Diversity Matters at Westmont

Christ holds first place in the educational mission of our college both as an academic institution and as a residential community. The specific expectations of college members in response to Christ's preeminence are enumerated in the Community Life Statement. "Diversity Matters at Westmont" describes how we live out these expectations as we strive to love one another as Christ has first loved us.

Long-Range Goals — As an academic institution, our desire to honor Christ informs our philosophy of general education, our intended learning outcomes for students, and our expectations for our graduates. One of the central goals of Westmont's educational program is that:

> Students have the understanding and skills to engage people unlike themselves —both individuals and groups — in ways that affirm others as persons created in God's image. Students are able to approach others respectfully — avoiding the natural tendency to deal with differences by vilifying, romanticizing, or victimizing.

Similarly, as a residential college, we aspire to the vision of our Community Life Statement, which reminds us that:

> Community is built upon other-centered practices. It flourishes in a place where love for God and neighbor is cultivated and nurtured. It grows strong when members practice integrity, confession, and forgiveness, attempt to live in reconciled relationships, accept responsibility for their actions and words, and submit to biblical instructions for communal life.

Our long-range goals — both inside and outside the classroom — are to celebrate God's creativity in shaping us and to live in reconciled relationships with one another. But our long-range goals must also be reflected in our daily walk. For Jesus the kingdom of God was not just a long-range goal. He broke through the prejudices of his day, showing that everyone — not just the privileged few — is welcome in God's kingdom, here and now.

In the time and place where Jesus lived, people despised anyone who came from Samaria, and rabbis would not speak to a woman in public. But Jesus overturned these prejudices, publicly asking a Samaritan woman for a drink of water and starting a conversation with her. His

disciples were astonished, but they were just beginning to see the radical respect that Christ's followers are to show others. As we cross paths with each other in classrooms and residence halls, in offices and meetings, at chapel and in the dining commons, our desire to hold Christ preeminent in all things also shapes our manner of engaging one another in everyday encounters.

Goals for Everyday Encounters — Jesus gave us "a new commandment, that you love one another." As we abide by that commandment, we learn to honor and respect one another in the ways that Scripture teaches. Therefore in our daily interactions as we try to live out what it means to be part of the kingdom of God, we seek to:

- engage in discussion openly, demonstrating humility toward our own perspectives, and respectfully examining views that are unfamiliar;
- affirm every person as created in God's image and reject stereotypical notions that demean, mock, or oversimplify;
- honor what is distinct in each other's experience as well as what we share in common;
- make choices that convey respect for our neighbors' experiences; and
- acknowledge the significance of context and its influence on our words and actions.

We are all alike in our need for Christ. But in our fallenness it is all too easy to mistake "we are alike in our need for Christ" for "everybody else is just like me." Unity in the midst of deep and valuable difference was one of the most difficult issues for the early church; we shouldn't suppose it's going to be easy for us.

First-century Jewish followers of Christ could not accept that Gentiles could follow Christ without becoming Jewish. But as God revealed to Peter, they were confusing their personal cultural experience with what is normative. In the same way, we may be tempted to suppose that for others to be Christians, they must be Christians just like us. But the family of God includes brothers and sisters from all sorts of backgrounds, and most of us are barely beginning to learn about those with whom we will spend eternity.

Jesus came to redeem us, but He also came to renew us, in our minds as well as our hearts. That means, in part, becoming open to one another's experience and honestly sharing our own, working through our differences rather than just pretending that no conflicts exist.

Discipleship and Discipline — Even as we aspire to live out such goals in all our interactions, we recognize that sometimes we are not as wise, as caring, as respectful as we wish to be. However, some behavior falls so far short of these goals that it will simply not be tolerated.

- Vandalism and violence. Subjecting others to physical violence, threatening others with physical violence, or engaging in acts of vandalism are unacceptable (and illegal!) ways to deal with conflict. But such acts become even more repugnant when they are based on race, church tradition, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. Westmont does not tolerate vandalism, violence, or the threat of violence against anyone.
- Words and images. Calling people names is an immature way of responding to conflict. However, using racial, ethnic, or gender slurs, or displaying demeaning images, crosses the line into conduct that is intolerable.

While physical attacks and vandalism are rare on college campuses, demeaning jokes or harassing or threatening phone calls or emails are not. Regretfully, members of the Westmont community have at times been subjected to crude or demeaning phone calls, email messages, and posters. Sometimes those who convey such messages think it is OK if they are "trying to be funny." It's not funny. It can be, and often is, hurtful to those subjected to the humor. And it's not OK. Humorous intent does not excuse repeating demeaning stereotypes. Such behavior hurts every member of a community called by the name of Christ. Westmont does not tolerate slurs based on race, church tradition, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or disability; other forms of verbal abuse; threatening behavior or threatening messages; the creation of a hostile environment; or any form of harassment. For more information, see the college's policy on harassment.

