



Guiding Principles for Renaming at Wycliffe College

Foundational Framework:

Our task group was asked to consider what principles might guide the College when it considers suggestions to rename any of its assets (such as rooms, endowments such as professorial chairs, and prizes). In doing so, we thought it helpful to reflect on the importance of names in a Biblical and theological context.

The Bible understands naming as an exercise of power and authority that constructs meaning in a community and helps shape its values. The process of naming takes centre stage in the first two chapters of the Bible, where God and Adam take turns naming the things of creation. The Bible loves explaining the etymologies of terms — from “Adam” to “Israel” to “Peter” to “Jesus” — because the meaning of a word discloses the nature or character of what is named, whether a person, a nation, an animal, a place, a thing, or, indeed, of God himself. Names are not permanent, however, and not only because after the collapse of the Tower of Babel, language becomes diverse. The Bible includes several stories of the renaming of places. For instance, after the “regime change” in the land of Canaan, the new landowners honoured themselves in naming Jair’s Villages, Nobah, and Leshem. The Bible has still more stories, some quite significant ones, of the renaming of people when they are called to a new purpose. Sometimes, as with Abraham, their former names are replaced; sometimes, as with Jacob, the former names continue in use as well.

The Bible principally recalls and honours the acts of God; on the thankful remembrance of these acts, our faith and our discipleship are founded. The Bible is rather more reserved about honouring people, since even the greatest of Biblical characters, whether King David or Peter or Paul or anyone else, aside from our Lord, are sinners. “Call no one good but God alone,” our Lord cautions. “There is no one righteous, no, not one,” Paul writes. Accordingly, the Bible’s purpose in recalling the deeds of people of faith, in all their imperfections, is to point us back to the grace of our sovereign Lord, who has wondrously made use of these earthen vessels. “All glory and honour be to God forever and ever!” (I Tim. 1:17). Nevertheless, there are hints of the commemorations of human persons as well. Of the woman who anointed his feet, Jesus says that wherever the gospel is preached, “what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

Honouring any person commemoratively is therefore relative to our understanding of God’s purposes. We consulted with Joseph Mangina who reminded us of Paul’s principle “honour to whom honour is due,” and referenced the view of his favourite theologian, Karl Barth, that while honour appropriately does function in the human sphere, it is always subordinate to the honour and glory due to God. A principal concern of the English Reformation was to restrain the commemoration of individual persons, aside from those whose service to God was recognized in the Scriptures. Most notably the first Prayer Book purged all post-Biblical saints from its Kalendar (although it could not resist retaining St. George as well!), and its collects for the saints were worded carefully to avoid presenting them as unambiguous Christian models. Thousands of church monuments honouring the deceased were destroyed or, if the families of the honorees acted

nimbly, were relocated elsewhere. (This destruction also served to obliterate references to purgatory and prayers for the dead.) The wording of monuments to the dead in the Reformation tradition emphasized the hope of the Resurrection, not their worthiness or piety. In naming institutions, the Reformation focused honour on God the Trinity, the saints of the Bible, and God's acts in history. Thus at Oxford, Cardinal College, commemorating Cardinal Wolsey, the second most powerful person in England in the 1520s, was refounded as Christ Church College. Other colleges at Oxford and Cambridge during the English Reformation were named after the Trinity, St. John, Mary Magdalene, and Jesus.

But aside from this interlude in a quasi-puritanical period of Anglican history, practices of commemorating important people, and dedicating places, buildings, assets, and awards to their name, have flourished. Even in the narrow realm of Canadian Anglicanism we have Bishop Cronyn Memorial Church in London, Bishop Strachan School in Toronto, and, of course, Wycliffe College, plus a myriad of parish and academic halls, prizes, endowments, honours, and places. Nevertheless, names and commemorations have remained fluid through history, as times, manners, ideals, values, sensibilities, and ruling authorities have changed. A local example in Canadian geography is the renaming in 1834 of York, in honour of the duke of York, as Toronto, representing the town's earlier Haudenosaunee name. Another notable Canadian example is the renaming in 1855 of Bytown, commemorating Colonel John By, as Ottawa, to recognize the traditional territory of the Odawa and the other Indigenous peoples of the area.

In recent years academic institutions in North America have given particular attention to practices of naming and renaming, especially where names commemorate people. Our task group has studied some of the documentation of their conversations about this process. The concern of these institutions has been that, when they assign a person's name to an element of their common life, they are associating themselves with the person named. Thus we continue to recognize, as the Bible does, the power of names. They become reflections, perhaps sometimes even personifications, of the mission, vision, and values of the institution. The problem arises that since institutional missions, visions, and values do not remain static, it can happen that a name that seemed appropriate in the past can become anomalous, or embarrassing, or even scandalous, in a later time.

