



Thursday, March 5, 2020

Dear Westmont Community,

For many months our community has grappled with tensions and questions related to race and equity on campus. Various opinions and feelings have been expressed through forums, social media postings, the display of posters and artwork, and private and small-group conversations. Many have contributed thoughtfully and empathetically to these discussions, but there have also been times when comments, actions, or silence have caused frustration or pain. Although vigorous discussion about ideas at college can be healthy, we are grieved when conversations do not build trust or sympathetic understanding. Much of that pain has been experienced by students of color. As members of the Executive Team, we apologize for the ways that our own actions, comments, or inactions have contributed to this. We desire to improve how we, as leaders, can help our community engage in respectful dialogue, listen to one another, learn from one another, appreciate differences, pursue reconciliation, and promote justice and hope.

Several years ago, Westmont adopted a statement on the “Biblical and Theological Foundations of Diversity” that calls us to see “human diversity as a feature of life worth savoring, a feature approved and embraced by God.” The statement challenges us to be a community where “differences are to be joyful rather than oppressive, loving rather than dismissive.” It encourages repentance, and admonishes us to “grow in grace, acknowledge truth, seek justice, show mercy, practice forgiveness . . .” These are high ideals, and we know that we often fall short, but we want to renew our commitment to hear others’ stories, and to be aware of when members of our community are hurt, feel excluded, or do not think they are free to express their views.

This is a long, ongoing journey, but we have identified some immediate steps to which we are committed.







First, we are working to make changes to the prayer chapel window that will allow a richer, more full expression of our Christian faith in hopes that all members of our community will feel welcome and included. To date, we’ve had several internal and external voices offer helpful perspectives on the best way forward. Immediately following spring break, members of the Westmont community, including various student groups, will help identify images that can be rotated in order to lend a consistent voice to the purposes of this worship space.

Similarly, we want to continue reviewing our curriculum to ensure it incorporates more voices that have been excluded and widens our lenses on historic and systemic issues. Shortly after spring break, the provost, working with the leading faculty committees, will be seeking the input and advice of various student focus groups, or listening circles, as we assess the possibilities for changes to courses, new courses, and revised criteria for approving courses.

As we undertake these tasks and confront some of the tensions before us, we are trusting that Westmont can be a place that is distinguished more by understanding and empathy than by anxiety or condemnation. We know that we will need humility and compassion and the Lord’s help to make this journey, and ask that you pray for us and for all students, faculty, and staff in the work that lies before.

We will also pray for safe travels, health, and renewal during your spring break. God be with you.

Sincerely,

Gayle D. Beebe    Mark Sargent    Edee Schulze    Irene Neller    Reed Sheard    Doug Jones

