



SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY

Office of the Dean
College for Public Health and Social Justice
3545 Lafayette Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63104-1314
Phone: (314) 977-3240
Fax: (314) 977-8150

October 24, 2014

Dear College Students, Staff, and Faculty,

Events in our city and on our campus over the past few weeks have uncovered raw emotions that are symptoms of deeper problems. We have seen and heard evidence of bigotry, racism, and intolerance that demand a response. Yet we have also seen courage, wise restraint, love, listening, calls for social justice, and hope for a better future for many in our city.

Our priorities are the safety of our students, faculty, and staff, and the education of our students. These priorities remain firmly intact during these complex times. However, we are also committed to social justice and to the preparation of our students to be men and women with and for others. Time for social action, time for reflection, and time for listening and healing are also important for our College community. Years from now many of our students will look back upon 2014-15 at SLU as a pivotal time in their development - a time when they became firmly committed to lives of service for others.

The wounds of our community, long unhealed but hidden from the world's eyes, are now open and weeping. Many in our community who were previously able to look away, isolated geographically and socially from the injustice located within poor communities, and secure in collective subconscious denial, are now faced with the undeniable injustice and inequity within our city, and our nation. Events in St. Louis, and the events on and around SLU's campus are prompting people in other cities to take another look at their communities. Unfortunately, wounds of injustice are not limited to specific neighborhoods in St. Louis, but are open and visible to those who have the courage to look in every major city in our country. These wounds of injustice will begin to heal only after we hear, we see, we acknowledge, we forgive, and we act together. Our College is committed to playing our role in the long healing process, knowing that old wounds heal slowly, but once fully healed are made stronger by their scars.

We are facilitating listening and dialogue in our College. Over the past couple of weeks we have had sessions in which CPHSJ students have had an opportunity to listen to each other, to openly and safely express their feelings and observations, and to ask hard questions. We will have other opportunities for sharing (see below), and look forward to hearing suggestions from you on how we can do better.

Members of our faculty in the School of Social Work and in our departments have spoken out in public, and in the media, on the events of the past few weeks. From facilitating and organizing a major event at Chaifez, to interviews on CNN, Time, and other media outlets, our College's faculty members have been out front, and behind the scenes, leading our community and national discussions. President Pestello's messages have clearly indicated that SLU stands for social justice and human rights. I and others in our leadership will continue to speak out over the days and months ahead on these matters, and I encourage you to let us know how we can best lead and facilitate positive change for social justice in St. Louis.

For several years members of our College faculty have led a series of programs in St. Louis collectively referred to as the North St. Louis Initiative. President Pestello's recent commitments on behalf of SLU to commit time and resources to help our community heal, and to facilitate faculty, staff and student service for our city, signal an opportunity for the expansion of the North St. Louis Initiative. You will learn more soon about ways in which you can participate.

Several of you have reached out to me and to others regarding your feelings and impressions. Let me briefly address some of these feelings, impressions, and issues here in order to move our process of sharing forward.

- *Some of us are frustrated and angry.*

Some of us are frustrated by the continued racism, bigotry, and injustice in our society – issues that should not exist in 2014. Some of us are frustrated, or even depressed and angry, that our protests in years past did not result in sufficient, lasting change. Some of us are frustrated by our colleagues' inability to understand how the events we have witnessed impact us, and hurt us deeply. Some in our community, under pressure to achieve and excel as students and professionals, have been frustrated by distractions from work and have perhaps said or written things that they now regret. We need to stop and listen to each other. For those of us with faith, we need to pray.

- *Some of us are overwhelmed.*

Ferguson, Ebola, and other crises are consuming the minds and emotions of many of us, who already are busy with family, work, and study obligations. Let's support each other, give each other breaks when needed, and continue.

- *Social injustice is also manifested by health inequities in poor communities*

We are witnessing not merely a reaction to the shooting of a single unarmed man, but rather the release of previously unexpressed frustration regarding a system of injustice that traps people who grow up in a community with poverty, inadequate public education systems, "food deserts", poor access to jobs and transportation, crime and violence, poor healthcare access, and multi-generational feelings of low self-worth fed by portrayals in media of minorities as criminals and thugs.

Our poor and minority communities suffer from increased rates of obesity, diabetes, hypertension and stroke, asthma, and other diseases. They also have higher infant mortality rates, and lower rates of influenza vaccination coverage than their neighbors in wealthier neighborhoods. Part of our response to social injustice must be to continue playing a role in addressing these issues in our community.

- *Racism, bigotry, and hate speech*

I was recently disappointed and sad to read racist, bigoted, and hateful speech posted on a social media outlet that has been attributed to a few anonymous individuals on or near our campus. SLU supports and encourages the free, respectful exchange of ideas and opinions in a safe and peaceful environment. Those who make profane racist comments should know that such language is not tolerated at SLU, and that action will be taken against those who engage in hate speech, consistent with the SLU policies and procedures. (See the SLU policies on Harassment and on Hate Crimes and Bias-Related Incidents.)

For those of us who are Christians, and for other people of faith, our faith challenges us to respond to hate speech with both disapproval and love. Anyone who feels that they must persist in spewing hateful speech should probably consider leaving SLU at the earliest possible time. SLU is a Catholic, Jesuit institution that promotes human rights, social justice, peace, and the dignity of all people. Those who promote racism and hateful speech will not be comfortable here. Those who wish to be a part of a College dedicated to the elimination of racism and bigotry from our society, regardless of their past, are welcome.

To those of you who have been hurt by hateful, racist speech, I am sorry that you have had this experience in our city. We are here to support you. Now is the time for all of us, with you, to stand in peace and love for social justice and for positive change in community attitudes and behavior. As light and accountability shine down upon those who spew hate speech good will prevail.

Hateful speech directed towards our police, who put themselves in harm's way to protect all of us, cannot be tolerated. When some of us believe that a single police officer, or even a group of police officers, behave inappropriately, let's remember that we should not judge all police based upon the behavior of a few. Some of our alumni, and some of those in our community who are the most committed to social justice and human rights, are current or former police officers. Engagement and community dialogue that leads to healing must include the police.

- *Next Steps*

Both in formal sessions, and in informal venues, let's all commit to listening to one another. I am asking professors to continue their commitment to teaching and mentoring students in their subject areas – their first responsibility. I am also encouraging professors to be flexible in their classrooms and in working with students, recognizing that we are in a unique time and that our students need time to express and to discuss.

We will schedule additional sessions for our students, and for all of us, in our College community to engage together on all of these issues. Included are the following planned events.

- Anti-Defamation League Events.
 - “Bias in the Classroom” October 27, 2014, noon-1:00 PM, Salus Center Rm 1412D.
 - “Bias in the Classroom” (repeat of previous event) October 29, 2014, noon-1:00 PM, Salus Center Rm 1412D.
- College Dialogue Group
 - November 3, 2014, noon – 1:00 PM – Location to be announced
 - Led by Nancy Culbert, this is an opportunity for students to engage in open discussion and listening.
 - Other events to be scheduled at both Tegeler and at Salus.

Other planned events will be posted on our College website and announced.

I have met with, and will continue to meet with, student leaders to learn how I as Dean can support them in their work to lead and to support their colleagues.

Please let me, the Director of our School of Social Work (Dr. Linhorst), one of our Department Chairs, or one of our Associate or Assistant Deans, know of any suggestions you have for how we can do better to respond to these challenges.

Peace be with all of you,

Edwin Trevathan, M.D., M.P.H.
Dean and Professor
College for Public Health and Social Justice