

# Lebanon Valley College

## Statement of Church Relatedness

The value which Lebanon Valley College places on its historic relationship and current affiliation with the United Methodist Church is evident not only through the LVC Web site and student recruitment literature, but also through the second sentence of the College mission statement which notes that its mission “arises directly from its historical traditions and a relationship with the United Methodist Church.” As the College works to realize its mission, its relationship with the Church finds expression through annual events which recognize church relatedness as well as through programming which honors the practice of worship, service, and social justice.

### **Annual Events Recognize Church Relatedness**

LVC's United Methodist heritage is celebrated on an annual basis through four campus-wide events: Founders Day, the Thomas Rhys Vickroy Society Dinner, Inquiry Celebration of Student Learning, and our Baccalaureate service. The occasional inauguration of our chief executive officer also affords an opportunity for the College to celebrate our United Methodist heritage.

Founders Day Convocation highlights practices of worship and service in its commemoration of the establishment of the College by the Church under the leadership of clergymen George Washington Miles Rigor and Thomas Rhys Vickroy. Two awards are presented as part of the worship, one to a member of the local community whose service contributes to the enhancement of life in central Pennsylvania and one to a campus student group that contributes to the enhancement of life in central Pennsylvania.

The annual Thomas Rhys Vickroy Society Dinner includes a celebration that honors the Methodist heritage of the College through a salute to its first president. One highlight of the event is a traditional toast to Rev. Vickroy, “whose spirit of scholarship, intellect, and service inspires our college to this day.” The event also acknowledges those who serve as current stewards of the institution through their generous financial support.

Scholarship awards presented during the Inquiry Celebration of Student Learning contribute to the development of our community of scholarship and learning by providing recognition and financial assistance to students who excel at the College. Several awards are specifically designated for students preparing for ministry as well as for students who seek to facilitate social justice.

Each Commencement Day begins with a Baccalaureate worship service featuring a message of Christian values and United Methodist hymns. In 2012 Bishop Peggy L. Johnson, who graduated from Lebanon Valley College in 1975 and now serves as bishop of the Eastern Pennsylvania and the Peninsula-Delaware Conferences of the United Methodist Church, preached for graduating students and their families at Baccalaureate. Students hear the good news of God's love and a call to service as they begin their post-baccalaureate careers.

The inauguration of the president of the College also presents a fine opportunity to celebrate our relationship with the United Methodist Church. We were honored to have both Bishop Peggy Johnson and Gerald Lord, Associate General Secretary of the Division of Higher Education within the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church, serve on the

platform party for the inauguration of Dr. Lewis Evitts 'Thayne as president in April of 2013. Both spoke with appreciation for how Lebanon Valley College, in line with its relationship with the United Methodist Church, educates graduates in the context of a value system that seeks to develop whole persons. This goal is accomplished in part through programs at the College which honor religious practices of worship and service.

### **Honoring the Practice of Worship**

LVC is deeply committed to the open pursuit of knowledge and stresses such values as integrity, honesty, justice, compassion, and spiritual growth as integral to that pursuit. Under the direction of the Chaplain, LVC's Office of Spiritual Life provides a supportive environment which seeks to enhance all students' intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth.

The College sponsors weekly student-led worship services in Miller Chapel, located at the center of campus. Student-led Bible studies occur most nights of the week, most of which meet in lobbies of the residence halls. One study is designated for men, another for women. A co-ed Bible study on Thursday evenings is particularly popular. These meetings are encouraged through the umbrella organization known as "Christian Life at LVC," which also sponsors service projects, weekly prayer meetings, Christian retreats and regular fellowship events for the entire campus community.

Christian outreach beyond the campus community may be found in the form of LVC's Chapel Concert Series, sponsoring four to six Christian concerts in Miller Chapel each academic year. The students who design, publicize and implement the Series develop professionally as they interact with performers, church staff, and concert attendees.

Because LVC respects the diversity of individual religious practices, the College also facilitates meetings for Catholic Mass, Buddhist Meditation, a Wicca Study Group and Jewish fellowship. A year-long series of "sustained interfaith dialogues" sponsored by the Department of Religion and Philosophy, the Office of Spiritual Life, and the Office of Multicultural Affairs focuses on issues ranging from individual belief to the actions of faith communities in response to global poverty. The success of the series has led to the development of an Interfaith Certification at the College. Students who enroll in select courses in religion and reflect upon designated program offerings related to religious life will be awarded a certification which may serve to demonstrate to prospective employers an openness to diversity on the part of the recipient.

