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# Southern Nazarene University



## Expanded Mission Statement December 2012

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**SOUTHERN NAZARENE UNIVERSITY**

# EXPANDED MISSION STATEMENT

## PREAMBLE

Southern Nazarene University is the church at work in higher education; it is the primary postsecondary educational institution for the Church of the Nazarene in the South Central Region of the United States. We derive our mission and core values *ex corde ecclesiae*—from the heart of the church. A deep and vital relationship with the Church of the Nazarene is essential to SNU’s mission and a nonnegotiable starting point in all we do. While governance and support comes primarily from the South Central Region, the university serves and partners with the work of the Church around the world. The mission of the Church of the Nazarene is “*to make Christlike disciples in the nations.*”

## ❖ The Church at Work in Higher Education

The church’s involvement in higher education has a long history. Higher education began under the auspices of the church. It was only after the Enlightenment that learning and vital piety were separated into two separate realms, secular and sacred. The affirmation that God is the creator of all things propels the university to engage in the study of the created order in its various dimensions.

Southern Nazarene University exists as an institution of the Church of the Nazarene to facilitate the work of Christ in the world. Its mandate is to seek truth with integrity, to explore long-held traditions and assumptions, to formulate an understanding of the world that is consistent with divine revelation and human experience, and to share in the formation of Christlike disciples. Thus, preparing graduates for a broadly defined Christian ministry is an underlying goal of all academic and co-curricular programs.

## ❖ Church of the Nazarene in the South Central Region of the United States

The Church of the Nazarene is a denomination of local churches organized into districts. The university’s educational region encompasses Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana, with 627 active churches organized into eleven districts.

Following a representative form of governance, each local church elects delegates to the annual district assembly. These delegates elect district officers to care for the business of the district and local churches between annual assemblies. The delegates elect a specified number of persons from their districts to serve as trustees for their regional college or university. In addition, the delegates vote to approve support for the university through the educational budget. This apportionment comes from local churches and expresses a deep, vital partnership with the university.

SNU operates within the mandate of the “Educational Mission Statement” found in paragraph 380.1 of the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*:

Education in the Church of the Nazarene, rooted in the biblical and theological commitments of the Wesleyan and holiness movements and accountable to the stated mission of the denomination, aims to guide those who look to it in accepting, in nurturing, and in expressing in service to the church and world consistent and coherent Christian understandings of social and individual life. Additionally, such

institutions of higher education will seek to provide a curriculum, quality of instruction, and evidence of scholastic achievement that will adequately prepare graduates to function effectively in vocations and professions such graduates may choose.

## **Mission (approved December 2008)**

*Our mission is to transform lives through higher education in Christ-centered community. As a Christian community of scholars, we model the hospitality of grace, the pursuit of truth, and the practice of discipleship, all within the Wesleyan-holiness tradition, as we prepare graduates who think with clarity, act with integrity, and serve with purpose.*

### **❖ To Transform Lives**

SNU's reason for existence is that persons who come here to gain knowledge will experience learning in such a way that they will be changed inwardly. Our intention is that persons who learn with us will come to a clearer understanding of themselves and of the world in which they live, and then see their place and purpose in life. We desire to facilitate students' encounter with learning in ways that prompt them to ask the ultimate questions of life and the meaning of human existence. Asking and attempting to answer those questions provides the occasions for students to consider who they are in relation to God. We genuinely affirm that God purposes to encounter persons who are seeking true meaning for life, and such encounters have transformative potential for human beings.

### **❖ Through Higher Education**

We are committed to providing students with the best possible university level education. We see no conflict between academic excellence and Christian commitment. We work at living out and acting upon the affirmation that all truth is God's truth. That affirmation allows us to explore fully any area of human knowledge while recognizing that human knowledge always has its limitations. We pursue higher learning within the framework of our confession that ultimate Truth is available only to God, who allows human beings to catch glimpses of that truth. Higher education as carried out at SNU thus has the first goal of honoring God. Only when that is done can its second goal, serving and helping humankind, have the genuine potential for fulfillment.

