



June 3, 2020

Dear Mount Mary Community,

Those of you who know me well, realize that typically words come easily to me. Rarely do I struggle to find a way to express my thoughts, beliefs and feelings and yet this week words have been very difficult to find. Today I am writing to you about the horrific death of George Floyd and what it represents in our country. I suspect this difficulty is because words are so dreadfully inadequate right now to express the hurt, the sadness and the justified anger that has overtaken our nation at this time. Words are simply not enough. Also, to be honest, I am fearful of saying the wrong thing, too much or not enough. So as I speak my truth as your President, please know that never have I been so unsure of what to say. I have been advised to speak from my heart and so that is what I will do.

I believe that many of us are deeply, deeply saddened. Our brothers and sisters of color have too long endured our racially unjust society. All we can say is that we are so very sorry. Personally, I am sorry for the role that I have played in either intentionally or unintentionally allowing this travesty to continue. What have I done or said that I should not have? What have I failed to do that I should have done? These are the questions that many of us, who have unearned white privilege as the backdrop to our daily lives, are asking.

After much thought and prayer I am going to lead our institution in committing to do more, to say more and to learn more about racism and its impact on our society and at Mount Mary. Today we recommit to action! Earlier this year I signed the CEO Action Pledge on Diversity and Inclusion which states my commitment to working with the Mount Mary community to create an inclusive and equitable environment on campus. The pledge makes a commitment to the statements below and more details can be found on this website: <https://www.ceoaction.com/pledge/ceo-pledge/>

CEO pledge | CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion

CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion™ aims to rally the business community to advance diversity and inclusion within the workplace. The CEO pledge outlines a specific set of actions the signatory CEOs will take to cultivate a trusting environment where all ideas are welcomed, and employees feel comfortable and empowered to have discussions about diversity and inclusion.

1. We will continue to make our workplaces trusting places to have complex, and sometimes difficult, conversations about diversity and inclusion
2. We will implement and expand unconscious bias education.
3. We will share best—and unsuccessful—practices.
4. We will create and share strategic inclusion and diversity plans with our board of directors.

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It is important to make everyone aware of the actions that Mount Mary has begun to address diversity, inclusion and equity in the last few years. Examples include the creation of the Diversity & Inclusion Council and its strategic plan; writing, receiving and implementing the Howard Hughes Medical Institute grant related to educating our campus on topics such as racism, inclusivity and unconscious bias and hiring an inclusive excellence professional to make our classrooms more welcoming to all; receiving millions of dollars each year in grants (Promise Program and Title III) and foundation gifts (Caroline and Grace Scholars) to assist students' needs on many fronts; creating the Latinx taskforce which resulted in achieving Hispanic Serving status for Mount Mary and supporting student organizations such as Students Achieving Leadership Through Spanish Activities (SALSA), Black Student Union, Asian Student Organization and Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee; and hosting many speakers and events on campus that have brought issues of race and inclusivity to the forefront. This past year the Diversity and Inclusion Council hosted a successful Day of Understanding with over 100 people in attendance and we recently finished a campus climate survey that will allow us to assess opportunities for on-going improvement. I point out these initiatives because we are not a campus without action, indeed many on the Mount Mary campus are dedicated to creating a more just environment. Still this is not enough; more is needed.

On behalf of our institution I ponder: What more could we do to hire people of color so our employees better mirror the race of our students? What can we do to better retain our employees of color – how can we intercede earlier to keep them at Mount Mary longer? How do we modify our policies and practices in ways that address the subtle (or not so subtle) discrepancies in how they impact students and employees of color? How does Mount Mary contribute to changes in society that will eliminate discrimination and position people of color to have equal opportunities with whites? And perhaps most importantly, how do we change our hearts and minds to effect change in others? These, and so many more questions swirl in my head as I consider what moves people to violence. The only answer seems to be desperation, because they do not feel heard or understood and so, we collectively and as individuals must do better. As your leader, I must do better!

Today, I ask each and every member of our campus community to commit with me to eliminate injustice and inequity whenever and wherever you find it. I ask you to add actions to words on our campus and in our community. I ask you to respond to hatred and violence with love and compassion. I ask you to assist each other in providing a safe, supportive and encouraging environment in which all people, regardless of the color of their skin, will know they are valued and welcomed. These are easy words to speak and write but they are much harder to live. We must be willing to change. Yes, we must be willing to change!

Rarely in our lives has there been a more important time to come together as community and care for one another. I send you each my care and my hope for better, more just and equitable days ahead.

Blessings of Hope,

Christine Pharr, Ph.D.
President

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