

Vanderbilt faith groups vow to leave campus

by [Annalisa Musarra](#) in the [May 2, 2012](#) issue

A coalition of 11 Christian student groups at Vanderbilt University are insisting that their leaders should be chosen based on shared faith—the newest front in a growing battle over religious freedom.

The campus groups, who call themselves Vanderbilt Solidarity, joined together to oppose the university's "all-comers" policy, which says student groups must be open to all students, including in leadership, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or religion. The religious groups say they cannot be led by students who do not share or profess their group's faith.

"Until recently, Vanderbilt explicitly protected the freedom of all student organizations to select members and leaders who shared and supported the group's purpose, including—for religious groups—its faith," the Solidarity groups said April 9, adding that they "continue to pray that our much-beloved university will change course."

Claiming the policy violates "the central tenets of our faith," the faith-based groups applied for registered status on campus but included their own constitutions containing faith-based requirements for leadership positions. If the school in Nashville does not recognize the constitutions, the groups would be considered unregistered next year.

Solidarity's decision came two weeks after one campus group, Vanderbilt Catholic, decided not to register as an official student organization because of the school's policy.

"All registered student groups at Vanderbilt must be open to all students, and members in good standing must have the opportunity to seek leadership positions," said Beth Fortune, vice chancellor for public affairs. "This debate is about nondiscrimination, not religious freedom, and we stand behind our policy." —RNS