



June 2, 2020

To our students, work colleagues, alumni scattered across every U.S. state and 65 nations, and other Friends of Bethel,

Bethel is a university, yes, but also a moral community, and that is a fragile thing. How do we agree about a proper response to the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor? We hold our community together in at least four ways.

**First, we invite all to lament personally** these deaths and too many others who perish from police brutality or the noxious air of racism. To lament is to sit deep into the pain. We see Mr. Floyd, and cringe – knee on a neck for eight minutes, asphyxiated over an alleged minor crime. And we acknowledge the subconscious default by many white Americans to merely intellectualize these events. If Mr. Floyd were our biological brother or father, and if this occurred on our campus, we would be undone, shaken by a total loss of fidelity between our ideals and actions. ***In our affection for the brotherhood of man, we need not wait for a campus incident to re-commit ourselves to a God-sized vision for our interracial relationships.***

**Second, we lament publicly.** As president, and a Caucasian, I called several persons of color over the past week and learned something. There can be, as one very thoughtful Nursing student from the Detroit area told me, a betrayal of silence by White America. “It’s like,” she told me, “watching your friend be bullied in a Junior High hallway, really being hurt, and saying nothing to the bully. What kind of friend is that?!” As a moral community, in fact a Jesus-shaped one, we say like Biblical prophets of old, whose personal innocence did not restrain them from condemning sin in society, ***“O God, we see a sinful society, we are ashamed that our society is like this. Forgive and restore all of us, by supernatural power!”***

**Third, we listen.** Fortunately, Bethel did not need the event with Mr. Floyd to demand our attention. In late winter of this year, Bethel heard from 600 students, faculty and staff through interviews, focus groups, and surveys about our climate. There are positives like doubling the percentage of students of color over a decade (now 35%), retaining and graduating students of color at much higher rates than peer institutions, and 9 in 10 students and employees say they are satisfied with their choice to work or study here. However, too many of our people still experience negative feelings about the incompleteness of our inclusion. Though top positive attributes named were Christ-centered, warm community, good professors, and encouraging/uplifting, a negative was non-inclusive.

**Fourth, we commit to substantive action.** In April, the Board of Trustees supported recommendations by the Administration to expand our Diversity & Inclusion efforts. Besides sustaining Institutional Aid

scholarships to students of color (\$4.3M/year), ongoing scholarship funding to Billy Kirk Scholars to students of color with noteworthy leadership capacity (\$100,000 per year), providing clubs like Black Student Fellowship, International Student Fellowship, the Urban Ministry residential experience, and more:

1. The Board of Trustees agrees to author a vision statement about diversity and inclusion, with specificity on our values and theology.
2. The Spiritual Life leadership agrees to continue a commitment for persons of color to lead in Chapel. Although half of all speakers in Fall 2019 were persons of color, and one-third of worship was led by the Gospel Band, we will add a D & I Keynote Speaker Series, not only for Chapel, but to faculty, staff, and student leadership groups on themes of dignity and empathy.
3. The Academic leadership agrees to create for every Bethel syllabus, an aspirational statement for inclusion in the classroom.
4. The University agrees to fund 15 influential student-leaders per year for a Civil Rights Immersion Experience in Selma, Ala., and other notable spaces of the civil rights movement, returning to campus to fulfill obligations to speak to campus groups on their learnings and convictions shaped from that experience.
5. The Student Life leadership agrees to continue and deepen training to Resident Assistants, Resident Directors, First Year Experience mentors, and all Freshmen.
6. The University agrees to launch a workforce diversity initiative to better populate next-hire searches with candidates of color, particularly for the positions of President, Vice President, Staff Director, and all Faculty positions.
7. The University agrees to initiate a Campus Reads Program, supplying 200 copies of a book of the year, on a D & I theme, followed with discussion groups.

We understand that inclusion work makes everyone – including majority culture persons – a beneficiary, when campus culture glows with authentic Biblical dignity, given and received. Our goal is not to be marginally better than last year, or marginally better than some other group. **The goal is excellence.** “Excellence” at Bethel means a self-motivated attempt to realize our potential in God, individually and together; it is doing work as unto the Lord; and it is exceeding a reasonable standard.

This ambition is not small like achieving a mosaic community, where success is only getting more “color” here. And we don’t target a mural community, where success is blending ethnicities together toward some kind of pale sameness. **The goal is bigger than that. It is to pray and work in the way of Jesus, that Bethel would be like Heaven on Earth (Matthew 6:10). Is it not yet that way. Our hope remains that Jesus will not falter or be discouraged in bringing justice to earth through us (Isaiah 42:3).**



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