

The background of the page features a large, faint watermark of the Calvin College seal. The seal is circular with a central shield containing a figure. The text around the seal reads "MY HEART I OFFER TO YOU LORD" at the top and "PROMPTLY AND SINCERELY" at the bottom.

# CALVIN COLLEGE

## STATEMENT OF IDENTITY AND MISSION

Calvin College is a  
comprehensive liberal arts college  
in the Reformed tradition  
of historic Christianity.

Through our learning, we seek  
to be agents of renewal in the  
academy, church, and society.

We pledge fidelity to Jesus Christ,  
offering our hearts and lives to do

God's work in God's world.

(Purpose, Vision, Mission Statement of Calvin College)

The following statement is distilled from three principal college documents:

The *Expanded Statement of Mission*, the *Core Curriculum Purpose Statement*, and *From Every Nation*. It articulates the identity and mission of Calvin College in light of its particular theological tradition, educational history, foundational premises, and sustaining vision. This statement summarizes Calvin's philosophy of Reformed Christian liberal arts education and its understanding of the college as a community of faith-directed inquiry. It aims to be comprehensive enough to provide guidance in meeting the challenges and opportunities of the future, yet brief enough to be used readily in college deliberations.

### **Introduction**

Of central concern for any Christian college are questions of identity and mission: who are we and why are we here? Calvin College answers those questions in terms of believing and belonging: beliefs, which ground and direct the work of the college, are held by those who belong to the living

community of God's people, the church. Thus both believing and belonging shape the mission of Calvin College as an institution of higher education that focuses on teaching, learning, and scholarship. The college sees all its members as carrying on these practices *Coram Deo*, before the face of God.

### ***Believing and Belonging***

As a Reformed educational institution, Calvin College has been shaped in its faith and scholarship by these central convictions:

God, the almighty creator of a good world, is sovereign over all of creation, granting to human beings, made in his image, the responsibility of caring for this world. Sin entered the world by humanity's rebellion against God, affecting every aspect of creation, including every area of human life. Nevertheless God graciously preserves the world, holding all things in his tender embrace and bending them to his purpose.

In saving grace God kept his covenant promises to our world, acting unconditionally in the person of Jesus Christ to redeem humanity and all creation from sin and evil. The risen Christ is Lord of all, reconciling all things to himself and calling people to salvation through faith alone, which is a gift of grace alone.

The Holy Spirit, active from the beginning, continues to move across all creation. At Pentecost the Spirit permanently indwelt the church, empowering it for service and gathering people from every tongue, tribe, and nation into the unity of the body of Christ.

The Bible is the authoritative, Spirit-breathed Word of God, fully reliable in leading believers to know God and to walk with Christ in newness of life. Through Christ and in the power of the Spirit, God meets his people in worship, conveying grace through Word and sacrament. The Spirit empowers believers to bear witness to Christ's love and to be agents of God's creative and renewing work in every area of life. Christians live with unwavering hope of the new creation where God's kingdom will fully come.

These beliefs have been formed, and continue to be nurtured and deepened, in the ongoing life, witness, and practice of the Christian church. Calvin College identifies itself with followers of Jesus Christ throughout all ages and around the world who affirm the three ecumenical Christian creeds: the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. It further affirms historic Reformed Christianity as expressed in three confessional documents—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort—as these continue to define the college's understanding of Scripture and to direct its living out of the Gospel.

As followers of Jesus Christ in the 21st century, members of the college community also gratefully affirm the witness of *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* as a powerful expression of biblical faith that shapes the work of teaching, learning, and scholarship as well as daily living.

In embracing the confessional statements as historic, authoritative guides to our understanding of Scripture and its claims on our lives, Calvin College affirms its connection not only to the Christian church generally, but to the family of Reformed churches in particular. Among these, Calvin College bears a special relation to the Christian Reformed Church, the denomination that founded and continues to support and govern the college. Calvin College is grateful for mutual blessings that accrue to the college and Christian Reformed Church by virtue of their close relationship to one another and their ongoing commitment to ever expanding service in the world.

