

Conference Call on July 7, 2020, with Westmont President Gayle D. Beebe and the Executive Team

It's wonderful to be with you. Thank you for dialing in. We anticipate communicating where we are in the racial conversation on campus. We also want to give you an update on all the plans for repopulating the college as we prepare to launch the fall semester. We'll spend some time responding to questions, and then we'll pray.

I want to begin by highlighting some of the great influences on my own life. I come from a Quaker background and upbringing, which remains an influence in my life. I'm a minister in the Friends Church, and even though we haven't fellowshiped in a Friends Church for 20 years, it was the most formative influence on my own understanding of my life with Christ. Martin Luther King Jr. was a hero to Quakers, who were one of the groups that joined with him in the civil rights movement. The Quakers published his letter from the Birmingham Jail, and they funded the Poor People's Campaign. They also underwrote his trip to India, where he connected with some of the great places and artifacts from the life of Mahatma Gandhi. When I think about Martin Luther King Jr., I consider how he lived his faith in a way that inspired millions of people worldwide, especially those trying to follow the life of Christ and make a difference.

I've learned recently that there's a great effort to try and understand how best to appropriate people from the past who've influenced us—and how we can bring that into the present. I hope that as a college community, we'll retain a posture of continuing to learn, continuing to take in new information, and to change and adjust as we learn new things. I've had the opportunity to reconnect with a Black alumnus, and I initially called him an African American, the phrase I'd used for much of my adult life. But when I stopped and asked, "What do you prefer?" He said, "I'm actually not of African ancestry." He said he prefers to be called Black. That was a teachable moment for me.

As we go forward, I want to reach out to our alums of various backgrounds and ethnicities and begin to understand both their experience at Westmont and how we can do a better job as we move forward. When I think about Martin Luther King Jr., I recall great individuals who've embodied the Christian faith. He is certainly a martyr, one who died for his beliefs, but he lived such an amazing, inspirational life. He gave a unique spin to the phrase: "What is the way in which a Christian should live their life?" He said, "The responsible Christian is one who has the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other." He meant it was our responsibility to integrate the great experiences of life with the biblical testimony. It was a call to consider how we bring our faith into contemporary society in a way that really counts.

My own discipline, historical theology and philosophy of religion, has wrestled with this from a philosophical and theological point of view. One of my favorite thinkers is Jaroslav Pelikan, who wrote the landmark study "Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture." This book identifies the 18 dominant ways Christ has been depicted throughout the 2,000-year history of the church, and it helps us understand there's a timeless aspect to Christ

and a time-bound form presented in the culture of various communities around the world. I think this is an important part of the conversation for us.

At Westmont, I think we must take seriously how we can develop a greater capacity to listen, including how we listen to the most aggrieved members of our community. I want this to be something we do to the best of our capacity, to develop an empathetic orientation, a capacity to feel what others have experienced.

I mentioned Pelikan's work because the image of Jesus in the stained glass window in the Nancy Voskuyl Memorial Prayer Chapel has been one of the key questions raised. The conversation around the window has prompted us to begin taking a fresh approach not only to this sacred space but to all spaces on campus. Conversations are underway and will continue into the coming academic year to understand why the chapel was built and what we need to do moving forward. Many of you already know the chapel honors Nancy Voskuyl, who was the daughter of Roger Voskuyl, president of Westmont at the time. She was 19 years old and was tragically killed in a car accident while returning to campus after lunch in December 1959. Lisa DeBoer, professor of the history of art and chair of the Art Department, has provided a wonderful history that reflects the original purpose and design of the chapel, which you can find on our website.

Because of my own background and discipline, I was especially curious about why the chapel had been constructed and the meaning behind its design. There's some wonderful history here. But as the conversation has continued—and as we've recognized some of the complexity of our contemporary moment—we've wanted to make some changes and begin the process of expanding the conversation and the repertoire of images in the chapel. Dr. DeBoer has crafted a wonderful process and approach that we'll take this year outlined in her [document posted to our website](#). She has broken the conversation down into four categories that we'll consider and discuss before crafting new images that will become part of the chapel. We've been in conversation with the Voskuyl family, with Nancy's two surviving sisters, Jane and Ruth, and they're supportive of the approach and the process we're taking. The four categories Dr. DeBoer has identified include: 1) Jesus through the centuries, the 2,000-year history of the church and its depiction of Christ; 2) How we understand the church year through images; 3) The church around the world or global Christianity; and 4) The church at worship. These are just preliminary; there's a lot of work to do, but I think this will be an exciting conversation with some deliberate outcomes planned at the end.

Second, I want to amplify the importance of curricular innovations. Under the leadership of Provost Mark Sargent, appropriate faculty committees have been meeting via Zoom and have approved a revitalized and repurposed ethnic studies minor. I think this is a wonderful rekindling of something that's been at the heart of Westmont for many years. Several developments make this possible, including the ongoing hiring of persons of color on the faculty who are expanding and broadening our curriculum. Across the spectrum, professors from all disciplines are thinking anew about what it means to approach their discipline with fresh eyes, attentive ears and curious

spirits. I hope the full implications of this effort will be inspirational for the college. There's so many good examples, including the impressive work of Professor John Blondell in our Theatre Arts department. I encourage you to look at his work (among many others) as he seeks to innovate his curriculum as part of this broader initiative.

