

Choosing the right religious group

How to flourish in faith and avoid harmful groups

RELIGION AND UNIVERSITY LIFE

There is a rich and diverse community of faith traditions and religious beliefs at Griffith University. The atmosphere of Griffith's religious life is respectful, open, and sensitive to your needs as a student. We want you to be involved, explore new things, and to find the support you need.

There may be times in your university journey when you feel homesick, unloved, or overwhelmed and seek comfort or support from a religious group. Griffith's registered student religious clubs are affiliated with and supported by the University. You will find a positive community where you will grow, find belonging and experience the support you need to get through university. It is important to be aware though, that there are some high-pressure religious groups that are not affiliated with Griffith University. These groups may not have your best interest in mind and may try to recruit you.

Choosing which groups to belong to while attending university is an important decision. Griffiths Chaplaincy service provides personal and spiritual support for students and, along with Griffith Clubs and the Guild, can help you find a healthy and supportive faith group.

CHOOSING A HELPFUL GROUP

Below are some indicators to help you connect with groups that will encourage your growth in a helpful way and support you in your student journey while highlighting the behaviour of some groups that could be harmful for you over time.

HELPFUL	HARMFUL
Recognised: This group is a registered University club or recognised by the university. They are open and transparent about their organisation, and I can find them easily and regularly online.	Unclear: This group has no affiliation with the University or no visible branding. I find it difficult to find more information about the organisation and what joining it involves.
Accountable: They are open and encouraging of me checking their group's reputation with family, Chaplaincy or other established faiths.	Secretive: They seem secretive about their presence and discourage me from checking their reputation and/or sharing my involvement with family or others.
Broad Support: The group supports me to connect with other personal and spiritual supports like family, churches, counselling, or Chaplaincy.	Isolating: The group claims to provide all the answers and community I need. They discourage me from spending time with family and friends or seeking help from Chaplaincy, the University or outside support services.
Global Citizen: I am encouraged to be a respectful, contributing member of the greater community.	Exhausted: I am kept so busy studying group teachings or engaging in group practices that I have little time to explore other things.
Support: While the group may encourage commitment, I feel supported to come and go throughout life's challenges and busy seasons. The group celebrates those who move on to other faith groups.	Pressure: When life is challenging, I feel pressure to stay involved and put the group first. My faith is questioned if I say no and they speak negatively about those who leave.
Thinking: The group offers a credible belief system and encourages me to think independently and investigate beliefs for myself. Questions, doubts, and disagreement are okay. I feel like I can be myself.	Obedying: The group demands unquestioning obedience to a leader who claims the only truth. Questions or doubts are discouraged through guilt, subtle remarks, or exclusion.
Alignment: The group has beliefs that align with established and credible faith groups in the community.	Exclusive: The group claims to hold the only truth, promotes distrust in other religious groups and calls the teaching of other organisations within their faith 'false'.
Contribution: The group may ask me to contribute in ways that are within my means. I always feel free to say no.	Exploitation: I feel pressure to give money beyond what is reasonable for someone in my life stage and income.
Freedom: I feel free to explore how the group's teaching impacts my life choices. I am encouraged to grow, but at my own pace. I feel a sense of autonomy.	Shame: I feel pressure from the group to change my behaviour to fit their teaching. I feel shame when I don't do what the group says is best for me.
Empowered: They encourage my growth and faith regardless of how much I agree with their teaching or get involved in their activities.	Fear: The ideas of "having a weak faith", hell, or disappointing God are often used. I feel coerced into participating in programs and agree with teaching.



RESPONDING TO GROUPS YOU SUSPECT MAY BE HARMFUL

- do not give out any of your personal contact information
- say you're not interested and walk away
- block people you don't know or who are pressuring you online
- ask for written information and tell them you will contact them if you're interested
- let your family, friends, faith community or Chaplaincy know about your encounter.

NEED MORE HELP OR INFORMATION?

[Griffith's Chaplaincy service](#) is a great place to start if you have more questions about which groups would be most helpful for you.

If you are concerned that you or another student may be involved with a harmful or high-pressure religious group, or if you have been approached by such a group and would like support, please contact Griffith's Chaplaincy Service at chaplaincy@griffith.edu.au.

Our team will treat your enquiry with care and confidentiality and work with you to provide appropriate guidance and support.