



The Ethical Framework for Religious Life at USC

Religious directors and their staff, religious advisors, and recognized student religious groups function within *The Ethical Framework for Religious Life at USC*. Within each of these categories, their status on campus requires adherence to the specified conduct norms indicated throughout by italics. Violations of these conduct norms places the person or group at risk of de-certification/loss of status, as determined by the Dean of Religious Life and specified below in this section and under section 11. Beyond those conduct norms indicated through italics, it is hoped that all participants within the religious life scene will identify with the broad aspirations articulated below.

The *Framework* has been endorsed by the Religious Directors Association and the Religious Life Advisory Committee. It has been reviewed by the President, Provost, Vice President for Student Affairs, Executive Board of the Academic Senate, Executive Committee of the Staff Assembly, and the university's General Counsel. It stands in congruence with other university statements of mission, policy and procedure.

Departures from *The Ethical Framework* will initially be handled through discussion with the Dean of Religious Life and, if appropriate, other relevant university personnel; e.g., staff from Student Affairs, Housing, Residential Education, Athletics, and so forth. In the case of egregious or continuing violations by a religious director or advisor or one of their staff, the person will be asked to cease his/her campus ministry at USC and asked to relinquish the USC Card which he/she gained through the Office of Religious Life. Before a termination stage is reached, the Dean will confer with the religious director's supervisor(s) within the sponsoring organization or denomination and/or, as appropriate, the Provost and/or Vice President for Student Affairs. In the case of egregious or continuing violation by a student organization, recognition will be withdrawn, as determined by the Dean of Religious Life.

Provisions of the *Ethical Framework* are as follows:

1. Maintaining commitment to faith and to the university. Those professionals or volunteers who gain affiliation with the Office of Religious Life, whether as religious directors or advisors, are encouraged to speak openly about their particular faith commitment under appropriate circumstances and to work actively to build their faith community on campus. The collegiality and professionalism of religious directors is compatible with their expressing doctrines, voicing personal opinions, and carrying on religious practice; likewise, there need not be standardization of administrative procedures, programmatic design, staffing or fund-raising among affiliated religious organizations. It is understood that religious directors and advisors and their staff represent specific religious traditions or faith communities and that their primary commitment is to serve the welfare of their own campus congregations, even while they are called upon simultaneously to serve the welfare of the entire USC community. *When promoting their ministry, religious directors and advisors and staff must clearly identify themselves and their particular affiliation. When acting in the name of the Office of Religious Life or the university as a whole, they must do so in a nonsectarian manner even while acknowledging the particular religious group that they represent.*

2. Balancing particularity and inclusiveness. *Student religious groups must be open to general participation by any interested student.* They may, however, specify requirements for holding a leadership position and/or participating in a particular religious ritual.

Religious directors, advisors and staff should inform themselves about, follow, and educate their student groups regarding the university's standards and policies with respect to hazing, harassment, student conduct and academic integrity. *Religious directors, advisors and staff must follow the USC Principles of Community to "not tolerate verbal or written abuse, threats, harassment, intimidation or violence against person or property" and to acknowledge that "no one has the right to denigrate another human being on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, etc."*

3. Promoting religious freedom. Religious directors and advisors, their staff, and their student groups will support religious freedom on campus, enabling students to explore and believe-or not-any particular teaching or idea. *A student must be able freely to participate in or to leave a religious group without being subject to harassment or procedures that compromise the student's autonomy.* USC religious groups should strive for a campus climate that honors the individual autonomy of each person, encourages open exploration, stimulates intellectual as well as spiritual inquiry, and supports the university's devotion to truthfulness and the search for knowledge.

4. Respecting religious history and ancestral connection. Religious directors and staff, advisors, and student groups should support the university's goal of making every student feel as much at home as possible within the USC community, a goal which requires respect for the religious convictions and/or ancestral identification of each student. The university supports the presence of a wide range of religious groups, encouraging the formation of new groups to serve newly emerging religious/ethnic constituencies. Religious directors, advisors and their staff should inform themselves of the varieties of religious expression available on campus and within Southern California, so as to help students learn about the religious setting of their heritage. Of course, students are free to explore religious options or embrace a religious tradition other than that in which they were raised, and religious directors will generously facilitate their process of exploration and experimentation.

5. Upholding religious pluralism and civil discourse. Religious directors, advisors, staff, and student groups should cultivate respect for, and understanding of, the range of world religions and non-religious thought. Such respect will be strengthened by open dialogue, debate, and discussion among two or more groups. *In public statements and activities, religious directors and advisors, their students and staff must avoid denigrating or de-legitimizing any religious group that has gained recognition at USC, its religious tradition, or its individual practitioners.* Undermining any religious community in order to proselytize or for any other purpose is considered a violation of good practice, and even sincere conversion should not be sought through deprecating other groups. Religious directors and advisors and their students should share their faith with others in a manner that avoids harassing, demeaning, or disregarding the integrity and freedom of other persons in making their own decisions in matters of religious faith and identity. They should avoid language that foments hatred or prejudice, or which otherwise undermines the community of respect and trust which is essential to free academic discourse and to a democratic society.

