

An Open Letter from the Staff of Luther Seminary

Dear President Robin Steinke, Leon Rodrigues, Heidi Droegemueller, Terri Elton, Rolf Jacobson, Randy Kyle, Michael Morrow, and Dwight Zscheile

It is with heavy hearts that we, the undersigned staff, received the community-wide email on the morning of March 23, 2022 titled "ELT Response to Student Proposal." As staff of Luther Seminary, we are moved to respond to you as our Enterprise Leadership Team and to express our solidarity with the Student Council, the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) sub-committee, and the whole campus community.

For many of us, our students' care and wellbeing are central to our work and vocation here at Luther Seminary. Many of our students have expressed how important it would be for Luther to embark on the RIC process and to give a public statement of support for students with marginalized identities, particularly LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC students. It is because of this commitment that we are so grieved by your swift denial of our courageous students' call for our institution to embark on this RIC conversation and to make their presentation to the Board of Directors.

Here is our call for your action:

1. We call for a public apology to the Student Council and RIC sub-committee, whose elected positions and collective leadership were subverted through the denial of granting them a receptive audience and/or a hearing with the Board of Directors.
2. We call for President Steinke to allow the Student Council Reconciling in Christ committee to present their proposal to "consider initiating a Reconciling in Christ process by the fall semester of 2024" to the Board of Directors for discussion.
3. We call for full transparency around the reasons why the ELT does not feel ready to embark on the formal process to join the Reconciling in Christ program.
4. We call for full accountability for each member of the Enterprise Leadership Team to publish how you will take responsibility for this shared work of Accountability, Belonging, Inclusion, Diversity and Equity (ABIDE). It is unacceptable to put the sole responsibility of next steps on Dr. Leon Rodrigues.
5. We call for an open dialogue and conversation with us, the staff, around your decision. Over the summer, you promised us transparency and clear communication, which has yet to happen.

Our LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC students and colleagues deserve more than a promise of conversation; we are called to action and accountability. We have not witnessed an outstretched hand of invitation to do this work together, in which the Enterprise Leadership Team is understanding the students' grievances and honoring their request to navigate the complexity of becoming a Reconciling in Christ seminary. Our Faculty, Staff, and Administration should be leading by example of how we embody our Welcome Statement through respectful dialogue, honesty, and transparency. There are students experiencing harm at the hands of this

institution's actions (and inactions) and we cannot delay dialogue any longer. Our students' safety and emotional well-being depends on it.

Through an intentional consultation with students, the Student Council discerned that one of the most effective ways to foster a sense of inclusion and belonging was to embark on the RIC process. The dismissal of this discernment does not embody the student-centered approach that Luther espouses.

We call you into active participation with our community, so that through intentional dialogue we may find space for reconciliation and healing.

Christ's ministry of reconciliation calls us to listen deeply to those who have been harmed and seek repair. In this case, many of our BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ students are asking us to become RIC as a faithful next step in healing as a community. This requires contrition and a posture of humility to learn from those who have been aggrieved by Luther's oppressive patterns of behavior. We pray that our hearts can be opened to hearing these painful experiences and seeking to live out God's compassionate justice more faithfully here at Luther. May we all commit to this difficult process knowing that we are called by the Holy Spirit to press forward toward God's just future.

We ask that we seize this opportunity of challenge and growth to broaden our scope of our Strategic plan to include Reconciling in Christ and live into our mission, vision and values. We are particularly drawn to the first strategic objective: *"By 2024 Luther Seminary will develop and implement concrete and measurable plans to promote inclusion and belonging across its organizational structure and programs, in keeping with its gospel-centered mission, vision and values and the aspirations of the Welcome Statement."* We firmly believe that this request to engage in the Reconciling in Christ process is crucial to the success and implementation of the strategic plan.

We call on our God of compassion to enter into the space with arms outstretched. We call on Christ, our healer, to flip over these tables of injustice. We call on the Holy Spirit to enter in and embolden us to hear one another. We call on you, the Enterprise Leadership Team, to take up the call that has been set before you, to lead not out of power but out of heart, not out of fear but out of compassion.

Here we stand; we can do no other. God help us.

David Scherer (Contextual Learning)
Ashley Wheeler (Contextual Learning)
Timothy Schroeder (Admissions Office)
Heather Hove (Seminary Relations)
Chris Jacobsen (Office of Technology)
Jennifer Thiel (Marketing)
Grace Pomroy (Faith+Lead/Stewardship Leaders Program)

Erica Dolmar (Contextual Learning)
Karen Gieseke (Contextual Learning)
Peter Watters (Library)
Jessi LeClear Vachta (Admissions Office)
Mary Ann Teske (Library)
Sarah Luedtke-Jones (Student Affairs)
Chenar E. E. Howard (Student Affairs)
Juli Kramer (Marketing and Communications)
Crystal Zemlin (Business Office)
Maria May (Contextual Learning)
Terra Zosel (Operations)
Ronald Hosek (Maintenance)
Ben McDonald Coltvvet (Faith+Lead)
Jeni Mullenix (ATE, Academic Affairs)
Laurel Forsgren (Office of Technology)
Patty Horazdovsky (Admissions Office)