



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on November 4, 2011

## Christian University Blasted for Staff Biblical Lifestyle Pledge Policy

A Baptist university in Georgia is receiving abundant media attention for a “Personal Lifestyle Statement” it recently updated, that requires faculty and staff to adhere to a set of biblical standards that include shunning homosexual behavior. Employees have been told that they must either sign the statement as a pledge, or face termination.



[Shorter University](#), based in Rome, Georgia, and affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), “expects its staff to help it further its Christ-centered goals,” reported the [Christian Post](#). “The school’s new motto, ‘Transforming Lives Through Christ,’ was also approved during the board of trustees meeting in addition to the lifestyle statement and a number of other related documents.”

The lifestyle statement emphasizes that the university is committed to hiring “committed Bible believing Christians, who are dedicated to integrating biblical faith in their classes and who are in agreement with the University Statement of Faith.” Within that context the statement requires staff to be “loyal to the mission of Shorter University as a Christ-centered institution affiliated with the Georgia Baptist Convention.”

It then specifies three behavior prohibitions, requiring staff to agree that they will not be involved in the use of illegal drugs; that they will abstain from the public use of alcohol; and, most significantly, that they will “reject as acceptable all sexual activity not in agreement with the Bible, including, but not limited to, premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality.”

While most traditional Christians would see nothing amiss about a Christian institution requiring its employees to meet a biblical moral standard, the major media quickly picked up on the story, particularly the school’s prohibition of homosexual behavior. According to [Baptist Press News](#), the SBC’s online news site, one homosexual newspaper anonymously quoted a supposedly “gay” Shorter employee who complained: “Why is homosexuality so much worse than anything else in the Bible? Why does a homosexual deserve to be fired any more than an obviously egotistical person, or a lazy person, or a dishonest person?”

Another anonymously “gay” staff member supposedly told the [Georgia Voice](#) news site that closeted homosexual employees at the school would now “live in fear that someone who doesn’t like us personally or someone who has had a bad day will report that we’ve been drinking or that we are suspected of being gay.”

While Shorter students are not being asked to sign the pledge, [Fox News](#) quoted one student at the



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school as complaining that the requirement boiled down to discrimination. “Who is one person to judge what somebody else does?” Fox quoted the anonymous student as saying. “It’s none of their business.”

On its “Gay Voices” page, the [Huffington Post](#) highlighted “happily out and proud gay” Rome, Georgia, native Jeffery Self, who recalled the joyful days he spent helping out in the theater department of the college around the corner from his boyhood home. While claiming to understand that, because Shorter is a Baptist college, “certain ‘lifestyle choices’ might not be within their ideas and beliefs,” the aptly named Self nonetheless took the liberty of referring to the school’s pledge as “outlandishly backward, despicable, disgusting, and in no way Christ-like....”

Ken Shepherd of [NewsBusters.org](#) noted that [Washington Post](#) blogger [Elizabeth Flock](#) spent her entire column highlighting “gay” criticism of the Christian university’s updated pledge, including an extensive quote from supposedly bi-sexual Shorter student Tamara King Henderson, who drew parallels between the policy and anti-Nazi Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller’s famed “First they came for the communists and I didn’t speak out” quote.

Shepherd noted that while prohibiting “premarital sex, drinking alcohol in front of students, and being active in a local church seems eminently reasonable of a Christian college to mandate of its faculty,” Flock failed to mention even one person who defended the pledge.

That reasonable defense was left to officials of the school, which receives no federal funding so is not subject to government mandates on what it can or cannot permit. “[The ‘why’ is really simple](#),” Joe Frank Harris Jr., chairman of Shorter’s Board of Trustees, explained of the updated lifestyle pledge, as well as a set of other statements that clarify the university’s philosophy on faith and education. “What you stand for matters. Proverbs 3:5-6 tell us to ‘Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.’ If we acknowledge Him, He will make this university’s path straight.”

Shorter’s president, Donald Dowless (pictured above), told the *Christian Post* that the reasoning behind the updated pledge was to clarify the university’s stand as a Christian institution. “As a private institution we have a right, just like organizations have the right, to set expectations of their employees,” he said. “We have a right to hire only Christians.”

Added Dowless: “We love Jesus Christ, and we want people who serve here to love Jesus Christ and be willing to not just sign the document, but enthusiastically endorse that in every aspect of their lives. We are an institution that wants to foster a Christian environment ... and that’s done by all employees who we hire, not just the faculty but also the staff.”



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