



The
Baptist College
of Florida

"Changing the World Through the Unchanging Word"

Office of the President

December 4, 2014

Ms. Catherine E. Lhaman
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. S.W.
Washington, DC 20202-1100

Re: Claim of Title IX Religious Tenet Exemption

As President and the highest ranking official of The Baptist College of Florida, I submit the following statement in order to claim on behalf of the College the religious tenet exemption from Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 which is provided for in 20 U.S.C. 1681, 1682, and which is the subject of 34 C.F.R. 106.12.

The Baptist College of Florida is a Southern Baptist institution of higher education. It is a Florida nonprofit corporation whose principal office address is 5400 College Drive, Graceville, Florida 32440-1898. I enclose the Charter and Bylaws of the College.

The College is subject to the direction and control of a religious organization. That organization is the Florida Baptist Convention. This convention is a Southern Baptist general body whose constituency is the cooperating Southern Baptist churches of Florida. It is an "association of churches" in the terminology of the Internal Revenue Code. The College is an agency of this convention. Pursuant to the College's Charter and Bylaws, the Florida Baptist Convention controls the University in part by exercising its right to select the entire elected membership of the board of directors of the College, the governing body of the College.

The College's Charter provides:

The corporation in its actions and functions is to be a religious, educational, benevolent and charitable body, medium, institution, trustee and agency, serving and doing the will of the Florida Baptist Convention....

The Convention's authority over the College constitutes control by the Convention which is more than sufficient to cause the institution to be exempt from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964's general prohibition against religious discrimination in employment under 42 U.S.C. 2000e-2, §

703(e)(2) as an educational institution "which is in whole or in substantial part, owned, supported, controlled, or managed by a particular religion or by a particular religious corporation, association or society." (See, for example, the decision of the United States Circuit Court of Appeals, Eleventh Circuit, regarding our sister Southern Baptist university in *Killinger v Sanford University*, 113 F. 3d 196 (1997)).

This request for exemption is from provisions of Title IX to the extent application of those provisions would not be consistent with the Convention's religious tenets regarding marriage, sex outside of marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, and abortion.

I identify those provisions to be:

Admissions:

34 C.F.R. § 106.21 including but not limited to (b)(iii) (governing differential treatment on the basis of sex in admissions); and (c) (governing admissions prohibition on the basis of marital or parental status).

Recruitment:

34 C.F.R. § 106.23 (governing nondiscriminatory recruitment).

Education Programs or Activities:

34 C.F.R. § 106.31(b)(4) (governing different rules of behavior or sanctions), and (b)(7) (otherwise limiting any person in the enjoyment of any right, etc);

34 C.F.R. § 106.32 (governing housing);

34 C.F.R. § 106.33 (governing comparable facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms);

34 C.F.R. § 106.40 (governing different rules based on marital or parental status of students); and

34 C.F.R. § 106.41 (governing athletics);

Employment:

34 C.F.R. § 106.51 (governing employment);

34 C.F.R. § 106.52 (employment criteria);

34 C.F.R. § 106.53 (recruitment);

34 C.F.R. § 106.57 (governing the consideration of marital or parental status in employment decisions); and

34 C.F.R. § 106.60 (governing pre-employment inquires).

The purposes for which the College is organized include:

...to promote, provide for, operate and control a program of education and training for ministers and other religious workers, for such period of time as the Florida Baptist Convention shall deem the need for such a program to exist.

The mission of the College is stated as follows:

The Baptist College of Florida shall operate within the context of a Christian worldview to promote, provide for, operate and control a program of education and training for Christian leaders through awarding certificates and associate, baccalaureate and masters degrees in a co-educational post secondary setting.

To fulfill its mission, the College seeks to develop those qualities in students that contribute to effective ministry. In the area of personal growth, we seek to foster a desire for knowledge; develop cultural awareness by introducing students to a wide range of knowledge; nurture the ability to acquire, evaluate, assimilate, and use information; and promote personal and social maturity.

