



**A Covenant between Agnes Scott College
and
Synod of South Atlantic of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

Approved by Board of Trustees

April 16, 2013

I. Introduction and Statement of Purpose

This covenant describes the nature and scope of the relationship between Agnes Scott College and the Synod of South Atlantic of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Agnes Scott and the Synod enter into this covenant as a fresh articulation of the enduring affiliation between the college and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It is renewed and adopted both as a celebration of the historic mission of the college and as a declaration of the present and continuing relationship and commitments that the college and the Synod make in furthering their common areas of mission.

II. History of the Relationship between Agnes Scott and the Presbyterian Church

Agnes Scott College was founded at the initiative of Decatur Presbyterian Church. In 1888, the church called Dr. Frank H. Gaines from Virginia to become its Pastor. Convinced of the importance of Christian education for women, Dr. Gaines soon began discussions with church leaders about establishing a school. Among these leaders was a church elder and prosperous businessman named Colonel George Washington Scott. In July of 1889 the Decatur Presbyterian Church Session resolved to establish a school for women. The school, called Decatur Female Seminary, opened in September 1889 with 63 pupils. Initial funding for the school was underwritten by 36 individuals, including Colonel Scott, who contributed by far the largest amount.

A year later, Colonel Scott told Dr. Gaines that the Lord had greatly prospered him in his business and he did not want it to harden his heart. He decided to give \$40,000 to provide a home for the new school. In return its name was changed from Decatur Female Seminary to Agnes Scott Institute in memory of Agnes Irvine Scott, George Washington Scott's beloved mother. Over the next 14 years, as the school grew, Colonel Scott personally bore much of the financial burden and covered operating deficits for the school.

In 1896, Dr. Gaines, at the request of the Agnes Scott Board of Trustees, resigned as pastor of Decatur Presbyterian Church and became the first president of Agnes Scott Institute, serving in this

capacity until his death in 1923. In 1906, the school gained regional accreditation, the first school in Georgia to do so, and was chartered as Agnes Scott College and awarded its first degrees.

Decatur Presbyterian Church's interest in education and its involvement in Agnes Scott's founding reflect the high value that Presbyterians have placed on education since the time of John Calvin, the sixteenth-century Reformer to whom Presbyterians trace their roots. Calvin regarded the pursuit of knowledge and truth as a sacred calling, and educators as a separate order distinct from and equal in dignity to both pastors and magistrates. Presbyterians are particularly known for their efforts in higher education in the United States, beginning in 1746 with the founding of the College of New Jersey, now known as Princeton University. Today, 62 colleges and universities enrolling 100,000 students are affiliated with the church.

While Agnes Scott College has operated as an independent institution with a self-perpetuating board since its founding, it has had an ongoing and vital relationship with the Presbyterian Church. The first and third presidents of the college were ordained Presbyterian ministers; three others served local congregations as ordained Presbyterian elders. Two presidents served as moderators of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and Dr. C. Benton Kline, a dean of the faculty, went on to serve as president of Columbia Theological Seminary. Many Agnes Scott alumnae have served in leadership roles at all levels of the church, including Rachel Henderlite '28, the first woman ordained in the Presbyterian Church of the United States and a recipient of the Union Medal from Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia.

Today, the college's relationship with the Presbyterian Church and its ongoing identity as a church-affiliated college are manifest in multiple ways which include the following:

- a. **The Julia Thompson Smith Chaplaincy.** A full-time position supported by an endowment established in 1988 by the late Hal L. Smith of Atlanta and named for his wife, Julia Thompson Smith '31. The endowment carries the stipulation that the chaplain should be an ordained Presbyterian minister. Through the college's Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, the chaplain works with students, faculty and staff to plan and facilitate community worship and other religious programs, as well as opportunities for study, learning, prayer and outreach. The chaplain serves as a pastoral presence on campus for all members of the college community and facilitates ministry on campus by leaders of other faith traditions. Religious life at Agnes Scott is based on the affirmation that all people are created in the image of God, sisters and brothers in the human family, regardless of creed, heritage or beliefs.
- b. **The Julia Thompson Smith Chapel.** Dedicated in 2008, the college's first free-standing chapel is a Christian chapel welcoming people of all faiths. The chapel is the spiritual center of the campus, providing a space for prayer, contemplation and worship and affirming the importance of faith in a community of higher learning.
- c. **Relationships with the Synod of South Atlantic and Decatur Presbyterian Church.** In addition to the college's formal link with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) through this

covenant, Agnes Scott participates in an annual celebration of its historical relationship with Decatur Presbyterian Church and enjoys other connections with that congregation.

- d. **Memberships in APCU and PCCA.** The college is an active member in the Association of Presbyterian Colleges and Universities, an independent organization that exists to strengthen the mission of colleges and universities related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Presbyterian College Chaplains' Association, an organization that provides a link between faith and learning, between the PC (U.S.A.) and its related institutions of higher education. It is composed of chaplains at colleges and universities related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as well as Presbyterians serving as chaplains at other private colleges.

