It’s a good feeling to be wanted. And it’s flattering to be asked to join a group. Now that you’re at University, you’ll find yourself invited to spend your time with lots of clubs and organizations of all kinds. Some rely on your free choice for joining while others use persistent recruiting efforts to win you over.

Among the clubs and organizations, you’ll find numerous religious groups. Some are well organized, and some are very informal. Choosing a religious group is also an important decision in your life while you attend ECU. We want to offer you some information that will help you make an informed, free choice about such groups.

At any given point in time on the campus there may be organized and informal religious groups that use high-pressure recruiting tactics. Listing names would be a waste of time since the names of these groups change frequently. However, you can identify these groups by what they do.

Why are they so harmful?

- They tend to isolate you from family, friends and other groups.
- They may encourage you to give up control of your life, thoughts and decisions.
- They tend to focus on guilt and shame.
- They may promote crises with studies, your career or your love life.
- They may resort to frightening you to the point that you stop making decisions and asking questions for yourself.

How can I identify these groups?

Observe the group’s responses to you and how you feel. If you can answer “yes” to any three of these statements, you should seriously reconsider your involvement.

- The group seems to be perfect. Everyone agrees and follows all orders cheerfully.
- The group claims to have “all the answers” to your problems.
- You are asked to recruit new members soon after joining.
- You begin to feel guilty and ashamed, unworthy as a person.
- The group encourages you to put their meetings and activities before all other commitments, including studying.
- The group speaks in a derogatory way about your past religious affiliation.
- Your parents and friends are defined as unable to understand and help you with religious matters.
- Doubts and questions are seen as signs of weak faith. You are shunned if you persist in these doubts.
- Leadership of the group is mostly male, and males in general are believed to have different rights and abilities than females.
- You are invited on a retreat with the group, but they can’t give you an overview of the purpose, theme or activities before you go.
You are most vulnerable when:

You are lonely

- You are homesick for familiar friends and places.
- You miss your significant other who is at another University or occupation.
- Everyone else seems to be coping OK, but not you.

You are hurting

- Your friends left you out of their party.
- You just had a fight with your family.
- You are grieving over a person or relationship.

You are having a tough time socially

- Everyone has a date for an important social event, except you.
- It’s the same dull routine of dinner, study and bed.

You are in trouble Academically

- You feel like a failure because you are failing one or more courses.
- You are under pressure to improve your grades.
- You are embarrassed because you have never had just “passes” before in your life until now.

Remember, these feelings and reactions can be confronted, put into proper focus and overcome. They are, however, uncomfortable if left unattended, and they’re a clear invitation to a high-pressure recruiters especially those from religious groups.

You can take steps to deal with these groups.

- Reach out and get the opinion of someone you trust who is not a member of the group, such as a friend, lecturer, parent, counselor, chaplain or a member of the clergy.
- Find out about this group from your church back home. Don’t be afraid to ask questions! Be skeptical. Don’t accept evasive answers.
- Don’t be afraid to take a stand.
- Learn to say “No”.
- Examine yourself; are you vulnerable?
- Think before you got to a meeting to check it out. Will you get a clear picture?
- Call one of the phone numbers in this pamphlet for help and information.

And very importantly …

Do not give your address and/or telephone number to anyone unless you are sure of what they are after. Otherwise you can expect calls or visits you may not want. Being cautious and careful is not being rude.

Where you can get help.

If you want to talk about life issues or discuss questions of a religious nature with someone with expertise and understanding, there are people on campus whom you can contact and who will listen to you. They may not have answers to all your questions but they are in a position to refer you to those with specialist knowledge.

**Multifaith Chaplaincy Service**
All campuses, Monday to Thursday
University Chaplain
Rev Joanne Baynes
Mobile: 0438 952 399
Visiting Chaplains
Rev Dr David Wood (Anglican)
Mobile: 0417 207 217
Website: [www.ecu.edu.au/chaplaincy](http://www.ecu.edu.au/chaplaincy)

**Counselling Service**
All campuses, Monday to Friday
Reception: (08) 9273 8877

**Student Guild**
Mount Lawley Campus
Education & Welfare Officer
Rosemarie Harris
Telephone: 9370 6821