



COLLEGE OF
MOUNT SAINT VINCENT

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

June 4, 2020

Students, Faculty, Staff, Alumni, Friends:

The College is clear on what we stand for. Our mission statement expresses our fundamental values: “an understanding of our common humanity [our equality], a commitment to human dignity [our inherent worth], and a full appreciation of our obligations to each other [our duty to serve and do justice].”

We try to live these values. This can be challenging in community. It is even hard to live them fully as individuals.

For several reasons, I have been deliberately slow to issue a statement about the College’s commitments in the harsh light of current events. The state of our nation is not new, nor are our problems new.

The murder of George Floyd and other recent events lay raw our national sin of racism. These events appear again to have awakened our national conscience. Some of our leaders have only more dramatically than usual displayed their revolting divisiveness. I fear many others are preening and posturing and confidently attributing our national shortcomings to anyone who disagrees with them. That makes me pause, and I suppose it above all explains why I have hesitated to share another statement. What follows is a statement from the College, but it is also uncharacteristically personal to me.

Bigotry is a sin. It is the Original Sin, the most serious sin, the sin of Pride. Because it is a perverse and arrogant expression of superiority, people are often blind to it in themselves.

Racism, sexism, homophobia—indeed all forms of bigotry—inflict bruising pain and do grave harm whether expressed violently or indifferently or through hateful speech or with the condescension of assumed superiority. Throughout our country’s history, from the invasion of European colonists till today, bigotry has been the radical injustice and tragedy at the heart of American greatness.

It is no excuse to recognize that bigotry is a common trait across the globe: China, Japan, Indonesia, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Rwanda, Israel, Palestine, Iraq, Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Russia, Poland, France, Germany, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Spain, and virtually every Latin American country... everywhere. In many nations, including here, there has been genocide.

That bigotry is everywhere does not exempt us from responsibility. Giving life in practice to the College’s values continues to be urgent: “an understanding of our common humanity, a commitment to human dignity, and a full appreciation of our obligations to each other.” Our souls depend on it. Your wellbeing and mine, everyone’s, and our nation’s, all depend on it.

We admire and should join in the protests against bigotry, violence, and injustice as an expression of anger and frustration but also of hope and commitment. How else can we explain protesters breaking into tears when policemen join them in taking a knee. Is that not hope? Is that not love?

At the College, I believe our greatest aspiration, and the fullest expression of our values, would be for our country to take a knee in penance, in hope, in solidarity.

The great danger is that, after taking that knee, in standing up, we as a people—like so many politicians—feel we did something virtuous and simply return to our routines or distractions. Or will we all as individuals in a democratic society recognize our personal responsibility to examine and purify ourselves? Will we as citizens have a sufficient commitment to the common good? While we debate the merits of this action or that proposal, will we be certain to not deviate from our obligation to serve each other and seek justice together. As equals.

Our soul is laid bare, as individuals and as citizens. Our shared failures lie raw. Let each of us—all of us—reflect on the College's values and give life to them in our hearts and in responding urgently to the call to seek justice together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Charles L. Flynn, Jr." in a cursive style.

Charles L. Flynn, Jr.
President