

SEATTLE PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

# Who We Are



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## LETTER FROM PRESIDENT PORTERFIELD

At Seattle Pacific University, our mission is both deeply rooted and continually relevant: to engage the culture and help bring positive change to the world through the good news of Jesus Christ. Living into this calling means being thoughtful about who we are, what we believe, and how we work together in community.

This small volume, *SPU: Who We Are*, gathers key documents that articulate the identity and guiding principles of Seattle Pacific — our statement of faith, our enduring commitments, and our expectations for life together in a diverse, academic community. These statements are more than policies; they form the shared framework within which we pursue our mission as educators, scholars, staff, and colleagues.

In the heart of a city known for its creativity and diversity, Seattle Pacific offers something distinct — a vibrant Christian community where faith and learning come together, where knowing who we are propels us into the complicated spaces of the world. These core documents anchor our commitment to the transforming hope of Christ and provide a framework for uniting our faith with the rigorous scholarship that develops our students' intellectual capacity and prepares them to serve with courage and compassion.

I invite you into this beautiful work as we seek to be faithful to Christ while engaging with the world around us.

With Prayer and Optimism,

Deana L. Porterfield  
President  
Seattle Pacific University



## MISSION AND VISION

### Mission Statement

Seattle Pacific University is a Christian university fully committed to engaging the culture and changing the world by graduating people of competence and character, becoming people of wisdom, and modeling grace-filled community.

### University Vision

Engaging the Culture, Changing the World

## RELATIONSHIP TO THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH

Since its founding in 1891, Seattle Pacific University has been in a covenant relationship with the Free Methodist Church.

In 1860, just before the Civil War, the Free Methodist Church was established by Benjamin Titus and Ellen Roberts in New York and Illinois. Early Free Methodists were passionately against slavery, working in the underground railroad and forbidding members from slaveholding. They established churches where pews were not rented, and the poor were embraced. They advocated for disenfranchised farmers and were committed prohibitionists because of the way in which alcohol abuse was destroying their communities. Its founders championed the ordination of women and the suffragist movement. These convictions fortified the church's founding mission "to maintain the biblical standard of Christianity and to preach the gospel to the poor." Today the Free Methodist Church is a global movement with churches in over 100 countries.

Seattle Pacific University was founded by the Oregon and Washington Conference of the Free Methodist Church in 1891. The key leaders were Hiram H. Pease, Nils B. Peterson, John C. Norton, Adelaide L. (Newton) Beers, and Alexander Beers. Each of them was profoundly influenced by B.T. Roberts and his teachings.

As a Methodist movement in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, the Free Methodists established their schools and colleges with a desire to "unite the pair so long disjoined, knowledge and vital piety." This deeply Christian and Wesleyan vision of joining learning and holiness captured early Free Methodists in the founding of its colleges and universities and continues to guide SPU's mission and vision today.

As a Free Methodist university and a member of the Association of Free Methodist Educational Institutions, SPU remains committed to the history, theology, mission, and character of the Free Methodist Church as articulated in the church's Book of Discipline.

**Thus, as a University in covenant relationship with the Free Methodist Church, we commit to:**

- Living by a statement of faith consistent with the Free Methodist Church, USA
- Living by lifestyle expectations that are consistent with the principles of the *Book of Discipline* of the Free Methodist Church, USA
- Undertaking our academic endeavors in ways that are in harmony with the Scriptures and the Free Methodist Church's teachings, as presented in the Articles of Religion

# STATEMENT OF FAITH

At Seattle Pacific University, we seek to ground everything we do on the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ. Such a claim is both personal, a commitment by each member of our community, and institutional, a corporate aspiration that has guided this institution from its founding. Even while we celebrate the rich diversity of the Church throughout the world, we anchor our faith on the person of Jesus Christ, the authority of Holy Scripture, and the tradition of the Christian Church throughout history.

## 1. We Are Historically Orthodox

We affirm the historic Christian faith, as attested in the divinely inspired and authoritative Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and as summarized, for example, in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. We affirm that God is triune, and that the three divine Persons — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit — are coequal, coessential, and coeternal.

We affirm that by the grace and power of God the universe was brought into being, is continually sustained and governed, and will ultimately be brought to its promised consummation. We affirm, further, that we human beings are created by God in God's own image to be stewards of creation, and that we are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love others as ourselves.

