



Building a Community of Belonging

Statement of Institutional Commitment:

Ozark Christian College is committed to becoming an institution of belonging—a college where students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds can be trained for Christian service and experience a joyfully diverse and transformative community. At Ozark Christian College, we believe true belonging is achieved when diverse cultural backgrounds are not only represented but also influential in supporting and enhancing the college's mission across the institution. This dedication to belonging impacts the institution's operations at all levels, from students to faculty, from staff members to administration, and from executive leadership to the board of trustees. OCC desires to implement practices and values at all levels that reflect God's kingdom of unity in Christ amidst distinctions. Our commitment extends beyond merely reflecting the ethnic and cultural diversity within God's church. We aim to prepare our students for ministry in multiethnic and multicultural environments. Below is an outline of the actions Ozark Christian College is taking to honor its commitment to belonging, guided by biblical precedent.

Biblical Foundation:

Since its inception, the church was to be a community comprising individuals from diverse backgrounds, nationalities (Acts 2:5-11; Acts 8:26-40; Acts 10:44-48), and ethnicities (Romans 1:16). These characteristics were defining elements of God's church (Acts 11:19-26). It is from an ethnically diverse church that Paul and Barnabas were sent out to evangelize the nations (Acts 13:1-3). Yet, the biblical foundation for a unified community of believers from various cultural backgrounds was spoken about long before the birth and growth of the church. God envisioned a time when foreigners, previously estranged, would be given a title better than sons and daughters (Isaiah 56:1-8). God told his people to anticipate a time when the kingdom would not be understood as ethnic or national uniformity, but instead characterized as united in worship of the one true God. This belief in the Lord would create a new family based on faith in Jesus the Lord.

When Jesus began his public ministry in his hometown, he declared that this prophesied time had arrived (Luke 4:16-30). Jesus made it clear that entrance into the kingdom of God is now based on hospitably receiving him as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. In receiving Jesus as Lord, the believers are hospitably welcomed into God's family: showcasing the year of the Lord's welcome (Luke 4:19). The ministry of Jesus defines what the church is meant to be: a community of people from all tribes, nations, and ethnicities (Revelation 7:9) who have encountered the Spirit of Christ (Ephesians 4:1-6) and now strive to follow the way of Jesus. Being welcomed by God in Christ outweighs the cultural differences that can easily bring division. Acts 6 shows us that culture can divide the church. Acts 15 shows us that ethnicity and differing ideas can divide the church. The epistle of James shows us that socio-economics can

divide the church. Yet, Jesus calls the church to be completely one (John 17:20-23). This unity transcends cultural differences, as articulated by Paul, who declared that in Christ there is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female: all are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11; Romans 10:12). This elimination of contention based on cultural differences, however, does not mean an annihilation of the differences themselves. Again, Scripture recognizes cultural differences in the body of Christ, affirming that unity in Christ in the midst of healthy cultural distinctions is something to be celebrated. Furthermore, when cultural differences are acknowledged and understood, the church does well in spreading the Gospel (e.g., Acts 17:16-34). Paul says that this was part of his own kingdom work, that he became all things to all people so that he might win some of them to the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:19-27).

In the kingdom of God, unity in Christ in the midst of diversity is prophesied, recognized, cherished, and utilized for the glory of God and the edifying of the church. Ozark Christian College desires to live out the words of Christ in the Spirit of Christ, and thus we follow suit as we pursue being a Christian college of belonging.

Implications of Belonging:

Encouraging Spaces of Belonging

Belonging requires representation and community ownership. OCC has several avenues that encourage students from various backgrounds to be united in Christ and celebrate differences. At events such as Coffee Is Culture and heritage celebrations, cultures from the United States and around the globe are showcased by students and personnel. In addition, avenues like short-term mission trips and Engaging Culture trips provide immersive cultural experiences. Groups like the Mosaic Leadership Scholarship Fellowship and international student gatherings are pivotal in fostering connections among students from various cultural backgrounds.

The Multicultural Affairs Department serves as a vital resource for students from all ethnicities to connect, be heard, and influence the campus climate. Through strategic collaboration and communication with Student Affairs and Lincoln Seminary, Multicultural Affairs is dedicated to providing support and care to undergraduate and seminary students throughout their college careers, particularly during moments of feeling culturally isolated. This department, alongside Cultural Footprints (a student organization that exists to cultivate a campus that embraces the beauty of unity in Christ amidst cultural diversity), plays a crucial role in providing feedback to the institution on its progress in creating a community of belonging and exploring ways for students to actively contribute to OCC's efforts.

Developing Students of Belonging

In the same spirit as Paul "becoming all things to all people," OCC desires to develop students who are growing in cultural intelligence and cultural engagement. This takes place both in and out of the classroom.

OCC has as part of its academic learning goal to cultivate students who practice cultural discernment. At Ozark, students learn to recognize, understand, and evaluate cultural differences to enhance their Christian service effectiveness. All students are required to take a sophomore-level course that pertains to global and United States cultures. This course includes an assessment tool that measures a student's capability to navigate cultural differences and provides opportunities for growth. Furthermore, students have access to courses in cultural anthropology, world religions, and other social sciences, enriching their academic journey without extending their time at college. Co-curricular activities like the Mosaic Lunch, Forum on Cultural Engagement, and the Global Ambassador Program (GAP) complement this learning, allowing students to engage with cultural experts and international Christian missionaries.

Developing Leadership of Belonging

To truly be an institution of belonging, this commitment must also be reflected in our faculty, staff, and administration. The Multicultural Affairs Department offers ways for personnel to grow in their cultural intelligence. All the events and opportunities previously mentioned are also communicated to all OCC personnel so that they can grow from these learning experiences. Additionally, the cultural assessment tool given to sophomore students is available for faculty and staff to discern how their unique roles can contribute to making a community of belonging.

Lastly, ethnic and gender representation is an ongoing effort. OCC recognizes that it should have a diverse faculty, staff, and administration if the institution is to truly be a place of belonging. It should not be surprising that Paul and Barnabas were sent as missionaries to Gentiles from the church in Antioch—a church whose leadership itself was culturally diverse, having people from different countries, ethnicities, economic backgrounds, and history (Acts 13:1). In trying to reflect the best of the early church, Ozark Christian College likewise strives to have leadership and personnel from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds.