When I was a young person about your age, I had a cousin—let’s call him Billy Bob to protect the guilty—who was always testing the limits of thought and behavior. Now, lest you begin to speculate, let me assure you of one thing—it was not my cousin Dr. John Maple. Though he grew up in a Christian family, Billy Bob always wanted to know just how far he could go without crossing the line into sin. Billy Bob would debate with me for hours the fine nuances of rationalization and the relative spiritual and legal risks of certain behaviors. He never matured to the point to where his commitment to principles, to values, or to faith was strong enough to keep him out of trouble. Even today, in excess of age 50, Billy Bob’s spiritual maturity level is about that of a 13 year old. And he continues to pay heavily for this failure to grow up.

I expect all of us have spent some of our lives either trying to rationalize what it is we want to do, or perhaps even more frequently, ignoring the moral and ethical implications of our proposed actions. I also expect that reliance upon laws for ethical behavior is at best a difficult case among your generation. The reality is that it was not enough for my generation either, nor for the generations of the patriarchs, the prophets, and the apostles.

It is highly evident from the scriptures that God wants his new covenant to be written on our hearts rather than tablets of stone, or handbooks, or websites. It is a vastly superior way of ordering both our individual lives and our collective life. Though God has always sought to reign in the hearts of his people, in the early years of recorded history, he found it necessary to have the law as a schoolmaster for his children. That progression from law to heart is also applicable to our lives as we grow in spiritual maturity. As children, we must have specific externally-imposed boundaries and directions for our
actions, but as we grow older, those constraints that allow us to live in community and compel us to act more Godlike come not from laws, but from heart attuned to his will.

You are in a transition time in your lives, a time in which you are loosening the constraints imposed by your parents, testing the limits of behavior, and seeking guiding principles for your own lives. Therefore, it is important that the current community in which you live provide opportunity, example, and encouragement for you to make the transition from third-party imposed restraints to personal disciplines worthy of your life created in the image of God. Our mission statement says we are about the business of transforming lives for Christian faith, leadership, and service. How do we best do that? There are many facets of that work, but by far the most important of those is to change hearts and attune them to the beat of the Master. To help in that process, we have drafted the Oklahoma Christian University Covenant to fill in a gap in the University’s own foundational documents. As thinking young people, I hope you will welcome a community call to standards directly from scripture which we believe are worthy of your loyalty and your lives.

The concept of a Covenant is a marvelous one that has largely been lost in modern America. It derives its origin from the biblical concept of covenant—which consists of a voluntary agreement among parties to live in relationship and to abide by certain accepted standards of behavior. Our current usage of the term certainly does not rise to the stature, holiness, or power of the biblical concept, but it conveys the idea that all parties are held to certain promises and standards, and that those who adhere to it will be blessed. A covenant is intended to be transformational, not just transactional. It has more to do with relationship as a God-people, than it does with legality. It has the potential for developing a deeper spiritual community and represents progress in the way we express our
community goals. In a very real sense, it is not something new; it is really just a more compelling statement of the existing spiritual and philosophical foundations of the University and of the kind of behavior desired in this Christian university community.

Think with me for a moment what this covenant is not. First, it is often erroneously equated with a legal contract, which is a two-way agreement that provides relief to the other party when one breaches it. In a covenant, we remain bound by personal integrity regardless of what another party may do. For example, the failure of a student to abide by a commitment in the Covenant does not in any way relieve the administration, the faculty, or other students of their commitment to treat that person with respect, love, and gentleness.

Second, this Covenant is NOT a creed which requires one to agree with the importance or veracity of each provision to be a part of the community. It does, however, demand that each staff, student, faculty, and trustee abide by the spirit and the letter of the covenant in the conduct of life in this community. Oklahoma Christian University will continue to welcome and embrace students who do not share all of the tenets of this faith community, but who are willing to comply with this Covenant.

Third, the Covenant is not like Thomas Jefferson’s Bible, which he cut and pasted together to contain only those parts of the Bible he liked and believed. Rather it points to the whole of scripture as the ultimate guide and standard, and contains, at a minimum, those precepts that are necessary for this non-Church community to fulfill its mission.

