A Covenant of Shared Values, Mission, and Vision Agreement Between
BAPTIST GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF VIRGINIA
AND
MCAFEE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
MERCER UNIVERSITY

I. Prologue
This Covenant is established by the Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV) and McAfee School of Theology (MST) of Mercer University for the purpose of clarifying and affirming the relationship between each as they seek to fulfill the Great Commission through shared commitments and cooperative ministry while at the same time maintaining the independence and distinct character of each.

A brief history of the relationship…
When Jesse Mercer founded Mercer University in 1833, he and other Georgia Baptist leaders envisioned an institution that would provide students with a classical and theological education. Their concern was for young preachers and for members of area Baptist churches. Mercer knew these churches desperately needed pastor-leaders who understood scripture and could clearly articulate their Christian beliefs.

Over the intervening years, the institution begun by Jesse Mercer has developed into a university of far-reaching influence, while remaining committed to an educational environment that embraces the historic Baptist principles of intellectual and religious freedom. Today, more than 8,300 students are enrolled in 12 schools and colleges on campuses in Macon, Atlanta, and Savannah; three medical school sites in Macon, Savannah, and Columbus; and at four Regional Academic Centers around the state.

In recent years, both pastors and students who seriously examined the opportunities for seminary-level training expressed a need for new educational alternatives within the Baptist tradition. After careful consideration of the issues and after an extensive feasibility study, the University’s Board of Trustees in June of 1994 voted to establish a School of Theology. MST accepted its first class in the Fall of 1996 and now can boast of some 750 alumni who serve around the world as pastors, professors, ministers, chaplains, and missionaries. MST welcomes the opportunity to foster a partnership with the BGAV as we seek the mutual advance of our Lord’s Kingdom.

This Partnership Mission Covenant is birthed out of a desire to work together to fulfill the Great Commission and because of the mutual and supportive benefit gained by establishing a relationship between the BGAV and MST. It is important that this Covenant establish the intersection of the values, mission, and vision of each entity as the foundation for partnering together through more specific means. This is accomplished first by each entity stating its values, mission, and vision, and secondly by the entities working together to build their covenant around the values, mission, and vision shared in common.

For the purpose of this Covenant, values or “statement of faith” are defined as those guiding principles established by an organization that help frame major decision-making processes, the formation of strategic direction, and the development of human and financial resources. Mission is a unique and succinct statement of purpose that frames the actions of the organization around several key components. Vision is that driving, motivating, God-given view of the future that moves an organization toward specific goals and that seeks to
bring others along on the journey. Vision can be described through a delineation of major emphases, new strategic initiatives, and/or the development and targeting of key resources.

II. The Values, Mission, and Vision of the Baptist General Association of Virginia

Values
In November, 1995 during annual session the Baptist General Association of Virginia adopted the following values:

- Centrality of Christ
- Authority of Holy Scripture
- Priesthood of Believers
- Soul Competency
- Religious Liberty
- Separation of Church and State
- Autonomy of the Local Church
- Believers Baptism
- Respect for Persons
- Intellectual Integrity
- Cooperative Spirit
- Compassion for Unbelievers
- Responsiveness to a Changing World

Mission
Since 1823 the Baptist General Association of Virginia has pursued its mission as stated in the purpose statement of the BGAV Constitution and Bylaws:

*The object of the General Association shall be to furnish the Baptist churches of Virginia a medium of cooperation for the propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and for the advancement of the Redeemer’s Kingdom by all methods in accord with the Word of God. There shall be full recognition of the autonomy of the local churches.*

Vision
In a special called meeting in May 2002 and in the annual meeting of November, 2002, the Baptist General Association of Virginia adopted a challenging new vision for the future. “Kingdom Advance: Partners in a New Vision” is a comprehensive strategy of the churches of the Baptist General Association of Virginia in cooperation with Kingdom partners in Virginia, the United States, and around the world. Unlike many visions and associated strategies from the past, “Kingdom Advance” goes beyond the ministry and work of the Baptist General Association of Virginia and seeks to involve all Virginia ministry partners in advancing the Redeemer’s Kingdom.

“Kingdom Advance” outlines four major goals:

BGAV will emphasize the matching of ministers and churches so that they might serve boldly the cause of Christ; the modeling of wellness for the church, its ministers, and Christian families; and developing leaders, both lay and clergy, for the church. Key strategies include developing assessment and placement tools in order to better match ministers and churches; intensified efforts to assimilate new ministers to BGAV life; leadership development cooperatives that provide specialized training and continuing education in multiple locations though linkages with ministry partners; and supportive ministries to prevent “burn-out” among ministers and their families.