### **❖ Christ-centered Community**

Our educational mission is fulfilled within a communal framework. That community comes from the common pursuit of scholarship, to be sure. However, our fundamental community arises and exists through our shared commitment to the person and work of Christ. We confess that God has made known through Christ the most significant truth that can be known by humankind -- God's nature and purpose. Thus, we are most truly a community when we are focused upon God's call to live and work in ways that express the life and likeness of Christ. We belong together as learners and teachers because we all first of all belong to Christ.

### **❖ Community of Scholars**

At its heart, the university is a residential gathering of scholars, supported by a corps of professional staff and administration. Each scholar pursues his or her own discipline and specialized area of inquiry by engaging in one or more forms of scholarship: discovery, integration, engagement, and teaching. Advanced, sustained scholarship, when combined with effective teaching and learning opportunities, provides depth and challenge in the curriculum. As students participate in scholarly work with faculty, they are invited to experience another dimension of intellectual life and prepared to pursue advanced academic work themselves. This student-faculty relationship is initiation, modeling, and mentoring at its best. And as students participate in community life with peers and support staff, they have opportunities to practice habits of mind and heart that reflect education in its fullest and best expressions.

Over time, university scholars collectively develop a shared sense of the vital, the deepest values and organizing principles for living a thoughtful, engaged Christian life. This collective wisdom is distilled slowly out of both the specialized knowledge of the faculty and the experience and discipline of living the ideals expressed in the mission and heritage of the institution. In essence, a wisdom community is formed. While the specialized scholarship of individual faculty provides academic depth, the ever-evolving wisdom community provides a common means to address overarching and eternal questions about faith, learning, and living—what it means to be an educated Christian in the twenty-first century.

### ❖ **Modeling the Hospitality of Grace**

Grace is the unmerited gift from God to us: we have been forgiven and welcomed into a loving relationship. Our identity begins with the knowledge that this gift has been extended to us and that God is in the world working to draw all persons to himself. The active presence of a loving God in the world compels us to reach out and embrace the other.

This embrace of the other may be termed hospitality. The grace of hospitality was defined when the Lord instructed the Israelites to treat the “alien who resides with you” as one of their own and reminded them that they too were once aliens (Leviticus 19:34). In Isaiah, Yahweh accepts Gentiles as his own and designates other nations as his people (Isaiah 19:16-25). At SNU, we extend a similar hospitality not only to persons of different ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural and faith backgrounds, but also to different ideas and methods of thinking. The university body says, “Welcome, we have much to learn from you” rather than “how can we change you and fit you into our way of seeing the world?” Hospitality suggests that the “alien” who resides with us brings a gift of knowledge if we are open to it. Our theology is made tangible in the way we welcome the stranger—both socially and intellectually. At the same time, we are mindful that God’s grace not only forgives and welcomes, it also transforms us. We are called and empowered by the grace of God to become Christlike disciples.

### ❖ **Modeling the Pursuit of Truth**

The pursuit of truth is an eternal conversation, a vital component of the search for knowledge and understanding. It is always tentative, ongoing, and respectful. “[W]e see in a mirror, dimly,” and we “know only in part” (I Corinthians 13:12), so learning must be approached with a sense of humility. We do not know everything, so there is always something to be learned from another point of view.

At the same time, we can approach the pursuit of truth with a sense of confidence—we do “see,” even if dimly, and we do “know,” even if only in part. Thus, in a learning community, confidence in what we know and humility in what we do not know are held in a healthy tension. In light of this tension, we believe that truth must be pursued in an atmosphere of open and honest dialogue. Albert Outler’s framing of the Wesleyan quadrilateral as a means of approaching biblical truth (scripture in dialogue with reason, tradition, and experience) is an excellent example of our approach.

## ❖ **Modeling the Practice of Discipleship**

The practice of discipleship seeks to live out the message of the Gospel in the world. This requires both personal integrity, which is evidenced by such qualities as honesty, fidelity, loyalty, consistency, and faithfulness, as well as heartfelt compassion for those in need, exemplified in feeding, clothing and housing the poor, comforting the dying, seeking the lost, advocating justice, and training the untrained. We believe that Christlike disciples are best formed in community. As we learn, study, share, comfort, serve, worship, and pray together, the mind of Christ is made flesh. As a Christian community of scholars, we invite students to follow us as we follow Christ.