Another initiative is college-wide training in implicit bias. This concept brings to light the fact that we all carry subconscious prejudice, which we develop without even realizing it. We carry this prejudice toward other individuals and groups, people who are different from us, people who live life and think about life differently than we do. We're often ignorant of our own implicit bias. Thankfully, we have wonderful resources within our own community, including Professor Carmel Saad. Dr. Saad is a social psychologist and the daughter of Egyptian immigrants who left Egypt fleeing religious persecution. Her specialty includes teaching about implicit bias, and she has developed a national following. She is an amazing teacher, and she's going to take us through five sessions in the fall and five sessions in the spring to help us understand implicit bias, take a broader view of diversity, understand equity, learn how to be committed to inclusion, and discover what it means to develop intercultural competence. I look forward to the impact she can make on us. One of the things I love about her style is her willingness to be self-deprecating. She sprinkles a lot of personal stories and experiences with evidence-based studies that illustrate her points and show that we can be tested for implicit bias. We all have it, we subconsciously pick up signals from the culture, and we can't get to work on the subconscious messages until we've brought them to light.

Another initiative will be considering how we can continue to hire a more diverse faculty. During my 14 years at Westmont, we've brought in 58 new professors, often hiring as people left or retired, but also for new program initiatives. Of the 58 professors, 35 are women, 23 are men, and 17 are persons of color. Eighty-five percent of them have stayed. A variety of people get involved in hiring faculty, including myself. The provost leads the search, and the relevant department chairs and appropriate faculty members serve on the search committees. There's a full vetting, so this doesn't happen quickly. But the fact that we've been able to diversify the faculty shows a multiyear commitment to this as a priority, and it will continue. I want to amplify our focus on diversity, global engagement and intercultural competency in recruiting students. We've also been deliberately working at this the entire time I've been here, and it predates me. We could not hire the faculty, we could not recruit the students without a great foundation. In the past 14 years, the diversity of the student body has increased from a little under 30 percent to a little more than 45 percent. This has taken time, effort and a significant increase in scholarships and money. I so often think we overestimate what we can get done in one year and underestimate what we can get done in 10. We recognize we still have a long way to go, but we have made some important and impressive progress.

We also want to expand our access to resources. I'm delighted with the hiring of Blake Thomas as he begins to settle in as interim director of intercultural programs (ICP). I'm also pleased that Carol Houston, an African American pastor, a Black pastor, from South Central LA

will join us. She serves on our Board of Trustees and has agreed to come to campus once a week to work on issues of diversity, global engagement and intercultural competence and to advise me as we work our way through this. She has an amazing life story and an amazing faith story. She has served as a pastor for many years at a church in South Central LA, and I value both her friendship and her spiritual guidance.

I encourage you to reach out for other resources; here are some I've found especially important. Dr. Mark Strong, the pastor of Lifechange Church in Portland, produced a sermon in which a Black pastor addresses the white community with a powerful message from the book of Job. Darryl Williamson, the senior pastor at Living Faith Bible Fellowship in Tampa, is another resource. A new friend of the college, Dr. Marcus "Goodie" Goodloe from Way Church in LA, is a Martin Luther King Jr. scholar who will come to campus later this year. I've already mentioned Carol Houston, pastor of Unspeakable Joy Church in South Central. Bishop Kenneth Ulmer of Water of Life Community Church in Fontana is another person to listen to. Their messages apply Scripture and help us think through our biblical faith as we confront a complex, difficult and challenging social situation. I appreciate the leadership of these people as we think together about how we can make headway on these big issues. We've also retained David Bailey, the founder and head of Arrabon, an organization that works with various churches, colleges, universities and other agencies as well as for-profit companies to build cultural understanding and work across all kinds of racial and ethnic boundaries. I appreciate that David—a new friend of the college—works to engage us at a level that builds trust and helps lower barriers of suspicion between different groups.

Emmanuel Acho, a former NFL player, has started a podcast, "Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man." He provides clear definitions of terms like white privilege. He went to University of Texas at Austin and has returned to Austin and made it his home base. A more controversial book, "White Fragility" by Dr. Robin DiAngelo, is excellent and gives a ton of great information but it also makes some highly controversial suggestions, conclusions and observations. It will help us understand the moment better. Later this fall, we'll host a seminar on campus with three people responsible for law enforcement in Santa Barbara County: District Attorney Joyce Dudley, Chief of Police Lori Luhnnow, and Sheriff Bill Brown. I personally have high regard for all three of these individuals and think they've been incredibly helpful not only in this moment, but in developing some of the most progressive policies in law enforcement. We can have constructive engagement without huge concerns about the integrity and ethics of individuals in law enforcement. I'm grateful for them.

As we move forward—or before we move forward—I want to emphasize how important this conversation is to us. All parts of the college community will be involved in it. I hope that throughout the year that we can exercise patience and forbearance to one another as we learn to live together with difference, respect difference, and make significant headway on such a critical issue. Before we go on, I'd like to stop and pray for this moment in the life of the college.

Gracious Lord and God, we give you thanks for all that is occurring, that it can bring to the surface the many ways in which we've neglected or overlooked problems that are a part of our life and our society. Westmont is an important part of this conversation. And now help each one of us who plays a role at Westmont to play our role well and to be able to bear with one another, to express forbearance in a way that actually encourages conversation and cultivates meaning. We pray that you'll guide us during this moment and that we can look back on this time as a turning point in the life and thought of the college and one that produced great fruit. We pray these things in your Son, Jesus Christ's name. Amen.