



JUNETEENTH  
June 19, 2020

In distributing a second public statement this month, I risk making Bethel's voice trite. But the special tensions in our nation also bear special hopes, and this inspires the gaze of Bethel University & Friends toward the significance of this day, Juneteenth – a day that celebrates Emancipation. It is a cause begun by law, unfinished in our social conscience, and linked to our mission.

In honor of this day, I re-read *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* – published 18 years before President Lincoln proclaimed the then-controversial shift toward freedom of slaves. Douglass is our nation's first African-American to whom a public sculpture was dedicated (1899). Despite suffering through horrifying and brutal slavery, he became free, self-educated, and one of the most articulate and prominent voices of his time. His sculpture in Rochester, NY features him standing with arms held forward, palms up, as if welcoming others.

Bethel's educational work links to Douglass, as we remember that he was "astonished at the goodness" of a woman who answered his yearning to learn by privately tutoring him. This education "stirred up an entirely new train of thought" in Douglass, and provided him a "special revelation." He called his learning a "pathway from slavery to freedom," before material freedom would come.

So transformative was education for Douglass, he passed it forward, training others in a church building, on Sundays. Of his fellow slaves and pupils, Douglass said, "Their minds had been starved by cruel masters. They had been shut up in mental darkness. I taught them because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that looked like bettering the condition of my race."

So, today, Bethel University pauses to recognize a day which was the beginning of a promise still being fulfilled, and our willing role as educators in it. A mind once stretched to new understanding can never return to its original place. That liberated Douglass even before Lincoln did. Education still liberates.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregg Chenoweth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and a long, sweeping tail.

Gregg Chenoweth  
President