

---

## Antonine University's Explanatory Statement on Securing a Place of Prayer for Muslim Students on Campus

Hadath–Baabda, November 2, 2022

With reference to the topic recently brought up of securing a place of prayer for a number of Muslim students on Antonine University's (UA) campus, and given the debate and discussion's intensity on social media platforms, as well as in response to the letter containing several proposals submitted to the University's administration in this regard and published online by some students, the UA's General Secretariat has issued the following statement in accordance with the transparency rules adopted by UA in its various conducts:

**First:** UA adheres to the principles and rules of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the provisions of the Lebanese Constitution, the mandatory rules of the Law of Higher Education, the University's organic statute and its constitution built upon these principles and rights reflected in its standards and relations with others, especially its students.

**Second:** These principles, rules and laws guarantee the right to education for all students without discrimination on the basis of religion, race, sect, doctrine, color or sex, as well as the freedom of belief and expression, regardless of one's opinions, within the parameters of law and public order.

**Third:** The commitment of UA to secure freedom of belief and expressing different opinions, does not imply the possibility for its students to exercise these rights in contravention of the parameters of public order, and to ignore the rights and freedom of others, and we will elaborate further on this aspect below. This is clearly stipulated in article 9 of the Lebanese Constitution, in article 18 paragraph 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in article 60 paragraph C of the Law of Higher Education, as well as in the University's organic statute.

**Fourth:** UA has applied these principles and rules in accordance with their content, granting its students the right to learn without discrimination of any kind. It has also granted them the freedom to express their opinions in word and deed, as evidenced by the acknowledgment of free expression of opinions, no matter what their ideas may be, the submission of all their demands to express their opinions of any kind, the latter being acknowledged by the University and discussed with the students in a clear and transparent manner, its meeting with student representatives on many occasions, and its total dedication to deal with this matter calmly and in a timely manner. However, the insistence of some of them to derail this issue and make it a public matter contributed to triggering a controversial debate with arguments and counterarguments. This has led to divisiveness that does not serve the higher educational interest, and is not sought by the

---

University's administration and the majority of its students. It has also created confusion among many people, hence the need to make some necessary clarifications to set the record straight.

**Fifth:** The University does not consider this discussion a favor, but rather a duty towards its students, which is not only guaranteed by the law, but also stems from the fundamental educational and parental relationship between the University's administration and its students whom it fully respects and is proud of, for their commitment and courage in expressing their positions and claiming what they consider to be their right, especially that what they are asking for is to perform the prayer which is respected by the administration. How can it be otherwise when the University's Chancellor, Rector, some members of the Board of Trustees, senior administrators, deans, and faculty members are monks who are devoted to prayer and community service, and who belong to the licensed Antonine Maronite Order.

**Sixth:** Although the right to practice religion for Muslim or non-Muslim students is important and a fundamental right, it must be exercised within the parameters of the general educational system aimed primarily at providing education to all students of all backgrounds and affiliations, in an atmosphere of closeness, cohesion and unity that protects the general interest of society and prevents disagreements from arising on campus, which may generate disturbance of this public order, thus undermining the purpose for which the University was founded, especially that it is a place for learning and conducting scientific research, and not for performing prayer despite its utmost and intrinsic importance.

**Seventh:** If the approval to secure a place of prayer for Muslim students within UA's campus will be granted, other students from other sects and doctrines would raise a similar request. Then, the University will also be required to approve the demands of atheist students to secure a place for them to disseminate their ideas and beliefs and to conduct their activities within the University premises on the basis of freedom of opinion and belief, which will give rise to disagreements among the students who are brought together by the learning service, causing conflict and unrest among them on campus, distracting them from the main goal of receiving education, destabilizing their harmony and unity, and resulting in the disturbance of public order within the University. Therefore, it will jeopardize its main goal, namely to ensure equal rights and freedom to learn for all.

**Eighth:** In addition to its adherence to the above-mentioned constitutional norms and principles, UA is distinguished in its identity and its mission which state that it is a Lebanese Catholic private institution that aims to raise citizens and believers in the higher education's framework, and proudly adheres to the teachings and directives of the Catholic Church in the fulfillment of its mission, which is the first article of its constitution and organic statute. Therefore, given this special characteristic, which has never been veiled, it cannot be asked to guarantee the freedom of religious observance for other sects, with all due respect and appreciation for them, as well as the freedom of atheists to carry out activities on campus, because this interferes with its

---

constitutionally guaranteed rights, which must be respected by its students, just as the University respects their rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the law.

**Ninth:** Based on the rules of public order and the stated rights of the University, some students have become confused and failed to differentiate between their constitutional rights on the one hand and their exercise on the other hand. The diversity protected and still promoted by UA does not mean securing the right to practice religion on campus, but rather building a diverse and inclusive internal community that respects the difference between its members who share a common goal, namely the right to learn without discrimination.

**Tenth:** Last but not least, based on the fact that the difference does not spoil the friendly relationships, we cannot but applaud the boldness of our students for raising this matter and discussing this sensitive subject, and for clearly expressing their opinion. We also thank all religious and political authorities for contacting us to clarify this matter, as they stressed the importance of taking into account the higher educational interest and ensuring equality among all students.

**Eleventh:** UA wishes that the media channels consider this clarification as its official statement in this regard.