Belonging as well as believing thus sustains and enlivens the work of all at Calvin College: faculty, administrators, staff, and students. It entails a disciplined and sacrificial commitment to the college community. It provides foundation and encouragement to members of the college as they seek to fathom in their work together that all truth is of God, and that whatever is just and pure, honest and right, lovely and excellent, is worthy of our promotion and praise, to the glory of God.

### ***Teaching and Learning***

Teaching and learning at Calvin College are rooted in its Reformed commitment to believing and belonging and are shaped by the pervasive sense that we come into being, live, and serve in a world created, sustained, and redeemed by God in Christ. "I am not my own, but *belong* body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ"—so begins the Heidelberg Catechism. Recognizing that we are not our own informs the overarching goal of this educational enterprise including our understanding of teachers and learners, the shape of the college curriculum and co-curriculum, and student formation both inside and outside the classroom.

Because both teachers and learners are made in the image of God, experience the distortions of sin, participate in the redemption Christ offers through the work of the Holy Spirit, and await the fullness of God's blessing, they treat one another with re-

spect, encouraging disciplined work and thoughtful reflection. Teachers and learners together are joined in a covenantal educational project that draws upon the resources of the Christian tradition and that seeks to encourage each member toward fullness in the body of Christ.

The curriculum itself, as well as the entire college experience, is intended to engage students in the various contexts of their lives—natural, cultural, societal, and spiritual— and to develop their gifts by emphasizing the knowledge, skills, and virtues they will need as they respond fully to the call of God. Beginning with a robust core curriculum, the college pursues the traditional aims of liberal arts education: to broaden and deepen students' understanding of the world and to prepare them for a life of wise and virtuous action. Majors, minors, and professional programs provide specialized training and education to develop adults who can faithfully and effectively carry out their vocations.

Pedagogical practices at Calvin are varied, but all stem from the desire to respect diverse abilities, backgrounds, and instructional styles while fostering in students a yearning for truth, delight in learning, curiosity about life, and the courage to take up its challenges and opportunities. Not only the content of the curriculum, but also pedagogy itself is shaped by Christian faith, thought, and practice. The college sets high expectations of its students, encouraging them to develop the commitments as well as the critical and creative skills they will need to serve the Lord as they serve others.

The goal of the educational project at Calvin College, therefore, is to form maturing Christians equipped to understand the history, structure, themes, and issues of the world they will inherit and which they will help to shape. It furnishes students with biblically informed lines of sight so that they are able to trace the interactions within and among the various dimensions of imaginative and practical life. It seeks to inspire them with a holy passion so that they may serve as ambassadors of Christ, representing and advancing the redemptive purposes of God's kingdom.

### **Scholarship**

The vocation of scholarship has been and continues to be vital to the identity and mission of Calvin College, as is evident in the array of faculty scholarship that it supports. This commitment fits with Calvin's character as a comprehensive college

deeply rooted in the liberal arts tradition because good scholarship enhances and grows out of good teaching on the one hand and seeks to address the pressing needs of contemporary life on the other. Christian scholars, like Christian teachers, begin with the awareness that we are not our own but belong to Christ our Savior. They engage the world as a creation that has been tainted in every part by sin but that still functions under God's providential care. They look for ways to advance God's creative and redemptive purposes through the production of imaginative, critical, and practical works.

As a community of mutual service, Calvin College honors the scholarly work of all its members. It recognizes that the type of work a Christian scholar carries out will be a function of the nature of the discipline, that scholar's particular gifts, and the opportunities that arise in the course of an academic career. Some are called to explicitly Christian scholarship, in which religious commitments have manifest impact on the design, argument, conclusions, or implications of the work. Others aim for similar ends but by more implicit means. Still others observe the standard practices of their guild in such a way that nevertheless fulfills their calling, honors God, and contributes to the common good.