## ❖ **Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition**

We claim as our primary heritage the theological insights of the Eighteenth Century English clergyman John Wesley. He and his associates rediscovered the potentially powerful link between Christian belief and Christian life. Later in a new context, the Nineteenth Century American Holiness Movement renewed the commitment to connecting faith and life. SNU has inherited this rich tradition of integrating life and thought. We honor our heritage by our commitment to education and character formation that is relational, integrated, and practical.

This commitment is first of all relational because it understands that human beings are relational beings created in the image of a relational God. Education is about becoming more genuinely human and more like God. This dimension of our commitment prompts us to model the hospitality of grace.

Second, our commitment is an integrated or interdisciplinary approach to education because we see all truth as interconnected. In our curriculum and our learning environment we explore this one truth and the difference it makes in human life. This is the perspective from which we model the pursuit of truth.

Thirdly, this commitment is practical, or perhaps, better, practicable. It sees education and learning in the context of living and doing. This means maintaining a balance between asking deep questions and ensuring that the answers we find are given a chance to make a difference in our world. In so doing, we model the practice of discipleship.

## ❖ **Preparing Graduates**

The core activities of an excellent teaching university are to teach, to shape, and to send. We intend for students to complete their courses of study and graduate with the requisite intellectual skills and knowledge befitting a university graduate. We also intend for our graduates to be persons of Christian integrity, direction, and purpose, with a keen sense of vocation and a theology of everyday life that will guide their work and shape their involvement in service and ministry wherever they find their place—around the corner or around the world.

## ❖ **Thinking with Clarity**

The cultivation of the intellect “to reason well in all matters, to reach out toward truth, and to grasp it” is, in the words of John Henry Newman, a primary task of the university. We desire to engage students in critical thinking, careful reading, precise speaking, cogent writing, and creative problem solving. The ability to think with clarity is essential for advanced study in any academic discipline, for professionalism in any field of endeavor, and for intelligent participation in the affairs of church and society.

### ❖ **Acting with Integrity**

How one lives is evidence of what one believes. If we believe that all things are unified in Christ, then our lives will demonstrate an essential sense of wholeness, a sense of integrity. Thus, learning is a matter of the heart as well as the mind. We desire to model and shape character in our students so that a consistency of thought, values, and behavior is not only deemed possible, but also understood as normative and essential to Christlike discipleship.

### ❖ **Serving with Purpose**

We desire that every graduate leave with a sense of obligation and vocation: a deep calling and commitment to use his or her gifts and opportunities in service to others – particularly the poor, the disadvantaged, and the disenfranchised. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Everybody can be great because everybody can serve.” The Apostle Peter put it this way: “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received” (I Peter 4:10 NRSV).

We also desire that every graduate will be involved in the ministry of a local church, contributing in a meaningful way to that congregation while being shaped and formed by the community of faith.

## **Context**

Southern Nazarene University educates students to think with clarity, act with integrity, and serve with purpose within the educational context of the liberal arts, selected professional and graduate studies, a Wesleyan-holiness theological perspective, and a cross-cultural community life.

### ❖ **Liberal Arts**

A liberal arts education at Southern Nazarene University is one in which the student is exposed to the broad general fund of knowledge, which includes the humanities such as the arts, literature, and philosophy. It includes mathematics and the various sciences as well. Particularly, the study of theology is an integral part of an SNU liberal arts education because it helps to make interdisciplinary connections and to offer a way of understanding the unity of all knowledge in Christ.

The goal of this type of education is not to become an expert or technician with a narrow scope of knowledge. Instead the goal is to understand human experience broadly and thus be able to engage diverse ideas and fragmented thinking effectively, and to interact and communicate with people of various backgrounds. Underlying this goal is a belief that education is a preparation to live and appreciate life fully.