In these divinely appointed tasks we have failed, so that we are now subject to judgment and death. Yet we rejoice that God's grace is available to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and that through faith in Christ we are delivered from sin and death and empowered by the Holy Spirit for lives of joyful obedience to the Father. Finally, we respond to the Spirit's call to participate in Christ's body, the church; to embrace Christ's mission to the world; and to live in the hope and assurance that Christ's return will bring to completion God's saving work.

## 2. We Are Clearly Evangelical

We stand within the broad evangelical tradition of Christianity and, as such, we joyfully accept the task of proclaiming the evangel — God's good news — to the world. We understand this to mean that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior of the world and that he alone can liberate broken and fallen human beings from sin and death.

We lift high the authority of holy Scripture as divinely inspired, embraced by the church as central to our understanding and witness. We affirm that the Holy Spirit works in human hearts to kindle faith in Jesus Christ, to restore people to a right relationship with God and each other, and to begin transforming people into the likeness of Christ.

And we believe the gospel promise that light, health, wholeness, and peace are abundantly available to everyone who asks. Yet we also believe that we are called to practice what we preach: first, by cultivating vital Christian piety; and second, by engaging the surrounding culture through public testimony and loving service.



### 3. We Are Distinctively Wesleyan

Standing within the Wesleyan holiness branch of historic and evangelical Christianity, and recognizing the Free Methodist Church as our founding denomination, Seattle Pacific University is informed by the theological legacy of John and Charles Wesley.

We share their conviction that God's saving purpose is the renewal of human hearts and lives in true holiness through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. We are shaped by their emphasis on the importance of the human response to the Spirit's renewing work, including the vital role of the spiritual disciplines and practices — such as prayer, meditation, worship, Scripture study, charitable giving, public witness to Christ's saving love, and service to those in need — all of which serve as means of God's grace.

Above all, we embrace the Wesleys' hope that God's transforming love is offered to all persons, addresses all areas of life, and will not rest content until it has redeemed the whole creation.

### 4. We Are Genuinely Ecumenical

As heirs of John Wesley's catholic-spirited Christianity, we seek to gather persons from many theological and ecclesial traditions who have experienced the transforming power of Jesus Christ. We believe that theological diversity, when grounded in historic orthodoxy and a common and vital faith in Christ, enriches learning and bears witness to our Lord's call for unity within the church.

We are also well aware of other dividing walls that separate people from one another, walls that Christ desires to break down — walls of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, and class. We believe that Christ calls us to value diversity and to seek ways for all persons in our University community to grow in their individual giftedness and to contribute in meaningful ways to our common life and work. Thus, in all of our diversity, we are centered in Christ, and called by him to shape, model, and participate together in grace-filled community.

Therefore, we commit ourselves to this faith, and to these shaping influences that define our community of faith, and we pledge ourselves, with humility and conviction, to live as best we know how in loving relationship with Jesus Christ and in faithful service to others. This we believe to be the defining center of our lives and the guiding aspiration of our life in community at Seattle Pacific University.

— SPU's Faith Statement was ratified by the Board of Trustees on May 21, 2004.

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Seattle Pacific University, as an institution of higher learning within the evangelical Christian tradition, respects the commitment of the academy to the free search for truth and its free expression.

This pursuit of truth is an obligation of Christian teacher-scholars and accords with SPU's acceptance of the Christian Scriptures, and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, as authoritative in matters of faith, morality, practice, and learning.

The Free Methodist Church has, since its inception, maintained that biblical authority is crucial. In keeping with the teachings of John Wesley, founder of Methodism, SPU holds that this central authoritative text is best interpreted through full exercise of the rational capacity that God has granted to humans, the collective experience of the Christian church as reflected in its traditions, and individual experience. The Christian Scriptures teach the importance of speaking the truth in love. Therefore, Seattle Pacific University fully supports its faculty in the free search for and expression of truth, always in the context of the University's mission and Christian love.

All members of the SPU community are to review and develop their own scholarship, teaching, and service in the light of the Christian Scriptures. Christian tradition, as presented in the ancient ecumenical creeds (e.g., the Apostles' and Nicene creeds), and in current formulations such as the Articles of Religion in the *Book of Discipline* of the Free Methodist Church of North America will also serve as guides for scholarly work.

Additional resources on academic freedom policies can be found at [spu.edu/faculty-handbook](http://spu.edu/faculty-handbook) (section 7.1.1–7.1.3).



