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**[Faculty] Next Steps**

1 message

**President's Office** <presoff@luthersem.edu>

Fri, Mar 25, 2022 at 3:08 PM

To: Faculty &lt;faculty@luthersem.edu&gt;, "staff@luthersem.edu" &lt;staff@luthersem.edu&gt;, Students &lt;students@luthersem.edu&gt;

Dear Luther community,

We know that tensions are high after the letter we sent Wednesday about not initiating a formal process to join the Reconciling in Christ program. We recognize that this was a blow to many, who are now experiencing grief and anger at the news. We have also received extensive feedback from community members who hold different perspectives on this issue. Our Lutheran confessional identity requires us to call a thing what it is, and the reality that has been exposed over the past few days is that we are a deeply divided community. One of the challenges before us is to discern how to cultivate Christian community in the midst of such divisions--a challenge that isn't unique to Luther Seminary, but is increasingly urgent in today's fractured and polarized world.

Before we go any further, we want to apologize to our students and the entire community for the lack of clarity we provided as students attempted to bring their proposal before the board. We never intended to mislead anyone, and we know that intentions are irrelevant when actions cause pain. We have heard your feedback about how confusing our messages were and take full responsibility for that. We should have been clearer so that those engaged in the conversation had no cause to feel as if they were lost in a bureaucratic maze. We are sorry and committed to ensuring our communication is clear and transparent as we move forward.

That's why we're following up with this message today. While Wednesday's communication expressed a decision about something we are *not* doing, we want to share some of what we *are* doing. This is by no means comprehensive, and we will need the entire community to come alongside one another in this work. But we believe it's a start.

**Core Commitments**

As we lean into the challenge of cultivating Christian community in the face of deep divisions, we reiterate our commitment to the ideals expressed in our welcome statement. Specifically, we seek to learn from one another's particularities and "are committed to engaging deeply in Christ-centered relationships across differences through honest, courageous, and respectful dialogue." As the welcome statement acknowledges, this isn't possible without the grace of God. Our ability to be a community of reconciliation is itself a gift of grace, and we pray for it earnestly. We will all make mistakes along the way, and we are committed to engaging one another with openness, vulnerability, and generosity.

The work of reconciliation requires prayer, deep listening to one another's stories, and shared discernment. This is a time to pull together and engage our differences openly, courageously, and graciously, instead of fracturing further. We remain grateful that Dr. Leon Rodrigues has been called to lead us in this work and he has our trust.

We do not want to prescribe what things will look like as we move forward, because this is something we need to co-create together as a community. What we *do* know is that it must begin with deep listening to one another's stories of hope, pain, faith, and fear. From there, perhaps we'll be able to identify communal practices that will equip us to be more fully reconciled to God and to one another. Then, rooted in these shared practices, we believe we'll be able to improve our internal processes to be more effective in dealing with problems when they arise and promoting shared accountability.

Starting next week, we will initiate opportunities to listen deeply and share our stories with one another through mutually respectful conversations. Listening sessions will be held with all individual staff departments and the faculty, and we have reached out to invite the Student Council to meet with us as well. We have received messages from community members who do not feel safe expressing their support of the seminary openly at this time which is why we will begin these listening sessions with existing groups who are accustomed to working alongside one another. We trust that the Holy Spirit will accompany us as we show up for one another and begin to discern together.

We live in a world in which the temptation to retreat into our respective camps and see each other as enemies is ever-present. The work of reconciliation is counter-cultural, difficult, and soul-deep. We invite the entire community into the journey we have before us, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit to do this transforming work among us. Please join us in praying daily for each member of our community.

Peace and grace,

Robin Steinke, President

Leon Rodrigues, Interim Dean of Students and Vice President for Inclusion and Belonging

Heidi Droegemueller, Vice President for Seminary Relations

Terri Elton, Interim Dean of Academic Affairs

Randy Kyle, Chief Human Resources Officer

Rolf Jacobson, Interim Dean of Faculty

Michael Morrow, Vice President of Finance and Administration

Dwight Zscheile, Vice President of Innovation

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The Rev. Robin J. Steinke, Ph.D.

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