### ❖ **Selected Professional Studies**

The goal of the professional programs offered by Southern Nazarene University is to prepare students within the context of Christian values and principles for beginning or advancement in professional careers. Students will obtain the knowledge necessary to faithfully exhibit both leadership and service as professionals. To that end, these programs promote effective written and verbal communication skills, problem-solving and decision-making capabilities, authentic collegiality, and positive interpersonal relations, all of which are recognized as essential for professional success. Each program creates an educational foundation for lifelong learning and further growth through graduate study and

specialization within professional fields. An overarching goal is to enable students to make decisions based on discernment of ethical Christian principles.

### ❖ **Graduate Studies**

The learning environment created by a residential undergraduate liberal arts program provides an ideal setting for the pursuit of selected graduate level programs. The goal for these programs is to promote learning at a more intensive level, focusing upon the mastery of research into specialized disciplines and the application of that knowledge to appropriate areas of human activity and enterprise. The results of graduate studies at Southern Nazarene University will be degree recipients finding places of increased service and advancement in their professions. In addition, some degree recipients will pursue doctoral-level degrees.

### ❖ **A Wesleyan Theological Vision for Life and Thought**

A Wesleyan theological vision for life and thought is a relational, practical, and integrated approach to education and character formation (discipleship).

This vision is relational because it understands humans as relational beings created in the image of a relational God. Our approach to knowledge, learning, teaching, and discipleship is based on the idea that education is a formative endeavor. In this sense, education is about becoming more fully human and more like God. In so doing, we can relate more deeply to God, to others, and to the rest of God's created order.

A Wesleyan vision is also practical, or perhaps better “practice-able,” because it sees education and learning in the context of living and doing. Truth is not just a set of data to be known but a way of life to be lived. This means a constant balance between asking penetrating theoretical questions—and teaching others to do the same—and ensuring that those answers and the uncertainties that remain are given a chance to make a difference in our world.

The Wesleyan vision provides an integrated approach to education because it takes seriously the affirmation that all truth is God's truth. Because all truth is interconnected, there is no such thing as truth that is either antithetical to God or disconnected from other truths about him or the created order. In both our curriculum and our environment, we seek to explore this one truth and the difference it makes in our lives.

### ❖ **Cross-cultural Community Life**

Education at its transformative best challenges students in a variety of ways, and this experience is promoted by a diverse campus community as well as opportunities to experience other cultural and ethnic communities first hand. One of the most formative aspects of the college experience is to live with and learn from persons from different cultural, socio-economic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. The context of difference brings new light to ways of seeing the world, ways of knowing, and ways of living in the world. In essence, new and broadening perspectives introduced in the general education program and other courses are reinforced and made real when experienced first hand on campus, in the surrounding community, or around the world.

## **Motto**

The university motto of “Character-Culture-Christ” was first introduced in 1933, and although the mission has undergone various modifications, the descriptors of the motto reflect the institution’s most basic ideals. The continuity provided by this motto keeps the institution focused on the pivotal role of education in character development, the nurturing of cultural analysis and critique, and the tremendous potential of simultaneously pursuing the best in education and Christian commitment. The motto provides a framework for understanding the connections among various aspects of the mission and core values.

## **Core Values**

### **❖ Education in a Vital Christian Community**

The learning environment at Southern Nazarene University includes fostering students’ Christian spiritual development. This development focuses upon three dimensions: the inward spiritual life of the individual, the community within which the student lives and learns, and the servant life to which that community leads. These emphases are woven into the fabric of the university.

All faculty members work to integrate their respective disciplines with the Christian faith. This integrative work is accomplished in a variety of ways. At its heart, however, it involves asking students to think actively about the ways faith affects and impacts their understanding of these disciplines and, in turn, how their understanding of these disciplines impacts their faith. It also includes prayer and counsel with students. Fundamental to all of this is a commitment to faithful learning—living out one’s faith as a scholar, teacher, and wise friend.

Chapel worship services are designed to promote personal development in the Christian life as well as Christian community at the University. These aims are fostered in the shared experiences of small group fellowships and by service opportunities both on and off campus. The formation of a servant lifestyle and a global perspective are important goals of cross-cultural and international ministry and educational opportunities provided and promoted by the university.