In North America discussions of renaming have taken place at Amherst College, Stanford University, University of Michigan, University of Oregon, Yale University, McGill University, Victoria University (Toronto), Brown University, Georgetown University, Harvard University, Princeton University, Queen's University, and the University of North Carolina, among others. At Princeton, the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs has become the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs; at Yale, Calhoun College has become Grace Hopper College; at the University of North Carolina, Hurston Hall has become Carolina Hall; at Virginia Theological Seminary Key Hall has become Bicentennial Hall; and McReynolds Hall at Centre College, Kentucky, is now known by its street address, among other examples. In some cases the institution itself is named after someone whose legacy is problematic, as in the case of Brown University, McGill University, and Washington and Lee University. That problem has proved rather more intractable.

These conversations about naming and renaming have been quite varied. In virtually all places there is a predisposition to preserve names so long as there is no reason to change them, but as to how we can discern a need for change, there are no universally agreed principles. But we have

found that, in these conversations, three questions keep recurring. First, how do we identify our institutional values, in a way that helps us decide whether a given name represents who we are and who we want to be? In their conversations about this question, institutions recognize processes of historical change, and sometimes are compelled to acknowledge elements in their own past of which they are not proud. Second, should we (or can we) continue to honour the name of a person whose legacy is, on balance, more positive than negative, or are there some flaws so egregious in a person that on that account alone their name should not be retained? Princeton University, for example, recognized that Woodrow Wilson was in many respects a far-sighted and admirable leader in international relations and the movement for world peace, but in the end decided that his racism constituted a sufficient problem. Third, if we do begin to doubt that a name can continue to serve the purpose of effectively representing our character and values, can we remove it without passing judgment, or appearing to pass judgment, on a person's life and legacy? When historians weigh the contributions of past figures, they do so as part of an academic conversation, but when an institution assigns or changes a name for commemorative purposes, the act can appear to involve an uncomfortably definitive collective determination of a person's worth.

These questions sit at the foundation of the Guiding Principles for Renaming. It is in pondering these questions that we recommend these principles be applied.

Definitions:

Named Feature – any room, plaque, portrait, prize, award, endowed chair, or bursary depicting, representing, or named in honor of an individual who made some sort of significant contribution (financial or otherwise) to Wycliffe College.

Namesake – an individual honored with a named feature.

Contest – a formal action taken to challenge the recognition of an individual being honoured with a named feature.

Grievance – the offensive behaviour and/or values, resulting in a request to contest a named feature.

Principal Legacy – the overarching, most significant, and lasting impact of the namesake's contribution to the world, in its totality. This is determined through scholarly inquiry and historical investigation related to an individual's reputation, the causes and ideas for which they advocated, prevailing historical memory, centrality of behaviour and/or values, inferred motivations and intentions, enduring consequences in the world, and the nature and significance of the grievance identified.

Stakeholder – students, Trustees, faculty, staff, donors, alumni, guests, UofT community, etc.

Legal Obligations – documented or verbally agreed to deliverables between involved parties (usually applies to recognition in exchange for financial contributions).

Fiduciary implications – legally binding responsibilities and obligations related to organizational risk, held by members of the Board of Trustees, the governing body of the Wycliffe College.

Guiding Principles for Renaming at Wycliffe College:

1) Principle of Alignment

The processes, discussions, and rationale related to contested named features should align with and be informed by Wycliffe College's Board-approved, guiding statements.

Questions to guide the application of the principle:

- Is the namesake's principal legacy fundamentally at odds with the guiding statements of the College?
- Does association with the principal legacy of the namesake compromise the mission/vision of the College?
- At the time of naming, was the namesake honored for reasons that contradict Wycliffe's guiding values?

2) Principle of History

Value should be given to history – both positive and negative – as a significant tool for teaching, influencing, and creating opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation. As such, intentionality is required to avoid misrepresenting history.

Questions to guide the application of the principle:

- Given the fact that history is a field of contest, choices must be made about the particular narrative among the various interpretations to subscribe to. How will this be done?
- If renamed, how can this history be preserved in a way that is not hidden? How can we demonstrate the inclusive ideals of a new name while recognizing the previous history of the feature?
- If retained, what measures will be taken to ensure that preservation does not distort history but instead represent it through an equitable lens?
- Is there valuable learning to be gained by retaining the name?
- How significant was the namesake's relationship with the College? (If incidental, renaming will have little effect on the historical record, but if significant, renaming could erase or reinterpret part of history.)