These scholarly endeavors help fulfill the college's obligation to contribute to and evaluate the creation of new knowledge, to aid in the preservation and reinterpretation of our cultural and natural heritages, to communicate and interpret these initiatives to lay as well as peer-professional audiences, and to enhance the voice of faithful Christian witness in the academy. In these ways, scholarship at Calvin College draws from the wellspring of Reformed beliefs and practices as it seeks to serve church, academic, professional, and lay communities, and especially as it aims to be a leader in intentionally Christian scholarship around the world.

The college has emphasized different aspects of its scholarly mission at different times in its history, but from the very start it has insisted on carrying out a critical dialogue between its defining religious commitments, Western cultural traditions, and the contemporary situation. Especially under the influence of Kuyperian neo-Calvinism, it honed the practice of evaluating all claims and schools of thought from a coherent and self-critical biblical perspective. Now celebrating the global expansion of Christianity, it hopes to learn from and help lead the scholarly interaction of the faithful within the



full range of human cultural, social, and ecological situations around the world, humbly embracing the challenges and opportunities that these afford.

### **Community**

The “believing and belonging” nature of Calvin College is a great strength and a great challenge. In an increasingly utilitarian, rootless culture, where human beings crave purpose and belonging, Calvin College offers itself as a confessional community of teaching, learning, and scholarship that is designed for the long run, defined by the Reformed theological commitments of its faculty and administrators, and nurtured by a living attachment to the Christian Reformed Church. This historical, theological, and cultural continuity is a great strength for Calvin College.

We treasure this “belonging” not for its own sake, however, but so that guided by the Spirit, faithful to the Word, and diligent in prayer we can aim together to be ever more conformed in heart and mind to the likeness of Christ Jesus. We take up together the challenge of becoming agents of the reconciliation and renewal that God is working in the world, learning what that might mean and where it is taking place. Knowing that God’s global venture increasingly takes our graduates to every corner of the world as well as into every niche in our own neighborhoods, we welcome the opportunity to learn with the myriad other communities that form our field of interaction even when such learning requires self-examination, repentance and a renewed sense of humility.

Calvin College’s strong theological identity, which embraces the body of Christ as those gathered from every nation, provides a foundation for mutual hospitality as the college more fully reflects the rich diversity of God’s worldwide family. Recognizing that core identity in Christ is always shaped and imbedded in cultural particularity, the college is nevertheless committed to removing all unnecessary boundaries while positively cultivating new ways of mutual belonging to Christ and to one another that reflect the dynamic, living fullness of Christ’s body. The college pledges itself to vigorous efforts to bring together faculty, staff, and students from diverse racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and national backgrounds who want to belong to a college community that is committed to its Reformed theological base, ecclesiastical tradition, and philosophy of education. The college is there-

fore a place where both in teaching and in scholarship difficult questions must be engaged in the freedom afforded by a venerable and shared confessional tradition.

In all these endeavors we aim to align our individual interests toward the common goal of shaping hearts and minds for Christian living through the pursuit of higher learning. This calling is guided by the following central virtues: *justice*, so that we honor the gifts and rights of each person while living toward the delightful equity that God promises at the end of time; *courage*, so that we may meet controversy, challenges, and innovations in the strength of faith and love; *compassion*, so that, awakened to the needs of others, we may be liberated from our own limitations and recognize God’s image in those about us; *discipline*, so that we may be good stewards of God’s gifts, accountable in our life together and found trustworthy by our partners near and far; and *humility*, so that we may learn from all that we encounter and offer our lives as a pleasing sacrifice to God.

### **Conclusion**

Calvin College has grown out of a noble vision: to shape hearts and minds for Christian living and to send out agents of renewal and reconciliation in God’s Kingdom. This statement of identity and mission both articulates that vision and presents a challenge. We cannot rest on the legacy of the past, but we find there a place from which to continue to carry out our mission in new and sometimes daunting circumstances. We seek to change those things that we have not done well, and we commit ourselves to doing even better those things that we are already doing well. In all we say and do, we hope to follow and further the ways of God on earth.

*May, 2009: Approved by Faculty Senate and Board of Trustees.*

**CALVIN**  
College