Fourth, the Covenant is not intended to eliminate or replace the campus behavioral rules and standards. It becomes the basis for and a standard by which we measure the appropriateness and implementation of the rules and regulations, but not a substitute for them. Even Jesus made it quite clear that his bringing of the new covenant of the heart was
not to eliminate the old law, but rather to fulfill it. In Matt. 5:17-20, Jesus says, “Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them…. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

It is our desire that all of our righteousness surpass that of the Pharisees and lawyers.

We will continue to have rules and regulations and sanctions for those who elect to violate the principles set forth in the Covenant, and thus violate their own integrity. However, we are asking members of the community to commit to these broader principles and expectations to which we will appeal for a change of heart when behavior becomes a problem.

Because we are human, no doubt we will all occasionally violate these magnificent principles, but if our hearts are attuned, we will all continue to return to them as our standard. I know there are some of you who will not write this covenant on your hearts. I am very sad about that—not so much for any impact it will have on me, but because I know the joys, the blessings, and the promises that you will be missing.

This current version of the Covenant is the result of numerous town hall meetings with students, faculty, staff, and trustees. We are indebted to many of you who made excellent suggestions and this version is much, much better because of your comments and suggestions. We are all deeply indebted to Jeanine Varner, Neil Arter, and Shon Smith, for finalizing the Covenant after taking all the comments into account.

Upon the authority of the Board of Trustees, effective immediately the Oklahoma Christian Covenant is an integral part of the governance and philosophical fabric of this University. For a community covenant to serve its stated purpose, it is crucial that each member of the campus family understand it clearly and embrace it sincerely. All those
living in the OC community are joining in a compact with other members of the community which should be done purposefully and with utmost seriousness. The act of enrolling or accepting employment in this community signifies agreement to live with integrity under the covenant’s provisions both on this campus or representing the University. If, after experiencing a community whose behavior reflects this Covenant, a students, staff, or faculty member feels that he or she cannot accept this Covenant, then we will, with love and gentleness, help that person to find a place that is more suited to their needs and desires. It is voluntary, but it is required of all who remain at Oklahoma Christian University.

As you leave chapel today, you will be given a copy of the official version of the OC Covenant, and it will be posted around campus and on the University’s website. It will also begin to show up conspicuously in catalogs, recruiting materials, and other public relations materials. Tomorrow in chapel, you will be privileged to hear from one of your fellow students and a faculty member about their personal reaction to and hopes for the OC Covenant. Though there was considerable opportunity for discussion of the Covenant during its formation, I hope that it will become the object of discussion in your classes, around the fireplace in the Magic Bean, on your dates, and in your dorm bull sessions.

Last Thursday Nancy and I were seated about 15 feet from President and Mrs. Bush at the Congressional Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC. Former Oklahoma Congressman and OU football star JC Watts told of sitting on the front porch on summer evenings as a child and smelling the mouth-watering aromas coming out of mama Watts’ kitchen. He said one thing the family and friends could ALWAYS count on was that anything that came out of mama Watts’ kitchen was going to be good. JC noted that he only wished that when someone thought of JC Watts that they knew that anything coming
out of JC’s kitchen would be good. That’s my desire also, that anything that comes out of
Mike’s kitchen, or OC’s kitchen, people will know it is good. I pray that is your desire as
well. If we commit ourselves to the principles of this Covenant, I can assure you that only
good will come from our kitchens.

At the prayer breakfast we were reminded so poignantly by the President himself,
by Washington Redskins coach Joe Gibbs, and by several Senators and Representatives of
the frequent counsel of the founding fathers of the American experiment, that “No self-
governing democracy can long stand if its people are not good, if they are not grounded in
morals and values.” A marvelous and wise constitution, a Bill of Rights, and all the
legislation in the world will not constrain and create a self-governing, civil society if its
people do not have goodness in their hearts. Likewise, God’s kingdom cannot flourish and
grow and this campus cannot meet its mission of transforming lives for Christian faith,
leadership, and service if all efforts to instill and nurture Christian discipline are grounded
no deeper than the legislative regulations in a student handbook or a faculty handbook.