3) Principle of Community

In keeping with the desire that all stakeholders feel welcomed and valued on campus, particular care must be taken to ensure that decisions about contested named features are mindful of Wycliffe's broad and contemporary community of heritage and ideas.

Questions to guide the application of the principle:

- Would renaming or retaining jeopardize a culture of community at the College?

- Does the nature (location/prominence) of the named feature have a significant effect on community connection among stakeholders and with the College?
- Does the name enhance the profile and image of the College?
- Does renaming help to reconcile injustice in order to create space for inclusive features?

4) Principle of Transparency

Process and rationale concerning discussions and decisions on contested features should be openly shared with the Wycliffe community as needed.

Questions to guide the application of the principle:

- How will you involve the stakeholder community in these discussions?
- How will you respond when stakeholders request information on an ongoing discussion?
- How will you share decisions and rationale?
- How will you respond when stakeholders challenge decisions?

5) Principle of Discernment

Arguments, information, and various historical perspectives related to contested named features should be evaluated with a balance of critical thinking, and godly wisdom.

Questions to guide the application of the principle:

- How clear/strong/reliable/consistent is the evidence of the grievance and principal legacy?
- What impact do historical standards have on your evaluation today?
- Has this namesake been contested before?
- Was the relevant principal legacy significantly contested in the time and place in which the namesake lived?
- Is there new information that has become known since the naming?
- Are perspectives reflective of the global church representation enjoyed at the College?
- Does the presence of the named feature perpetuate ongoing injustice?

6) Principle of Redemption

As Christians, we believe in the redemptive power of the Gospel. We believe that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has effected the restoration, healing, and unity of humankind and all creation. The church as the Body of Christ allows us to participate in God's redemptive story as we navigate decisions regarding contested features. We hope thereby to set an example for the world.

Questions to guide the application of the principle:

- Would renaming provide opportunities for reconciliation?
- Would retaining the feature with visible acknowledgement to reframe and educate, invite an environment of dialogue and learning?
- Is there an opportunity to right the wrong?
- Would renaming inhibit free inquiry or establish an orthodoxy with respect to specific views?
- Would any stakeholders find retaining or renaming disrespectful to their views?
- Can we present clear evidence and rationale to our stakeholders, regarding the renaming or retaining of a contested name?
- Would retaining or renaming interfere with the ability of Wycliffe to teach, learn, live, and work as a community?
- Would any action taken promote justice?
- Could any action taken act as a public testimony of what Wycliffe College believes its responsibility is as a Christian institution?

Process & Authority:

It should be noted that none of the principles listed in this document can override Wycliffe College's legal obligations or the Board of Trustees' fiduciary responsibilities to mitigate organizational risk, which includes maintaining a positive relationship with the University of Toronto.

Renaming decisions rest with the Board of Trustees.

It is recommended that an ad hoc committee of the Board of Trustees, comprised of individuals representing different roles at Wycliffe College as well as diverse life experiences and perspectives, be struck when the Principal and/or Board of Trustees determines that a request to contest a named feature is warranted. The purpose of this committee is to 1) conduct appropriate research, 2) apply the Guiding Principles for Renaming to discussions and decisions, and 3) make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees.

Advice to those implementing the Guiding Principles for Renaming:

Throughout the process of developing these principles, the Task Group spent significant time researching other organizations around the world that have had or are having discussions about renaming. This research, coupled with thoughtful discussion, resulted in several recommendations that fell outside the mandate of this Task Group. We decided to include them in a final section, as advice to the committee charged with implementing these principles.

- 1) Try to identify your own bias early in the process and be intentional about questioning it. Be open to what the research tells you and engage in healthy discussion among the committee. Remember that the recommendation you make to the Board of Trustees must reflect the values of Wycliffe College, not any one individual.
- 2) When considering a contested feature, the choices need not be limited to simply renaming or taking no action. Options exist to rename, modify the name (hyphenate with a second name),

keep the name and provide signage nearby to contextualize, and more. Consider what opportunities exist to educate, inspire, challenge, and dialogue. Take time to brainstorm options and be open to creative ideas.

- 3) Renaming that defies the namesake's egregious behaviour can be redemptive and healing. For example, if the grievance against a named feature involves discrimination against women, a female namesake could be chosen to replace the former.
- 4) A named feature does not require an individual as its namesake. People groups, movements, or unifying Christian terms can be wonderful alternatives.

Reference documents used in the development of this document:

<https://www.rhodes.edu/about-rhodes/palmer-hall-discernment-committee/principles-process-discernment-related-contested>

<https://campusnames.stanford.edu/renaming-principles/>

https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CEPR_FINAL_12-2-16.pdf