

## Why it is Critical for the Church (Especially the EFCC) to Continue to Stand with TWU



We live in challenging times. Many of you are aware that the Supreme Court of Canada ruled against Trinity Western University (TWU) regarding the proposed law school. Opposition to it was based primarily on the mandatory signing by students of the TWU Community Covenant, which references the traditional definition of marriage. Following the loss, the TWU Board of Governors (BOG), on which I sit, decided to not change the Community Covenant (CC). We also determined that signing and living by the CC would remain mandatory for Faculty and Staff, but would no longer be mandatory for students.

The BOG has additionally committed to work with TWU Student Life to better teach and orient all students to the CC and the university's Statement of Faith (SOF).

Responses from voices both inside and outside the church have been predictable – and disappointing.

As expected, those outside the church felt the BOG didn't go far enough. They feel that forcing Faculty and Staff to sign the CC is a bad thing, because they feel that parts of the CC are discriminatory. This was to be expected. LGBTQ communities believe that tolerance and acceptance of a LGBTQ lifestyle is not enough; rather they desire all Canadians to affirm and celebrate that lifestyle. The university and the EFCC still hold to the traditional definition of marriage. I believe that this is the correct stance for us to have yet will make us unpopular with some.

The disappointing response came from some inside the church who accused TWU of caving in to the culture. Let me explain why this is disappointing and why I believe that we as believers must stand with TWU at this time. First, the TWU BOG are firm that the SOF and the CC are foundational documents that define the identity of the institution. There is no appetite to change TWU's identity, values, or mission in order to placate some voices in the culture. Yet some Christians (who are not privy to the BOG discussions on these issues) have, based on their limited understanding of the decision, judged the motivations of the BOG. We ought to hesitate before judging each other, even when we think we have all the information (Jesus has some words on this for us in His Sermon on the Mount, and James further admonishes us on the topic). The truth is, the few letters and articles that I have read from believers condemning TWU's decision to make signing the CC by students non-mandatory have either not had all the information, or worse, had some of it dead wrong. By the way, on TWU's website is an excellent Q&A section on the issue, in case you want to get up to speed on all the background details. Click [www.twu.ca/frequently-asked-questions](http://www.twu.ca/frequently-asked-questions).

This takes us to the second issue, which is the missional nature of TWU. In a nutshell, TWU does not only accept believers into its programs. In the same way as your churches, TWU does not force newcomers to sign and uphold the Statement of Faith when they first walk through the doors. They trust that the classes and TWU Student Life will introduce students to Jesus and the core truth about Him – just like you hope that spending time in worship and teaching about our Lord in your church will help to introduce newcomers to Jesus. Hence, for decades, TWU has not forced students to accept the SOF.

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The SOF defines TWU theologically; the CC describes it morally. Mandatory signing of both by staff and faculty makes total sense – faculty and staff represent and work for the institution, and so must support the university's beliefs to students and others with whom they deal on behalf of TWU. Allowing students,

who may or may not be believers, to accept the SOF and CC on a voluntarily basis also makes total sense in a missional institution. Merely checking a box off acknowledging these documents (and not teaching students why we believe these things theologically and morally) may make sense in an institution where you only accept Christians, but it makes no sense in a missional institution that seeks to attract unbelievers into our community in order to introduce them to our Saviour.

A stronger approach to teaching the university's Christian values is what TWU is planning to do moving forward. Rather than merely having students check off a couple boxes upon admission (and then potentially ignoring the SOF and CC thereafter), Student Life will take greater initiative in teaching why we believe what we believe theologically, and why we do what we do morally. This is a disciple-making approach that makes sense in a missional institution that accepts both believers and unbelievers into its programs. Meanwhile, there will still be a Code of Conduct for those who live on campus to compel residents to live according to accepted community standards.

Lastly, it is imperative for believers to stand with TWU because our enemy so loves to see believers attacking each other. TWU is not waffling on the truth – they are seeking, as a missional institution, to reach unbelievers, introduce them to Jesus, and make godly leaders for the market places of life. Life is simple when you screen everyone on the way in and exclude everyone who doesn't believe exactly as you do on every issue – but that is not our calling. We are called to be a gracious presence in this world and to be gospel-sharing people. This is a messy calling.

As the Free Church guy on the board, I am committed to two things: first, I want to help TWU maintain its evangelical identity. That means TWU holds onto its (the EFCC's) SOF. Mandating that faculty and staff sign and promote the SOF and CC contributes to that. Second, I want to help TWU maintain and accomplish its mission. That means making disciples of believers and unbelievers and helping them become godly leaders for the marketplaces of life. All of us in the church know that this is messy and that we need to spend less time having people "check off boxes" and more time orienting them to what and why we believe what we do about our Lord Jesus and the life to which He is calling us.

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The EFCC has a long history of being a gospel sharing people – indeed, we are seeking to return to that calling with renewed passion. Rather than attacking or condemning TWU; rather than predicting its inevitable slide to liberalism; let's in Christian solidarity stand with them to protect and further both the evangelical identity and mission of the institution. Let's show this culture that we do not shoot our wounded, but that we are the same kind of loving, faithful presence that the church in the first century was even though they too lived amidst a culture that held values different from their own.

May we stand with and pray for TWU's leadership as they seek to speak gospel truth graciously and boldly (Acts 4:23-37).

Serving with you,

**Bill Taylor**

EFCC Executive Director