BGAV will identify new leaders for church leadership, both lay and clergy, young and old, on campuses and at places of employment; equipping them for service through special training experiences and through mentoring relationships; and deploying them to places of service for “hands-on” learning of practical skills.
Key strategies include “call-out” events at church, associational, and statewide levels; the ongoing program of campus ministry on college campuses; the creation of “greenhouse” events where emerging leaders are challenged to grow through intense learning experiences; the development of coaching and mentoring networks for new leaders; and the creating of internships in local church and denominational ministry.

BGAV has an overall mission strategy of going to places where the Gospel is needed, both locally and globally, caring for emotional, social, physical, and spiritual needs; and educating future generations of mission leaders. Key strategies include the deployment of missions volunteers to serve alongside our missions partners locally and around the world; the deployment of Kingdom Advance Ambassadors and a flexible, mobile missions force, supporting caring ministry at the local church level and through joint efforts of ministry on a larger scale; and providing missions education opportunities through classroom and “hands-on” experiences.

BGAV will seek to create a movement where Christians and churches go beyond being healthy to being courageous in evangelizing the lost through church planting and evangelistic outreach; discipling believers to become bold Christians; and visioning a new future for the church and its ministry as often as a changing community and God demands. Key strategies include the provision of resources and supportive networks for church planters and new congregations; training in evangelism, Bible study, discipleship development, worship leadership, and church growth; concentrated efforts at church revitalization and community transformation through an intensive covenant process; financial partnering with churches seeking to become courageous; and through matching assistance for significant discipleship and outreach projects.

III. The Values, Mission, and Vision of Mercer University and McAfee School of Theology

MST’s mission and vision exists under the umbrella of the mission and vision of Mercer University.

Values, Mission and Vision of Mercer University

Mercer University’s mission is to teach, to learn, to create, to discover, to inspire, to empower and to serve. In fulfilling this mission, the University supports undergraduate, graduate, and professional learning as well as basic research and its application in service to others. As a university committed to excellence and innovation, Mercer challenges members of its community to meet and exceed high standards in their teaching, learning, research, scholarship and service. Founded by Baptists in 1833, Mercer is an independent university that remains grounded in a tradition that embraces freedom of the mind and spirit, cherishes the equal worth of every individual, and commits to serving the needs of humankind.

As a reflection of this heritage:

• We encourage our students to discover and develop fully their unique combination of gifts and talents to become leaders who make a positive difference in the world.
• We seek to inspire members of our community to live virtuous and meaningful lives by using their gifts and talents to serve the needs of humankind as an expression of their love for God and neighbor.
• We seek to enrich the mind and spirit by promoting and facilitating an open and rigorous search for truth and understanding, including an examination of the moral, religious and ethical questions of this and every age.
• We affirm and respect the dignity and sacred worth of every person and celebrate both our commonalities and our differences.

The Ten Founding Principles of the McAfee School of Theology

Based on Jesse Mercer’s vision, the McAfee School of Theology is founded on ten principles that have guided its inception and will continue to guide its formation and character:

1. The School shall be founded upon the belief that Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the center and focus of faith.
2. The School shall spring from Mercer University's conviction about its own vocation as an institution, borne and nurtured by Baptists and Baptist churches and committed to undergirding the work and witness of the church as a community of faith.

3. The School shall seek to educate students who are:
   - literate and disciplined in the study of sacred scripture;
   - articulate in understanding the historical and theological issues of faith;
   - effective preachers and interpreters of the Christian gospel;
   - wise and compassionate in personal and social ministry;
   - prepared to integrate faith and life in the spiritual formation of congregations.

4. The School shall be devoted to the preparation of men and women who combine the call of God's spirit with the intellectual gifts, the emotional maturity, and the spiritual discipline to become effective and responsible pastors and leaders in ministry.

5. The School shall be inclusive in spirit and practice, affirming the open search for truth, and fostering tolerance for religious and intellectual diversity.

6. By underscoring both scholarly discipline and the experience of ministry, the School shall seek to break through the dichotomy of theory and practice, claiming both reason and compassion, the mind and the heart as gifts of God and conceiving ministry as bringing the sacred to bear upon every dimension of human experience.

7. The School shall hold steadfastly to the high and defining traditions of Baptists, including the priesthood of believers, the separation of church and state, the autonomy of the local congregations as the context for mission and ministry, the centrality of scripture to the life of faith, and the resolve that neither creeds nor human affirmations of faith should stand as tests of orthodoxy.

8. While holding firmly to its high calling and to its specific responsibility for theological education among Baptists, the School shall also accept its responsibility to embrace the whole world as the creation of God and to serve the wider Christian community as the people of God who are called to live out God's purpose and presence in the world.

9. The School shall embody the historical traditions of Mercer University, valuing both intellectual freedom and the affirmation of faith as the foundations of the University.

10. The School shall serve as a continuing resource to churches, pastors, and professionals in ministry for their continuing education and as a reference and placement service for churches, pastors, and other church leaders.

