



2 June 2020

Dear La Salle Students, Parents, and Fellow Alumni:

I am joining with Brother James in our two communications affirming our hopes, dreams and wishes for our extended La Salle communities as we all face extraordinary challenges right now. I write about the brutal killing of George Floyd. I write on behalf of our young men, particularly our young men of color.

I write from what I know and what I feel.

For a number of years, I have featured my class year after my signature in school correspondence, following a rather typical La Salle custom. It is a sign of pride and connection with an institution which I have served for more than four decades, and more, importantly, a connection with its beliefs and values.

In June 1968, on this coming weekend to be exact, I graduated from La Salle College High School and was designated as a graduation speaker. I remember the event from the campus grotto vividly in part because it was my senior year and even more so because it was 1968.

On June 6, 1968, Robert Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles on the night of his victory in the California primary. I remember watching the assassination in real time. I also remember tearing up my rather pro-forma speech and re-writing it from scratch in one night so that I could convey all of my idealism, inspired and honed by my teachers at La Salle.

How could we not react to the killing of a prominent political leader? At my summer job at Ford Motor Company, supervisors and colleagues of every ideological stripe were stunned.

And there was a prologue to this killing. On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was gunned down in Memphis. My father woke me from one of those late adolescent naps at dinnertime to tell me the news. In addressing my classmates and families that

muggy June evening, I tried to lift up both Dr. King and Senator Kennedy as markers in our young lives.

Watching the current news about the brutal killing of George Floyd and the ensuing turbulence jolted me back to 1968. I have lived in many of the Philadelphia neighborhoods now on fire or destroyed: Northeast Philadelphia as a child; West Philadelphia as a young husband and graduate student, and Germantown as a young teacher at La Salle.

I was advised by a teacher of mine at La Salle: "Write about what you know." So, I am doing just that.

I have not been a shopkeeper so I cannot begin to feel the pain of the destruction of inventory and livelihood. I have not been a police officer--a close uncle was--so I cannot feel the danger of confronting angry crowds.

But I have been a teacher of young men for more than four decades. I do know how fear plays out in young lives. Our young men will experience uncertainty, confusion and fear as they witness the news on their cell phone feeds. And the news of the brutal death of George Floyd, falls particularly hard on our students and families of color, wherever they may live in the Philadelphia area. As we do at school, through prayer, thoughtfulness, conversation, and simple support, I ask everyone to reach out to friends and acquaintances in need right now.

La Salle strives to create an environment where differences in background are accepted and understood, where every member of our community is valued and respected, where our graduates continue to light the way in a world that is increasingly interconnected. And a community that affirms respect for all persons and a striving for social justice.

As we all continue to work though the complexities of our times, let us pray for peace, work for justice, and comfort those in need.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MAO '68". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael A. O'Toole '68

Principal