There is nothing magic in this covenant itself. It is merely words on a paper, but
they do have the power to inspire us and lead us to the source of truth, wisdom, and life.
My deepest prayer is that each of us--staff, faculty, trustees, and students--will etch the
principles of this OC Covenant in our hearts, carry out its loftiest ideals in our lives, and
thus fulfill the law of Christ. I promise you that our lives will be blessed in direct
proportion to how well we do exactly that. The alternative is to live your life like Billy Bob,
either not controlled at all, or controlled by laws and regulations, accompanied by all the
pain and sorrow that comes from not following our Maker’s instruction manual for life.
Our ultimate goals at Oklahoma Christian are that we will prepare you for a life of
Christian faith, leadership, and service, and that ultimately, we will see each and every one
of you in that marvelous home prepared by God for those who have written the law in their hearts. May God bless each one of you, may God bless the life of this Covenant, and may God bless Oklahoma Christian University.
Our Covenant

Oklahoma Christian University is a higher learning community which transforms lives for Christian faith, leadership, and service.

The values and behavior of this Christian community are derived from the Bible, rather than the prevailing culture. Because we are a higher learning community dedicated to a distinctively Christian mission, we join together in a community covenant. This covenant is not a creed demanding strict belief in its veracity and inerrancy, and it is not merely an ideal to which we aspire; rather, it is a personal commitment that while we are members of this community, we will abide by the principles and ideals set forth in the covenant. The purpose of our covenant is to unite all of us at Oklahoma Christian University—students, staff, faculty, administration, and Board of Trustees—in a Christian community which is based on biblical principles and which transforms lives for Christian faith, leadership, and service.

We recognize that the University is not the church; however, we are a Christian community which seeks to be guided by the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in scripture. We welcome all students, regardless of their church affiliation, who agree to abide by this covenant. Because the University was founded by members of the churches of Christ and because we seek to serve our church constituents effectively, we expect all full-time faculty and staff to be faithful, active members of the churches of Christ who fully embrace the principles of this covenant.

Our Foundation

God interacts with this world as both Creator and Savior (Genesis 1; Hebrews 1:1-3).

The Bible is God’s inspired word, which shows us the nature of God, the risen Son, and the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21).

We seek to honor God by imitating the nature of God and his son, our Lord Jesus Christ, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 13:13-17; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21).

As members of this Christian higher learning community, we are guided by specific principles set forth in the Bible (Psalms 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Our Call

God calls us to do our best in everything we do (Colossians 3:17; Colossians 3:23).

God calls us to submit our will to his (John 15:14; James 4:7; 1 John 2:17).

God calls us to submit to one another in love (1 Corinthians 10:23-24; Galatians 5:13-14; Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:3-4) and to show his love through the justice, mercy, and faithfulness of our lives (Matthew 5; Matthew 23).

God calls us to live lives of holiness (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians. 4:7; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16).

Our Community Life

We strive to honor the Lord and be Christlike in all of our conduct (Colossians 3:12-14; Titus 2:11-14).

We strive to demonstrate love and respect for everyone, even those who have views that differ from ours, and avoid conduct or language that is demeaning to others (Galatians 3:28; Philippians 2:3-4; James 2:1-13).

We strive to exercise our Christian freedom responsibly within the framework of God’s Word, humbly submitting to others (I Corinthians 10:23-24; 31-33).

We strive to use wise stewardship of our mind, body, time, abilities and resources and make thoughtful, biblically guided choices in matters of behavior, entertainment, and interpersonal relationships (Philippians 4:8).

We strive to practice honesty and integrity in everything we say and do (Colossians 3:9-10; Revelation 21:8).

We strive to treat our bodies with the honor due the temple of the Holy Spirit—honoring God’s plan that sexual relations be a part of a marriage between a man and a woman, dressing modestly, and avoiding any self-destructive practices (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

For the sake of our personal influence and our life together in Christian community, we also agree to certain community standards of conduct which are not specifically set forth in the Bible, but which enable the community to operate peaceably and in harmony with these principles and with one another. These community standards are set forth in the Student Handbook, the Staff Handbook, and the Faculty Handbook.

By choosing to be a part of the Oklahoma Christian University community, every member of the student body, staff, faculty, and Board of Trustees