Mission of MST
The mission of MST is to form Christian leaders whose practice and scholarship, empowered by their passion for God and neighbor, changes lives and transforms communities. The School accomplishes this mission by:

Integrating spirituality with service

- Practicing spiritual disciplines that nurture us for Christian service.
- Embracing ethnic, gender, and theological diversity to enhance our spiritual growth and moral formation.
- Creating opportunities to learn in community, experience transformation, and risk action.

Integrating theological inquiry with prophetic vision

- Interpreting the story of the Christian faith through sacred scriptures and traditions.
• Connecting faith to global contexts in ways that engage personal, communal, and political realities.
• Critiquing the structures of our society from an informed prophetic voice.

Integrating worship with witness

• Celebrating God’s presence in worship as the source of the Church’s call to community and global transformation.
• Reading cultural contexts to create holistic strategies for ministry.
• Proclaiming the love of God in Jesus Christ through dialogue and in partnership with others.

The Vision of MST
The vision of MST is simply stated as it emerges from the School’s founding principles and mission: “Changing lives and transforming communities.”

IV. Our Covenant Together
The Baptist General Association of Virginia and the McAfee School of Theology therefore affirm their voluntary, mutual, and supportive relationship by means of the following shared values, mission, and vision. We do this as partners in a new vision seeking to fulfill the Great Commission and to advance the Redeemer’s Kingdom.

Shared Values
As Covenant Partners, our shared values include the following:

• Centrality of Christ
• Authority of Holy Scripture
• Priesthood of Believers
• Soul Competency
• Religious Liberty
• Respect for Persons
• Intellectual Integrity
• Compassion for Unbelievers
• Responsiveness to a Changing World
• Separation of Church and State
• Autonomy of the local church

Together we affirm the significance of the local church and the need for theological education that equips the church for the work of ministry. We recognize the need for intentional work in racial reconciliation where “in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” (Galatians 3:28).

Shared Mission
The McAfee School of Theology provides a diverse learning environment in which students of various ethnic backgrounds study and minister in order to change lives and transform communities. We welcome all students who are committed to Christ-centered ministry and mission in the world. McAfee’s mission together with the BGAV’s focus upon empowering local congregations makes a partnership between the two institutions a helpful way for advancing God’s kingdom in the world. We welcome the opportunity to partner with the BGAV and with the Baptists of Virginia for the spreading of the Gospel and for the advancement of God’s Kingdom.
Shared Vision
As a Christian School of Theology, rooted and grounded in the Baptist tradition, and as a Covenant Partner with the BGAV, MST shares the vision of “Kingdom Advance.” In particular, and in covenant together, we will promote this vision in the following ways:

Development of Leaders:
We commit to training students to be Christian leaders who are prepared to change lives and transform communities. We encourage and model for students a life-long integration of faith and learning, combining academic rigor, spiritual formation, and ministry application. We seek to produce graduates who are personally whole and spiritually mature, biblically grounded and theologically competent, pastoral, evangelistic, and prophetic. We will provide opportunities for Virginia Baptist students to have hands on experience in church ministry, CPE/chaplaincy, community development, missions, evangelism, church planting, and innovative ministry. We look forward to connecting McAfee graduates with BGAV churches through placement and internships.

Support of Churches:
We commit to support and train BGAV pastors and leaders through our ongoing continuing education programs, our Resource and Referral services, opportunities to take part in our emerging centers for preaching and congregational life, global church and interreligious collaboration, community development, spirituality and the vocations, ethics and public life, and through our Doctor of Ministry and Masters degrees and Certificate programs. Furthermore, we seek to work with churches to integrate the training of leaders and minister with the training and encouraging of churches. We are eager to provide resources for churches in the form of retreats, Bible studies, and training events and to offer our faculty as resources for congregations. Drawing on the resources of the larger university, we can help to facilitate training focused on the intersection of vocational ministry with business, law, health care, counseling, and in a variety of other areas.

Ministry to the World:
McAfee School of Theology has made a significant commitment to increasing the awareness and ability of students to connect with an increasingly pluralistic world. Through its emerging Global Church and Interreligious Collaboration Center, MST helps both students and churches understand the diverse religious traditions that surround them. Through mission immersion experiences, MST helps students and others who wish to participate to appreciate and learn from the enculturation of the gospel in various global contexts. Through its programs in community development and social enterprise, MST seeks to equip students and others to explore new and entrepreneurial ways to transform lives and communities in our rapidly changing world.

V. Relationship Between the Parties
This agreement does not create a contractual relationship or financial obligation, nor does it imply that McAfee School of Theology is an agency, institution, or shared ministry of the General Association.

VI. Term
These shared values, mission, and vision frame our relationship as Covenant Partners effective November 13, 2017. With six months’ notice, either party to this Covenant of Shared Values, Mission, and Vision may request that it be renegotiated or terminated. This Covenant shall be reviewed every five years.