III. Core Values and Guiding Principles

The Reformed tradition in which the college was founded shaped the intellectual, spiritual and ethical values affirmed to this day by Agnes Scott: individual inquiry, commitment to the common good, the importance of character formation and engagement with the world. These are reflected in its motto from II Peter 1:5 from the New Testament, "Now add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge." This covenant provides opportunity for Agnes Scott to reaffirm those values and the college's Reformed and Presbyterian heritage in which they are rooted. These include:

- a. A commitment to truth and the importance of open inquiry in its pursuit; this is made manifest in an unwavering commitment to academic freedom;
- b. A mutually supportive relationship between faith and learning;
- c. A commitment to honor and integrity;
- d. A commitment to good stewardship of the world's human and natural resources;
- e. A commitment to the discernment of vocation as a central aim of education, and to the importance of service to others.

These values are echoed in Agnes Scott's mission to educate women from around the world to "think deeply, live honorably and engage the intellectual and social challenges of their times."

In an effort to live out its core values Agnes Scott has dedicated itself to the highest level of "moral and intellectual training and education."¹ Its emphasis on academic excellence and a rigorous liberal arts curriculum "fully abreast of the best institutions of this country"² has always encouraged independent thinking in an atmosphere for learning. The college seeks to offer a program through which students develop the independence of mind, moral direction, creativity of spirit and compassion that will enable them to make an impact for justice and peace at home and abroad.

Living within a pluralistic, diverse and global context, Agnes Scott nurtures and maintains a learning community that is hospitable to people of all faith traditions and those who claim no faith tradition. Thus the college's charter commitment to provide "auspices distinctly favorable to the maintenance of the faith and practice of the Christian religion" has broadened into a commitment to ensure that

¹ Charter, Decatur Female Seminary, Aug. 27, 1889.

² Agnes Scott Ideal, Frank H. Gaines, 1889.

students, faculty and staff of many faiths and secular persuasions are full participants in the life of the college and that the college provides a safe and encouraging space for interfaith dialogue and mutual respect.

IV. The Responsibilities of the College

- a. Provide academic instruction in religious studies and promote knowledge and understanding of Christianity. Through its majors in religious studies and in religion and social justice and the work of the Wallace M. Alston Professor of Bible and Religion and of other instructors, the college provides students with opportunities to learn about all religions, including Christianity in all its traditions, and particularly in the Reformed and Presbyterian expressions in which the college was founded.
- b. Encourage students' exploration of faith, spirituality and vocation both inside and outside the classroom.
- c. Nurture the spiritual growth of a diverse student body by providing opportunities for worship, service and dialogue.
- d. Cultivate a welcoming community that promotes ecumenism, interfaith dialogue and respect for religious diversity.
- e. Celebrate the relationship of faith and learning through an annual Faith and Learning event and other programs that bring eminent scholars and practitioners of religion to campus.
- f. Reflect and maintain the college's commitment to its historical relationship with the Presbyterian Church and its affinity with the values of the Reformed tradition through its governance. The bylaws of the Board of Trustees, as amended in May 2010, require that at least two trustees be ordained ministers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and that a significant number of trustees be members of this church. They also affirm that the composition of the board shall reflect the diversity of faiths and philosophical perspectives that characterize Agnes Scott today. In this way, the college's governance ensures a vital ongoing connection to its Presbyterian heritage that continues to shape the future of the college.
- g. Agnes Scott's responsibility to the church
 - i. Continue to support the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life as well as the chaplain's dual role of director of church relations.
 - ii. Seek enhanced relationships with local congregations, in particular our founding congregation, Decatur Presbyterian Church.
 - iii. Support students pursuing the vocation of ministry and religious scholarship within the Presbyterian tradition and other faith traditions.
 - iv. Nurture community building and provide opportunities for faith development and spiritual formation among students of all faith traditions as well as those who claim no particular affiliation or belief.
- h. To strengthen the relationship between the church and the college
 - i. Recruit students who are related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and other denominations in the Reformed tradition.
 - ii. Provide scholarships to students coming from PC (U.S.A.) congregations.

- iii. Invite PC (U.S.A.) friends and partners to make use of the college's facilities for church-sponsored events (e.g., Presbytery meetings, Session retreats).
- iv. Support an ongoing commitment to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) using covenants such as this one, including other governing bodies and congregations.

V. The Responsibilities of the Church (i.e. Synod)

- a. Hold the college and all of her constituencies in prayer, so that the college might grow and prosper.
- b. Promote the college to the larger church by interpreting the mission of the college to congregations throughout the synod, encouraging young women to consider Agnes Scott as their college choice.
- c. Strengthen the college's visibility across the larger church by adding a web-link to the Synod's website that connects to the college's website and encourage congregations throughout the Synod to do likewise.
- d. Partner with the college when holding events for the larger church (e.g., annual Synod meetings, Presbyterian Youth events, etc.)
- e. Partner with the college to nurture transformation in the lives of young adults by encouraging Presbyterians in positions of influence to provide internships, research positions and employment opportunities for Agnes Scott students and graduates to further their vocational development and their ability to live lives of service.
- f. Support and make use of the intellectual resources of the college to further the work of the denomination and larger church.