

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 22, 2021

To: General Overseer Dr. Tim Hill and the Church of God Executive Council

From: Dennis Livingston, Chairman, Lee University Board of Directors

For more than a century, Lee University has been committed to training and equipping the next generation of Christian students to go anywhere and everywhere—whether in ministry, business, medicine, or other fields—and live out the Gospel in its fullness.

Our mission has been, and will continue to be, accomplished in a manner that is consistent with Scripture and the doctrinal teaching and commitments of the Church of God. The Board of Directors of Lee University (each being “appointed biennially by the International Executive Committee” *COG Minutes S19(I)(A)*) takes our appointment to this position seriously, recognizing that we are stewards of the University, its mission, its faculty and staff, and—most importantly—each and every student enrolled in our institution.

Thus, the Board was deeply troubled, and, in truth, shocked to learn of recent false accusations made via social media against Lee, its leadership (both currently under Dr. Mark Walker and previously under Dr. Paul Conn), the Board, and even the Church of God as it relates to our commitment to Scripture and Church of God doctrine. These accusations are unfair, misinformed and incomplete in their information. None of them represent who Lee is or what we stand for.

While this individual chose to air personal grievances on a public platform that has regrettably been shared beyond the confines of members of that group, the Board does not intend to engage similarly. Rather, we believe concerns and conflict between brothers and sisters in Christ should be resolved under the structure and authority of the Church of God (*see* Matthew 18), a position that is reflected throughout official meeting Minutes.

Therefore, the Board respectfully submits this response to the Executive Committee itself, and the Executive Council, detailing Lee’s ongoing commitment and efforts to respond to new challenges facing many Christian institutions in our day and age.

- 1) **Lee University’s student practices and policies have been and will continue to be implemented in a manner consistent with Scripture and Church of God doctrines.** Our students are our “mission field,” and they come representing a variety of views and beliefs on many topics, including issues of sexuality and gender. Lee has consistently and clearly taught our students a biblical worldview that follows the teachings and practices of the Church of God on these issues. Students who violate our biblically-based Community Covenant or other codes of conduct—which cover a variety of issues including dishonesty, violent behavior, theft, promoting or advocating for ideologies and causes that conflict with biblical teachings, and sexual morality—are subject to disciplinary action including suspension. Furthermore, recognizing that “we all stumble in many things” (James 3:2), Lee offers counseling, prayer, and biblically-based guidance to students who are struggling with any sexual sin or temptation, but who commit to live within our codes of conduct as they “work out their own salvation” (Phil. 2:12). This prayerful guidance is what Scripture requires us to do; it is what the Church of God expects us to do; and it is what our policy calls for. This is our calling and mission with students, and we accept it with a sense of responsibility before God.

- 2) **Lee University’s faculty and staff practices and policies have been and will continue to be implemented in a manner consistent with Scripture and Church of God doctrines.**

Regarding faculty and other employees, the Board follows our charge under the Minutes to “permit no person unable or unwilling to accept in good faith the Church of God Declaration of Faith to be employed.” COG Minutes S19(I)(B)(6). We do not knowingly employ anyone who does not accept and practice the biblical guidelines for sexuality which have been established by the Church of God. Claims to the contrary are false and irresponsible.

- 3) **Lee University is exempt from Title IX to the extent that its requirements conflict with our biblically- and denominationally-based policies and practices.**

The Church of God Minutes recognize that “we are to obey the laws of our country insofar as they are not in conflict with obedience to God.” COG Practical Commitment VII(A). Thus, Lee University fully complies with all federal and state laws, including Title IX, except when such laws conflict with our duty to God. There are many aspects of Title IX, such as providing equal opportunities for members of both sexes, that Lee fully supports and complies with. But to the extent that Title IX (or any other federal law) is interpreted to require actions that violate Lee’s religious tenets, we will not comply.

However, as confirmed with legal experts we have consulted, Lee University does not have to file an exemption letter with the federal government to be exempt from any Title IX requirements that conflict with our beliefs. Instead, as the federal regulations clearly articulate, Title IX “does not apply to an educational institution which is controlled by a religious organization to the extent application of this part would not be consistent with the religious tenets of such organization.” 34 C.F.R. 106.12(a). The so-called “exemption letter” referenced by the author of the social media post is not prerequisite for an exemption. Rather, the letter is merely an “assurance of the exemption.” As the regulation explains, Lee University can “raise its exemption” at any time by submitting a letter “identifying the specific provisions [of Title IX] which conflict with a specific tenet of the religious organization.” 34 C.F.R. 106.12(b).

- 4) **Under the oversight of the Board, Lee University is undertaking a comprehensive review of all policies.**

As the Executive Council is already aware from past reports and conversations, the President's Cabinet has been engaged throughout summer 2021 in a wall-to-wall review of all our policies to produce an improved way of dealing with students or faculty who might engage in any conduct that violates our standards. The Cabinet’s review is a work in progress, as it is leaving no stone unturned even including a detailed theological statement on human sexuality and gender that is doctrinally sound and goes into far greater depth concerning these issues than anything currently produced by the Church of God. This review also includes our policies related to students enrolled in our ministerial training programs. Lee has graduated thousands of students who went on to be credentialed ministers with the Church of God. To our knowledge, all of those individuals (except for the one identified by the author of the social media post) have affirmed Scriptural teachings on marriage and sexuality. Thus, until now, we have not needed a specific procedure for addressing students who reject Christian orthodoxy on these issues. However, such a procedure is a part of the President’s Cabinet policy review.

While some of our detractors wish to “sow discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:19), we believe in focusing on those things which are true, noble, lovely, and of good report (Phil. 4:8)—things which we know the Executive Committee and Council value and that demonstrate Lee’s ongoing work to train up a new generation of students prepared to impact the world for Christ. Among these true, noble and lovely accomplishments are:

- the thousands of students that engaged in authentic worship in Convocation this past week, intently listening and responding to God’s word;
- the 80 students participating in the 10 new Chapel Bible study groups launched this year as a part of our continued strategic efforts to help students integrate their faith and vocation;
- the selfless volunteer work of our students and faculty in churches and local outreach ministries all over Cleveland and Bradley County meeting the needs of the community;
- the hundreds of student Commissioning speakers who have shared their Lee stories of how they accepted Christ or encountered Him in a new and transforming way during their time at Lee; and
- the multiple thousands of Lee University alumni doing life-transforming kingdom of God work around the world in all vocations.

These stories and so many more like them are the work and ministry of Lee University— and those who truly love Lee know it!

We fully support and affirm the mission of Lee University as established by the Church of God, the work of the Board of Directors over many decades of service, and of the leadership of President Walker and President Conn throughout the years we have served with them. We know there is always more work to be done, and we pray that we will continue to have the full support of the Executive Committee and Council as we accomplish that work. We further hope that the Committee and Council will continue to fully express your support of Lee, its leadership, and its Board to the denomination as a whole.

This statement was approved by the Lee University Board of Directors:

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