Jesus astounded his disciples in the way he overturned the prejudices of his day based on ethnicity, national origin, religious differences, and gender. He treated the poor with at least as much respect as he treated the wealthy and powerful. As he cut through bias and prejudice, he left his disciples to ponder the many ways in which they would have to rethink some of their ingrained expectations in order to follow him. After Peter had twice been told in a vision "what God has made clean, you must not call unclean," he spent some while "puzzled about what to make of the vision" before realizing he had to disobey the law saying that Jews were not to associate with or visit a Gentile. Jesus had treated the woman from Samaria with respect. But even after the resurrection, Peter had not realized that he, too, had to treat people of different races, ethnicities, religious traditions and nationalities with equal respect.

Confrontation and Respect — The respect Jesus showed others not only reached across his culture's ethnic and gender barriers, it reached even to those he had to confront. When Jesus encountered a person who was sinning, he did not mock or jeer or taunt the sinner. He told the woman taken in adultery to go and sin no more, but those he really confronted that day were the men intent on stoning her. In our culture, no one stones adulterers, but some feel that it's OK to cast stones of mockery at people who experience same-sex attraction. At Westmont we do not condone sexual relations outside of marriage, but we also do not condone jeering at one another simply because our temptations differ. We know our own sinfulness and need for forgiveness all too well to cast stones of mockery at others.

What can I do to make a difference?

- Be willing to learn. As a member of this residential, liberal arts community, take advantage of the opportunity to learn from engaging with others unlike you.
- Be willing to teach. It takes courage and humility to talk about your own experience and the new ideas you're learning without making it sound like your way is the only way. But you can't expect others to know what it's like to walk in your shoes unless you're willing to teach them.
- Recognize that the image of God doesn't look like you alone. God's children come from different races, different ethnicities, different genders, different social classes, and church traditions. Look for God's image in people who don't look, think, or experience life the same way you do.
- Look for the family resemblance. Your cousins are different from you in important ways; but there is much that you share. So it is with the family of God.
- Examine your own language. Ask yourself if you use derogatory or degrading terms in describing others.
- Speak out against jokes or comments that demean others. Silence implies consent; when we don't speak out against injustice we share some of the blame.
- Check in with your neighbor. Remarks that strike some as just a joke may not feel like that to others. Have the courage to ask about it; and have the courage to answer honestly. If you want to develop real friendships, you can't pretend that hurtful remarks don't hurt.

Taking Action Against Disrespect — Sometimes statements are meant to be hurtful. Recognizing such remarks as demeaning is pretty obvious. At other times, the hurt can be unintended but still very real. When we bump into someone, we apologize even though we

didn't intend any harm. Similarly, when our words hurt others we need to own up to what we've done, even when we didn't mean to cause harm. And when we've been injured, we need to acknowledge it—to ourselves and to others.

As Christians we know what it means to repent and seek forgiveness. Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to "forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." With all that practice we should certainly know what to do when our actions hurt or offend others: repent and humbly ask forgiveness. (And that means much more than a perfunctory apology; it means a change of behavior.) As we learn by God's grace to take redemptive action on our own, reconciliation may take place without college officials being involved. In accordance with scripture, we desire that conflicts be resolved as quickly as possible and, where appropriate, with the least amount of formality. Jesus tells us to confront a sinning brother or sister one-on-one before calling in one or two others or taking the matter to the church. The college tries to honor that principle in its policies for resolving conflicts or grievances of students, staff and faculty. But sometimes we're slow to learn what it means to be God's people; when redemptive intervention is needed, college officials will intervene.

What can you do if you have received or have witnessed demeaning, threatening, or abusive messages?

- If you are a student, please report incidents directly to Student Life by speaking to your resident director or by calling Stu Cleek (ext. 6029), the associate dean for residence life. Residence hall staff are trained to take threats or expressions of hostility seriously and to provide peer support for those who have encountered bias-motivated incidents.
- If you are a faculty or staff member, please report incidents to the Provost's Office or the Human Resources Office, respectively.
- If you feel unsafe call Public Safety (ext. 6222).
- Preserve any evidence (graffiti, voice-mail message, e-mail message, letter, etc.).
- If you believe you have been subjected to harassment or discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or physical or mental disability, you may report the behavior to any resident director; to Edee Schulze, Tim Wilson, or Stu Cleek in the Office of Student Life; to Beth Cauwels in the Office of Human Resources; to Toya Cooper, college counsel; to Chris Call, the college's Title IX officer; to any supervisor, department chair, dean or vice president; or to the president. Anyone violating Westmont's policy prohibiting harassment may be referred for appropriate disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

What will Westmont College do in such cases?

An appropriate college official will:

- meet with you promptly.
- treat you and your concern with respect and sensitivity.
- take every case seriously, pursuing disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.
- seek justice, richer understanding, and ultimately restoration of all involved.

Community members who have harassed, intimidated or demeaned others in public cannot expect their disciplinary action to be wholly private. Public misbehavior may involve sanctions, restitution, and apologies that are also public.