# DIVERSITY STATEMENT

**We ground the work of diversity in the gospel of Jesus Christ, pursuing diversity as an aspect of our calling to be a reconciled community.** Our understanding of the gospel is that the foundation of all hostility has been defeated because of God's redemptive work on the cross through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Ephesians 2:11–22). As ambassadors of this reconciliation, we are to speak truth and peace into division, inviting people to relationship that has been made right with God and with one another, as the Holy Spirit brings new life through repentance, forgiveness, and transformation (2 Corinthians 5:16–21).

**We understand that God creates diversity with intentionality and that we are unified in Christ in such a way that human categories of division do not have the last word about worth or place in the community.** Through repentance, which reveals God's mercy and grace, we desire to embody the outcome of Christ's reconciling work on the cross and to participate in God's divine intent for unity in difference.

**We believe that the gospel promise and hope of restorative unity and wholeness are foundational to the ongoing work of diversity at Seattle Pacific University.** From a posture of humility, we engage the complexities and tensions of diversity and we invite God's presence as we pursue greater understanding and empathy across differences. Living into our Wesleyan tradition, we draw on the accumulated wisdom that comes from studying our theological heritage, discerning the truth of Scripture through reason, and experiencing God in community.

**We confess our shortcomings and collectively seek wisdom for healing, restoration, and justice.** While rooted in the Free Methodist tradition — a Christian denomination whose historic commitment aspired toward the abolition of slavery, equal rights for women, and dignity for the poor — at different times SPU's story has been marked by human failings to act redemptively in response to relational and systemic injustice.

**We challenge ourselves to consciously examine the impact of our curricula, policies, and practices and to continue to create a learning environment where all students can flourish.** Our commitment, then, is fourfold and communicated through the broad goal areas of the SPU Strategic Diversity Framework found at [spu.edu/diversity](http://spu.edu/diversity).



# COMMUNITY LIFESTYLE EXPECTATIONS

Employees of Seattle Pacific University are members of a community. All communities expect their members to uphold certain standards of behavior and contribute to the welfare of the group in specific ways. The community expectations of SPU are standards of behavior that reflect the University's commitment to providing higher education in the context of an evangelical Christian and Wesleyan heritage. Employees serve as both ambassadors of SPU to the external community and role models for students.

Therefore, as members of this academic and faith community, SPU employees are asked to make behavioral and lifestyles choices consistent with moral integrity, social consciousness, and effective Christian witness. In keeping with these expectations and to ensure a spirit of Christian community, University employees are expected to refrain from:

- Committing or advocating illegal or unethical acts of any kind.
- Sexual behavior that is inconsistent with the University's understanding of biblical standards, including cohabitation, extramarital sexual activity, and same-sex sexual activity. (See the University's Statement on Human Sexuality).
- Use of any alcohol and/or tobacco products on campus or at any University sponsored activity. (See the University's policy on Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug Use).
- Conduct that is contrary to SPU's Anti-Bullying Policy, or Employee and Volunteer Sexual Misconduct Policy.
- Conduct that constitutes discrimination or harassment (including sexual harassment) as defined in SPU's Discrimination and Harassment Grievance Procedure or in SPU's Title IX Sexual Harassment and Related Conduct Policy.

Employees who engage in any of these activities may face disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment with the University.

Policies pertaining to lifestyle expectations can be accessed at [HR Wiki Employee Handbook 1.13](#).



## ENDURING COMMITMENTS

The following document compiled, written, and ratified by the Board of Trustees is an acknowledgment that this educational dream does not live only in the past, but that it must be lived out in today's context, helping to further nurture the future of the University and its educational mission while also maintaining its partnership with the Free Methodist church. Read more about the process to articulate our Enduring Commitments at [spu.edu/enduring-commitments](https://spu.edu/enduring-commitments).

Since its founding in 1891 as Seattle Seminary, transition to Seattle Pacific College in 1915, and rebranding as Seattle Pacific University (SPU) in 1977, throughout its 131-year history, SPU has remained committed to delivering world-class Christ-centered education grounded in the liberal arts to prepare its graduates for a life of service.

With recent debates that have affected SPU collectively and its students, staff, faculty, alumni, and extended community members, SPU's Board has worked to articulate a vision meeting the University's contemporary needs and aspirations while honoring its history, mission, and legacy.

As the University's foundational robust Christ-centered educational identity endures in the next chapter of its history, the Board has identified seven interrelated enduring commitments that will intentionally, strategically, and sustainably shape decisions and actions and determine resource allocations. After reviewing existing documents, completing previous work on strategic planning, collecting input from the Senior Leadership Team, the Academic Leadership Team, and numerous staff and faculty, and engaging in dialogue among these key audiences, the Board believes the combination of the commitments listed below uniquely reflects SPU's strengths and provides meaningful guidance for its future.