For spiritual growth, we provide the resources for gaining biblical and religious data; we also assist students in learning and living the Christian life. In terms of professional growth, students are enabled to gain the credentials that enhance opportunities for ministry, and they learn to master a specialized body of knowledge.

At the same time, we encourage positive attitudes toward ministry and foster both an awareness of and a loyalty to the Southern Baptist heritage.

The College's Doctrinal Statement begins with this affirmation:

The Bible is the divinely inspired and revealed Word of God

Southern Baptist religious tenets have been described most extensively and most recently in *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, a statement of faith adopted by the Convention. That statement is enclosed.

In regard to marriage, sex outside of marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy and abortion, the following statements are illustrative:

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race. . . . Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. XVII The Family, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*.

Man is the special creation of God, made in His image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. III Man, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. (The Southern Baptist Convention elaborated on this tenet most recently in 2014 by the adoption of a resolution "On Transgender Identity." It is enclosed.)

Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. . . . We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death." XV The Christian and the Social Order, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*.

The State Board of Missions of the Florida Baptist Convention, the board of directors of the Florida Baptist Convention, has declared the following in its "adherence to The Baptist Faith and Message": to wit:

The State Board of Missions declares its expectations that the students, faculty, staff and trustees of the Baptist College of Florida are to conduct their personal behavior and lifestyle in a pattern that is consistent with Biblical teachings and values, in addition to expressing beliefs and tenets consistent with Southern Baptist theology and practice.
(Resolution is enclosed.)

Thus, the College's policies are rooted in these religious tenets. Application of a regulation would not be consistent with these tenets if the regulation prohibited the institution from following its policies, that is, if the regulation prohibited the College:

From engaging in recruiting and admissions under a policy which called for the consideration of an applicant for admission's sexual orientation, transgendered status, marital status, past and present practices regarding marriage, sex outside marriage, pregnancy, and abortion (these considerations collectively referred to hereafter as "student and employee characteristics"), and prohibited the institution from treating that person differently as a result of that consideration;

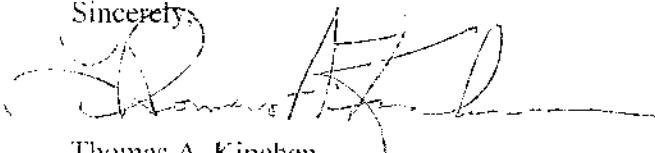
From subjecting students to rules of behavior, sanctions, or other treatment because of these student characteristics. Examples would be the institution's rules regarding eligibility for employment of the student by the institution; the assignment of housing, restrooms and locker rooms, and restrictions to athletic activities by birth sex; rules prohibiting homosexual conduct including but not limited to a prohibition of a student's engaging in sex with a person of his or her birth sex; prohibition of sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman; sanctions as the result of pregnancy and abortion; and

From making all employment decisions, including but not limited to selection criteria and pre-employment inquiries, recruitment, the decision to employ, retention decisions, and decisions regarding sanctions, in a manner which takes into consideration these employee characteristics.

Thus, this claim for exemption includes exemption from these specified regulations to the extent the regulation would require the institution to treat marriage, sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, gender identity, pregnancy and abortion in a manner that is inconsistent with the religious tenets of the Convention.

I trust this letter is sufficient, but if you have any questions, please let me know. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas A. Kinchen", written over a horizontal dashed line.

Thomas A. Kinchen
President

TAK/lt

Enclosures



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

December 22, 2014

Thomas A. Kinchen
President
The Baptist College of Florida
5400 College Drive
Graceville, FL 32440-1898

Dear President Kinchen:

The purpose of this letter is to respond to your December 4, 2014, letter to the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR), in which you requested a religious exemption from Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), 20 U.S.C. § 1681, for The Baptist College of Florida (College) of Graceville, Florida. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any education program or activity operated by a recipient of Federal financial assistance.