### **❖ Faithful Partnership with the Church of the Nazarene in Education and Ministry**

The Office of Church Relations is focused clearly and intentionally on maintaining and strengthening the relationship between SNU and the South Central Region of the Church of the Nazarene. The region is the primary source of undergraduate students for the university. It also offers strong and consistent financial support, supplies a majority of trustees for the board, and provides places for student ministerial training and development.

The university serves the region through a variety of avenues. Professional development for ministers and laypersons is provided through an ongoing series of training events both on and off campus, including activities such as networking events, retreats, and clergy appreciation day. In addition to the denominationally specific events, community clergy events are held on an annual basis as a means of serving the broader faith community. The university’s most important service to the church is the sending to local congregations graduates who think with clarity, act with integrity, and serve with purpose.

### **❖ Hospitality in Admissions**

We have no intention of becoming an elitist or sectarian institution; however, we have no desire to encourage students to matriculate if they cannot be successful or if they would honestly be better served at a different institution. We do desire to recruit every qualified Nazarene student in the South Central Region, invite other Nazarene students from across the country and around the world, and attract and welcome students from other faith traditions who desire to avail themselves of our faculty and campus experience.

We intend to invite students from diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural and faith backgrounds and to provide the resources and support necessary for such students to feel welcome and to flourish. We know that we will not achieve the high level of academic quality and transformative campus environment we desire and value without diversity in our community. Our theology compels us to extend hospitality; our academic mission cannot be achieved fully without it.

### ❖ **Excellence in Teaching**

Excellence in teaching requires professors who love learning and are motivated by a deep desire to partner with their students in discovering and discussing new ideas. Professors are encouraged, and indeed make every effort, to remain current with the latest research and issues in their area. Professors acknowledge they are scholarly role models: they read professional journals; write for publication; and present at workshops, conferences and conventions while encouraging their students to do the same. Professors do not insist that students accept their views, but they encourage students to examine issues, theories, and ideas so they can express their points of view with supporting evidence.

In core general education courses and many major courses, students spend class time engaging important texts and required readings; professors encourage students to question and debate topics so that they can develop higher-level thinking skills. In classes where excellence is displayed, professors use innovative pedagogy; they frequently employ small group discussions, debates, and facilitate hands-on and service learning when possible, along with appropriate technology. During class, professors evidence the ongoing work of integrating Christian faith with their learning and provide a forum for students to do the same. When excellent teaching occurs, students leave the course thinking differently about the topic and their own education.

### ❖ **Holistic Education and Leadership Development**

While education at many universities is fundamentally a cognitive enterprise, this university intends the development of the whole person. This goal is actualized through students' participation in a variety of curricular and co-curricular activities. These activities provide experiential learning in leadership, teamwork, and program development. The skills practiced and refined in these experiences contribute to the creation and development of leadership qualities that students exhibit and hone in the life of the campus community. These leadership qualities and skills are expected to enable graduates to make significant formational contributions in their professions and in leadership positions in religious, social, and cultural organizations throughout their lives.

### ❖ **Global Understanding, Service, and Ministry**

Southern Nazarene University provides a liberal arts education within the framework of a Christian understanding of the world. Some of what that means is captured in the 1647 “Westminster Shorter Catechism,” which states that humanity’s “chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.”

The conviction at SNU is that such glorifying of God is best done not through cloistered living but through active involvement in ministry and service. As John Wesley said: “The Gospel of Christ knows . . . of no holiness but social holiness” (*Poetical Works*, 1: xxii). True holiness does not mean being physically separated from the world, rather being in the world without being a part of it. That concept of active involvement complements SNU’s educational philosophy, which views hands-on and service learning as an important partner of classroom instruction.

Thus, while SNU students may take five or more courses in the School of Theology and Ministry, amassing passing grades in those courses is not considered the sum total of what it takes to produce responsible Christian persons. Whether for credit in a course or as a volunteer activity, SNU’s curriculum promotes all students’ participation in educational service and ministry opportunities. Several semester-long study abroad programs support this important emphasis.