

Guidance for Engaging Spiritual and Religious Groups at Bentley

This resource offers guidance to help members of the Bentley community make informed, values-aligned choices when engaging religious, spiritual, and philosophical groups or individuals.

Bentley's Commitment to Religious Freedom and Healthy Pluralism

Bentley University affirms the fundamental right of every individual to hold, express, and explore religious, spiritual, secular, and philosophical convictions. The university supports a wide range of **recognized student organizations and campus partners** that foster spiritual growth, ethical reflection, and interreligious dialogue.

Exploration of belief—whether through faith, doubt, practice, or conversation—is a meaningful and welcomed part of student life at Bentley. This guidance is **not about encouraging or discouraging spiritual inquiry**, but about supporting environments where such inquiry by those interested is **voluntary, transparent, respectful, and life-affirming**.

Why This Guidance Matters

College and university campuses are unique environments: students are forming identities, building community, and asking deep questions about meaning, purpose, and belonging. Because of this:

- Campuses can attract **outside organizations** seeking to recruit students
- Some approaches rely on **pressure, urgency, or emotional manipulation**
- Students may feel unsure how to engage with and evaluate groups that initially appear friendly or supportive

Understanding common patterns empowers community members to engage openly while also protecting personal agency and well-being.

Recognized vs. Unaffiliated Groups

Bentley-Recognized Student Groups

Religious and spiritual student organizations that are **recognized by Bentley University**:

- Are known to the university and operate under institutional policies
- Have identified leadership and faculty/staff advisors
- Are committed to standards of transparency, safety, and accountability
- Support students' academic success and well-being

A current list of recognized student organizations is available through Bentley's student engagement and involvement platforms.

Unaffiliated Outside Groups

Some individuals or groups engaging students around religion or spirituality may **not be affiliated** with Bentley. This does not automatically mean they are unsafe or inappropriate. However, additional care and discernment are warranted when groups:

- Operate without any university oversight
- Are unclear about who they represent
- Primarily recruit in informal or private settings

You always have the right to ask questions and to take time before engaging further.

Questions You Are Encouraged to Ask

If approached for religious or spiritual conversation—whether in person, online, or off campus—consider asking:

- *What group or organization are you part of?*
- *Is this group recognized or affiliated with Bentley University?*
- *Where can I learn more about the group and its history independently?*
- *Is participation flexible and voluntary?*

Clear, respectful answers are a hallmark of healthy engagement.

Behaviors That Support Healthy Spiritual Community

Across traditions, healthy groups tend to share common practices:

- Transparency about beliefs, leadership, and expectations
- Respect for personal boundaries and individual decision-making
- Encouragement of critical thinking and open dialogue
- Acceptance of members who choose to leave or disengage
- Support for relationships and commitments outside the group

Genuine spiritual formation supports wholeness rather than control.

Behaviors That May Signal Concern

Consider seeking guidance or stepping back if you notice patterns such as:

- Intense pressure to commit quickly or exclusively
- Discouragement from consulting family, mentors, or outside perspectives
- Emotional manipulation through fear, guilt, or shame
- Expectations that interfere with academics, health, or personal relationships
- Lack of clarity about leadership, finances, or organizational structure

No single behavior alone defines a group, but **patterns matter**.

Trust Your Instincts—and Take Your Time

If something feels rushed, confusing, or uncomfortable, that feeling deserves attention. You are never obligated to attend meetings, share personal information, or continue conversations that do not feel right.

Healthy spiritual communities respect **consent, pace, and choice**.

Seeking Support and Conversation

If you would like to talk through an experience, ask questions, or explore spiritual life at Bentley in a supportive setting, resources are available. Conversations can be:

- Exploratory rather than problem-based
- Confidential and non-judgmental
- Focused on meaning, discernment, and personal values

Reaching out is a sign of care for yourself and for our shared community.

Leaving a Group

We understand it can be very difficult to leave a group for a variety of reasons including fear of losing friends or feeling like you're being mean to people who have been nice to you. Nevertheless, it's very important to set clear boundaries, especially with high-pressure groups. Here is some example language you might use if you are approached:

"I understand you're not a registered group at Bentley, and I have concerns about the way you've approached me and others. I do not want to participate in your activities and expect you to cease all communication with me going forward."

In Closing

Bentley thrives when spiritual exploration is paired with **integrity, freedom, and mutual respect**. By staying informed and looking out for one another, we help ensure a campus environment where everyone can explore questions of meaning in ways that are safe, and consistent with the Bentley core values of: caring, collaboration, diversity, honesty, impact, learning, and respect.