### 1. Commitment to Christian Faith

Seattle Pacific University is a Christian university grounded in the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ, committed to the evangelical proclamation of God's good news to the world, anchored to historic Christian orthodoxy, guided by its Wesleyan heritage, and honoring its ecumenical diversity for the spiritual formation of all who make up its community, whatever their background or faith tradition.

SPU's Christian faith commitments are not just its historical foundation. They continue to shape its current work and future planning. The University's faith statement eloquently states its orthodox creedal beliefs, its evangelical joy in sharing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and its commitment to the global Church. Aligned with its Wesleyan tradition, the Statement of Faith is meant to secure both SPU's commitment to and freedom in Christ. To that end, SPU honors the reflection of God's Church in its ecumenical diversity, welcoming faculty and staff from a wide range of Christian traditions.

SPU will continue to be a vibrant Christian university where faith in a living God permeates and animates desires, decisions, and daily activities. The SPU community, in all its diversity, is rooted in respect for the institution's Christian, Wesleyan, and Free Methodist faith commitments, which are communicated clearly to numerous staff and faculty past, present, and future community members. Students who come to SPU without a Christian faith or tradition are respected, introduced to, and engaged with the Christian faith and leave with a deeper understanding of Christianity. Campus leadership invests in the spiritual formation of faculty, staff, and students with the hope that all students welcome and embrace the Christian faith as a result of their participation in the SPU campus community.



## 2. Commitment to Educational Breadth and Scholarly Depth

Seattle Pacific University is committed to rigor and equity in every aspect of learning, teaching, scholarship, and student development, and the importance of its liberal arts core to support these goals. The University's Christian faith commitments permeate the curriculum and classroom and animate scholarship as an act of vocation.

SPU continues to affirm its robust educational commitments, which have made it a vibrant intellectual community. Prospective graduate and undergraduate students are drawn to SPU for its academic reputation, diversity of thought, nuance, and rigorous learning. Recognizing the *imago Dei* in each person, SPU emphasizes its priority to work with every student to achieve their intellectual potential and educational aspirations. SPU recruits Christian faculty who are attracted to the University's academic reputation, its support for its faculty, and its Christian convictions. Faculty are at the forefront of educational innovation. The University prioritizes educational breadth, and the faculty and students have a shared meaning of the liberal arts and their importance to a holistic and transformative education.

Each department consciously works through its curriculum to communicate points of connection with the Christian faith so that students are able to articulate how their education has deepened their spiritual commitments; non-Christian students are exposed to the Christian faith through direct instruction and interaction with faculty who model and embody the truths, virtues, and life of Jesus.

Faculty and student scholarship are supported and celebrated. Faculty are thought leaders in discussions related to faith within their fields and are sought out for their expertise. As an institution of higher learning within the evangelical Christian tradition, SPU respects the academy's dedication to the free search for truth and its free expression. This pursuit is an obligation of Christian teacher-scholars and accords with SPU's acceptance of the Christian Scriptures and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, as authoritative in matters of faith, morality, practice, and learning.

## 3. Commitment to Character Formation

Believing that God's redemptive purpose encompasses all of humanity in the created world and in historic continuity with the Wesleyan belief that knowledge is crucial to vital piety, Seattle Pacific University is committed to holistic and transformative education that shapes character and initiates students on a lifelong journey to wisdom.

The goals of a holistic and transformative education are meant to guide students toward the ability to judge truths, warrant beliefs, and understand differences of opinion with compassionate and winsome conviction. Faculty development programming incorporates critical thinking, character shaping, virtue, and wisdom. Departmental curricula are designed with "character" milestones and appropriate learning outcomes throughout general education and major coursework. Students are taught and mentored with the centrality of character formation in mind so that graduates can make wise decisions and act courageously from a place of vulnerability to meet the world's needs. This is foundational to the Seattle Pacific University mission to graduate "people of competence and character."

## 4. Commitment to Vocational Preparation

Through intentional vocational discernment, Seattle Pacific University is committed to preparing students for meaningful and purposeful lives of service and leadership in the work of God's kingdom in the church, home, employment, neighborhood, and other communities in which its members serve.

SPU recognizes that God's call is a lifelong journey of discernment for students and employees and, to quote Eugene Peterson '54, "a long obedience in the same direction." Vocation is more than career preparation; it is an integrated curricular and co-curricular whole-person approach to a transformative and holistic education embedded in "Falcon Formation."