The implementing regulation at 34 C.F.R. § 106.12 provides that Title IX does not apply to an educational institution controlled by a religious organization to the extent that application of Title IX would be inconsistent with the controlling organization's religious tenets. Therefore, such educational institutions are allowed to request an exemption from Title IX by identifying the provisions of Title IX that conflict with a specific tenet of the religious organization. The request must identify the religious organization that controls the educational institution and specify the tenets of that organization and the provisions of the law and/or regulation that conflict with those tenets.

Your request explained that the College "is subject to the direction and control of a religious organization. That organization is the Florida Baptist Convention." Your letter enclosed a copy of the College's Charter and Bylaws. Article II of the College's Charter states that the College's purpose is to be a "religious, educational, benevolent, and charitable body, medium, institution, trustee and agency, serving and doing the will of the Florida Baptist Convention in the matter of its operating, conducting, and managing The Baptist College of Florida, Inc., for and on its behalf, and in holding in trust the assets and properties of The Baptist College of Florida, Inc., for its use, maintenance and operation in accordance with the instruction, direction and authorization of the Florida Baptist Convention." Your request further explained that "[p]ursuant to the College's Charter and Bylaws, the Florida Baptist Convention controls the

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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

[College] in part by exercising its right to select the entire elected membership of the board of directors of the College, the governing body of the College.”

Your letter requests a religious exemption from provisions of Title IX “to the extent application of those provisions would not be consistent with the Convention’s religious tenets regarding marriage, sex outside of marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy and abortion.” In support of this request, you cite to The Baptist Faith and Message 2000, the most recent statement of faith adopted by the Convention. According to your letter, that statement of faith explains that the tenets of the Convention are that marriage is between one man and one woman and serves as the means for procreation, that God made man in male and female form, and that the “gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God’s creation.” You further cite the Convention’s belief that one should “speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.”

You explain that it would not be consistent with the Convention’s religious tenets for the College to comply with Title IX to the extent that it prohibits the College from “engaging in recruiting and admissions under a policy which called for the consideration of an applicant for admission’s sexual orientation, transgendered status, marital status, past and present practices regarding marriage, sex outside marriage, pregnancy and abortion; ... from subjecting students to rules of behavior, sanctions, or other treatment because of these student characteristics; [or] from making employment decisions... in a manner which takes into consideration these employee characteristics.”

You state that, for these reasons, the College is requesting an exemption from the following regulatory provisions to the extent that they prohibit discrimination based on marital status, sex outside of marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy or abortion:

- 34 C.F.R. § 106.21 (governing admission);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.23 (governing recruitment of students);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.31(b)(4) (governing different rules of behavior or sanctions);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.31(b)(7) (governing the limitation of rights, privileges, advantages, or opportunities);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.32 (governing housing);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.33 (governing comparable facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.40 (governing different rules based on marital or parental status of students);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.41 (governing athletics);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.51 (governing employment);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.52 (governing employment criteria);

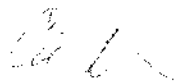
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.53 (governing recruitment of employees);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.57 (governing the consideration of marital or parental status in employment decisions); and
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.60 (governing pre-employment inquiries).

The College is exempt from these provisions to the extent that they prohibit discrimination on the basis of marital status, sex outside of marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, or abortion and compliance would conflict with the controlling organization's religious tenets.

Please note that this letter should not be construed to grant exemption from the requirements of Title IX and the regulation other than as stated above. In the event that OCR receives a complaint against your institution, we are obligated to determine initially whether the allegations fall within the exemption here granted. Also, in the unlikely event that a complainant alleges that the practices followed by the institution are not based on the religious tenets of the controlling organization, OCR is obligated to contact the controlling organization to verify those tenets. If the organization provides an interpretation of tenets that has a different practical impact than that described by the institution, or if the organization denies that it controls the institution, this exemption will be rescinded.

I hope this letter responds fully to your request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Catherine E. Lhamon
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Education