



## **Bethel College Statement on Race Tensions, National Mourning and Remedy**

July 22, 2016

Bethel community:

Each week our nation bears witness to escalating tensions, even death, between police and citizens of color. Though total violent crimes have decreased over the decades, polls show race relations are strained to the highest level in 25 years, as bad as the Rodney King era and L.A. riots. Commentators say we are in national nervous breakdown. Some African-Americans experience profiling rather than protection. Some police fear ambush. Such is our summer of sorrow.

Bethel College joins public servants and community leaders in mourning the dead, calling for calm, and participating in remedy. We pledge to supplement existing support to employees and students on race, and participate with honest brokers of civic peace across our region. We will soon convene community leaders for input on how we are best employed.

We should. Our 23 percent students of color deserve it, as do our law enforcement alumni; our historically white Christian constituency should rally for it, and our faith-integrating mission requires it. Twenty thousand alumni scattered over 59 nations and every U.S. state can lighten this darkness, as can our 2,000 employees and students inside our ZIP Code. We, like other colleges, aspire to more than selling academic credits, but to improve the public good.

We acknowledge that race-based stress is not limited to murder or other hostilities of naked harassment. Seeded into our diversity long before today's headlines was distrust. It is expressed anywhere from passive social avoidance to microaggressions of ill-will. Some offenses are bigotry, some are ignorance.

Our vision of racial harmony begins when peering into the Christmas manger. Our leader is an olive-skinned Middle Easterner. Most who follow Christian faith today are not Caucasian, with nearly twice as many Christians in Central and South America as stateside. Christ teaches about an immaterial, harmonious Kingdom of God - not a legislated Christian Empire - made up of every nation, tongue, and tribe. That euphoria is valuably diverse, not color-blind. Scripture calls us to do God's will on Earth just as if we already live in heaven.

Our project is not so small as a racial mosaic, with independent pieces adjacent to one another. It is not even as small as racial mural, a blending of red-blooded people. It is more audacious than that. It is heaven on Earth. It remedies the double consciousness in citizens of color: a life not only privileged as Americans, but challenged by what is in front of the hyphen (African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic-American).

We call upon our community to at least show sincere curiosity, if not active sympathy, to reflect upon whether we perpetrate falsity or disparagements upon those of other races. Surely, we can commit ourselves to acquire new awareness, motives, and an outcome that looks far more like heaven on Earth.



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