annual report of all Church-related congregational giving upon request.

## 7. Effective date

This covenant shall become effective upon approval by the Board of Trustees and the Synod.

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For the Lyon College Board of  
Trustees For the Synod of the Sun

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## ADDENDUM ONE

### A. THE MISSION OF THE SYNOD OF THE SUN

The purpose of God is fully revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. As Christ's body, the Church is called to proclaim the gospel and, through the power of the Holy Spirit to make disciples, inviting and encouraging people to become followers of Jesus-to grow spiritually, emotionally, and theologically on the journey of faith and faithfulness.

All expressions of the Church called Presbyterian are called to be instruments of God's will. To each there is a particular role, with accompanying responsibilities. The vision of the Synod of the Sun is to be a regional community of Christians who work together across geographic boundaries.

Being a living expression of the Great Ends of the Church is the primary task of all entities of the Church beginning at the congregational level. Presbyteries exist to create and encourage such congregations and to motivate, develop, and support lay and clergy leadership. The presbytery is meant to be a community of interdependent congregations.

The Synod of the Sun seeks to be an agent of mutual ministry among the presbyteries, Presbyterian colleges and seminaries, institutions, agencies, and ministries within the region embracing Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. The goal of the Synod is to facilitate these components to harmonize in ministry. The Synod seeks to proclaim and promote the reign of God in a spirit of ecumenicity.

### B. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH'S HISTORICAL ROLE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The oldest continuous mission of the Presbyterian Church in the United States beyond the congregation is mission in higher education. For the past 264 years (since Presbyterian minister established Log College in 1735) Presbyterians have been engaged in continuous and uninterrupted mission in higher education establishing colleges, academies, and universities.

Presbyterians care about education because we are admonished to love God with our minds. Thus, the church's responsibility is to nurture and equip people of God to do this. The church is involved in higher education to assure education that assists people in becoming faithful persons and responsible citizens.

A basic philosophy of education permeates Presbyterian understanding of a responsible educating community: (1) conviction is an indispensable element in any learning that makes a difference in people's lives; and (2) spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of life as well as encouragement of service to others are necessary components of education. The mission of the PC(USA) is to call higher education communities to provide education which addresses the spiritual as well as intellectual needs of persons, and prepares them to be caring citizens in a complex world.

Presbyterians are committed to transformation of people and societies. Higher education today is a powerful influence in the lives of persons from diverse backgrounds who throughout their lives must learn to cope with a rapidly changing and highly technical world. It is the conviction of Presbyterians that the church engages in higher education to influence responsible uses of knowledge.

Excerpts from *Loving god with Our Minds*, 203rd General Assembly, 1991, PC(USA)