6. Respecting the university's academic mission. Religious directors and advisors and their staff are expected to respect the goals and purposes of the university, avoiding programs or efforts that obstruct the achievement of those goals, especially with regard to students. They should responsibly support the university's pursuit of the educational goals which form its foundation. *Thus, religious directors and advisors and staff must not engage in any action that (a) seriously compromises a student's academic standing, (b) removes students from campus by pressure or force or without their full consent, (c) places undue financial pressure on students, or (d) exploits the sexual or other vulnerability of students.*

The overall programming calendar pursued by a religious director or advisor, or followed by their student group, should not be so demanding as to make it difficult for students who are committed members of the group to meet the academic obligations which constitute the primary purpose for university enrollment. While attending to potential conflict of interest with the university on this overall level, religious directors and their staff are also encouraged to inquire as to the academic status of, and current demands on, individual students involved with their groups.

7. Acknowledging students' relationships with their families. Religious directors and advisors and their staff are encouraged to be sensitive to the relationship between students and their families, and to be as open as possible with concerned parents while respecting the confidentiality of communication and individual autonomy of students as adults. In cases of uncertainty or conflict, the religious director will confer with the Dean of Religious Life and the Office of the General Counsel.

8. Publicizing with integrity. *In publicizing their group and its programs or offering items on campus, religious directors and advisors, staff, and students must create and distribute only materials that clearly convey who they are, the focus of their group or program, and connections to any off-campus organizations. The title of and publicity for a particular event should make clear the scope and approach of the event, as well as whether people from a range of religious traditions are encouraged to attend. The name of the sponsoring group needs to be large enough to be easily read by anyone encountering the item—whether a flyer, poster, newspaper advertisement, banner or free gift. Furthermore, the name “Office of Religious Life” may not be used on publicity without the knowledge and consent of the Dean of Religious Life. Use of the university’s identifying marks—including but not limited to the name, initials (USC), seal, monogram, and Trojan head—must conform to the guidelines established by the university in July 1999, as contained in the three-ring binder “Graphic Identity Program: Artwork, Color and Type Guidelines.”*

9. Respecting privacy within university residence halls. Student leaders of religious groups often serve as resident advisors and are otherwise active within USC’s residence halls, and religious directors are eligible to serve as non-resident faculty fellows. When desiring to share their faith commitment with students in residence halls, religious directors and advisors, their staff and student leaders should avoid invading or intruding upon the privacy of those students—whether through personal visit, telephone, email, or mail—unless they have been asked by a student to make contact. Situations in which this general principle and/or any of the provisions below conflict with religious requirements or individual conscience should be discussed with the Dean of Religious Life.

Religious activity in the residence halls may take place only within the following boundaries:

a) Religious directors and advisors, their staff, and non-resident students may visit other students who (1) have checked off that particular religion or group on the Religious Interest Card distributed through the Office of Religious Life, or who have requested more information through direct contact with the particular group, and (2) have invited those associated with that group to visit them in their room.

b) Religious directors and advisors, their staff, and non-resident students may not canvass, approach or visit an entire residence hall or floor. They may not randomly visit student rooms where no prior relationship has existed, even when the door to a student’s room is left open. They may not place publicity or solicitations on a general, random basis on or under the door of students’ rooms.

c) Religious groups may not set up a table or distribute material in the lobby of a residence hall without approval of the Director of Residential Education, the Director of Housing, and the Dean of Religious Life.

d) Religious directors who are non-resident faculty fellows have privileged access only to the residence hall

with which they are affiliated. They may not use that access to engage in general visiting or recruitment for their particular group or religious tradition.

10. Honoring confidentiality. *Religious directors and advisors and their staff, whether clergy or lay, function as religious professionals and therefore must honor the confidentiality of students and others whom they guide and counsel. Such confidentiality governs unless specifically waived or as covered under specific legal provisions.*

Likewise, student religious groups should be educated to maintain an atmosphere where the personal communication encouraged by a religious setting is respected as confidential.

11. Dealing with disagreements. When religious directors and advisors find themselves in disagreement with the university administration, the Dean of Religious Life, or their fellow directors/advisors, they should handle this disagreement as an internal matter. Should claims of conscience bring a religious director/advisor to publicly disagreeing with established university policy or procedures, the director/advisor should notify the Dean of Religious Life, preferably in advance of the situation. In cases of conflict among religious directors/advisors, those involved will try to work with one another to achieve a resolution. If a solution is not reached at this level, those involved should seek counsel with the Dean of Religious Life, who may bring the matter to a meeting of the Religious Directors Association. In situations where the above modes of resolution do not suffice, the Dean will seek the advice or involvement of the Provost, the Vice President for Student Affairs, or the relevant university official.

The Religious Life Advisory Committee shall serve as the arena in which possible violations of the Ethical Framework by student religious groups, their directors and advisors are reviewed. If a violation is deemed to have occurred, the committee will write a letter of reprimand to the group(s)–with copies to the Religious Directors Association and Campus Activities.