Students can articulate the theological meanings of vocation, shalom, and justice aligned with a sense of calling. They engage in learning opportunities that prepare them for lifelong service. Christian students are prepared to live out their faith in all life realms.

Graduates are recognized and visible in local communities as God-honoring leaders and compassionate servants. All students are prepared to live lives of integrity. They are highly regarded potential employees given their opportunities on and off campus to develop as servant leaders.

The University also intentionally invests in developing a sense of calling for its employees, providing opportunities for robust organizational socialization, spiritual formation, and individual professional development.





## 5. Commitment to a Christ-Centered Caring Community

Seattle Pacific University is committed to a Christ-centered and caring community that seeks God's shalom, reconciliation, and justice for all its members and for those with whom they interact and serve. It is committed to fostering a diverse and culturally responsive campus where all feel a sense of belonging. As a unique expression of the Body of Christ, SPU strives to be a community willing to listen to one another, engage differences, tolerate disagreement, and speak truth in love.

SPU is an intentionally diverse, urban, Christian university that reflects the demographics of the city, region, and the Pacific Rim. The University intentionally recruits and welcomes students from a wide range of Christian faith traditions, students with little or no faith, and students of other faiths. From a posture of humility, SPU engages the complexities and tensions of its cultural and theological diversity and welcoming enrollment philosophy.

The University is committed to the academic success of all its students, both undergraduate and graduate, and creates curricular and co-curricular programs that develop all students to their fullest potential. Academic programs are designed with its diverse students in mind while anticipating the needs of students in the future. The University is intentional about recruiting, equipping, and retaining a diverse faculty, staff, and administration to teach and serve its diverse students.

SPU is committed to diversity, racial justice, and the work of reconciliation grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ and as an expression of its Free Methodist values and practices. The University affirms the dignity of, and demonstrates the love of God for, all people. SPU is called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a just, equitable, and reconciled community that works toward right relationships between God and humanity, and between communities (2 Corinthians 5:16–21).

## 6. Commitment to the World Beyond SPU

Located in the vibrant and global city of Seattle, Seattle Pacific University is committed to investing in its urban setting and international perspectives, fostering learning, innovation, and service beyond its classroom walls, including the global Church.

Seattle is a robust and diverse global city that offers students, faculty, and staff opportunities to contribute to its economic, social, cultural, artistic, and spiritual vitality. As a Christian university, we are inspired by the call for God's people to care for the welfare of the city (Jeremiah 29:7) and the interconnectedness of people, which transcends nation-states. SPU continues its commitment to the greater Seattle area. It is a model for neighborhood and community partnership, addressing issues of poverty, wellness, education, family health, and the unhoused. The University communicates how its Christian faith commitments motivate its community involvement.

SPU engages with community and business leaders, building and strengthening relationships to create mutually beneficial partnerships. The University attracts top thought leaders to campus, including those who bring a Christian perspective to important and timely topics. SPU convenes community, religious, and business leaders in the Seattle community and globally to generate discussion, innovation, and mutual learning about complex societal issues. It raises funds for faculty, staff, and students to ethically and reciprocally partner with businesses, nonprofits, public agencies, and churches committed to the welfare of the greater Seattle area.

Moreover, as a theologically diverse university rooted in the Wesleyan tradition, SPU believes that God is the God of nations (Acts 17:24–28). As part of the global church, we are called to humble and reciprocal learning about the experiences of different cultures, nations, and regions of the world. Thus, the University can serve as a witness to God's Kingdom in the region and across the globe.



## 7. Commitment to Institutional Integrity

Seattle Pacific University is committed to institutional integrity, aligning significant decisions, actions, and budgetary commitments to the University's Christian mission and vision. SPU clearly articulates its identity to those in and outside the campus community. Working through shared governance, the University follows through on its major commitments, explaining rationales for its undertaking.

SPU is known and respected for its institutional integrity. Leadership is transparent and committed to organizational sustainability, and its budget is carefully stewarded. It invests in faculty, staff, and facilities, ensuring reasonable employee workload and extra-role expectations. SPU is committed to just pay (e.g., equitable and livable wages) for its employees. SPU is committed to institutional assessment and data-informed decision-making to ensure equitable treatment and outcomes.

Sustainability efforts are highlighted throughout the campus. Creation care is incorporated into the curriculum, co-curricular activities, and facilities management. University budgeting takes into consideration sustainability initiatives.

— SPU's Enduring Commitments were approved by the Board of Trustees on October 21, 2022.



# SEATTLE PACIFIC

UNIVERSITY