Requirements for General Education at Lebanon Valley College include one course in religion and philosophy. Five full-time professors teach in this area, in addition to several adjuncts. Taking into consideration those students within our Department of Music who intend to serve the church professionally as organists or choir directors, the College has identified 14-20 pre-ministerial students in recent years.

### **Honoring the Practice of Service**

In recognition of the vital connection between faith, knowledge, and service, the College has extended the role of the Chaplain beyond pastoral care and liturgical performance. Through the Office of Community Service & Volunteerism, also directed by the College Chaplain, the campus offers many opportunities for service in the community, including week-long trips to areas impacted by natural disasters. Three levels of community service awards are available for inclusion in a student's professional resume. In 2013, the Office logged the fifth consecutive year of reported service hours since the establishment of College-wide service hour guidelines. Lebanon Valley

College was recently named among top national higher education institutions to the 2013 President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. The College has also been an active participant in President Obama's Interfaith and Community Service initiative for colleges and universities.

Student initiative provides the engine which drives these initiatives of the Office of Community Service and Volunteerism. In all, approximately 13 student-led service organizations provide an array of service opportunities focused on constituents ranging from people in need of housing to the athletes of Special Olympics to individuals fighting cancer. Local, regional, and national concerns may be address by students involved in a service fraternity (APO), a service sorority (Gamma Sig), or a national organization (Kiwanis, Rotary Club).

The college also sponsors outreach ministries which extend beyond the boundaries of the United States. Each year the student-led service organization the Servants of Christ coordinates the packing of 500 shoe boxes with toys for distribution to Latin America, Africa and Asia through Operation Christmas Child. A grant from the President's Innovation Fund for 2013-2014 will fund a service trip to Cusco, Peru in collaboration with the Department of Languages.

Co-curricular programming in worship and service is organized with strong faculty participation. Opportunities to assess the degree to which the activities foster student learning are incorporated into each program.

### **Honoring the Principles of Social Justice**

Just as the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church address human issues in the contemporary world with prophetic spirit, Lebanon Valley College aims to educate students about social justice ministries. Four programs and two honors illustrate how LVC speaks to social justice in line with the UMC.

Sustained Dialogue is a student-centered, dialogic social justice education model that fosters student engagement and learning across differences, modeled after the tenets of the nationally renowned Intergroup Dialogues Program. The Dialogues at LVC focus on religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and ability with the goal of bringing people together from diverse backgrounds to address and resolve deep-rooted issues that may divide communities along political, religious, cultural, social, racial, or socioeconomic lines. In recent years, Sustained Interfaith Dialogues at LVC have engendered conversation and relationships between members of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim communities.

The "Doorways to Diversity" Project is developed by students in LVC's Digital Graphic Design class. The students work with diverse members of the LVC community to create door-size color displays that express some aspect of identity. The goals of the project are to celebrate the diversity of LVC's community, to bridge gaps between the various constituencies across campus, and to break down boundaries between curricular and co-curricular opportunities for learning.

Every January, the Office of Multicultural Affairs sponsors a three-day Social Justice Institute that allows students to explore how oppression impacts true equality. The highlight of the institute is the day-long trip to an urban center where students are able to visit an array of human and social service agencies as well as explore various cultural aspects of the city. The students return in assist in the leadership of our observance of MLK, Jr. Day on which we serve the local community and reflect upon Rev. King's legacy through lecture and music.

Two honors come to members of our LVC community who actively address issues of social justice. The Pallas Society is a campus-based honor society consisting of students, faculty, and staff who are instrumental in promoting social justice at Lebanon Valley College. Once inducted, members of the Society work together to advance justice in the college and the local community. Notice of Multicultural Achievement (NOMA) Awards also recognize individuals at Lebanon Valley College who build, serve, represent, or enhance social justice both on and off campus. NOMAs are awarded by students at any point in the year as they inspired by others; recipients are celebrated with a posting in the College Center.

Given their common goals of enhancing worship experiences, encouraging community service, and demonstrating inclusion and compassion, the relatedness of Lebanon Valley College and the United Methodist Church makes sense. Because both institutions work actively and effectively to achieve these goals within shared local, national, and global communities, the partnership contributes to the sustainability of both Church and College. So we are thankful for the relatedness of the UMC to LVC and look forward to nurturing that relationship in the years to come.