

January 10, 2020

Dear Rev. Dr. Steinke and Dr. Rodrigues,

We write to you in recognition of your respective roles as President and Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, with appreciation for your legacy of advocacy, representative power for the entire community, and ability to lead continued action on students' access to resources and sense of inclusive belonging at Luther Seminary.

It is our calling as students of Luther Seminary to be sent by the Holy Spirit to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ and to serve in God's world. While our digital learning spaces and time in the classroom are important arenas to live out this call, we recognize how education unfolds within and beyond course formalities, and one of the first steps of reconciliation is a moment of disruption. So today, while so many are gathered on campus for January intensives, many of us are coming together to take action beyond the classroom. In this "walk-out" of our classes, we join in solidarity to demonstrate our unity in the face of brokenness at Luther Seminary.

After reflecting in multiple smaller circles on the pain and feeling of lostness caused by this brokenness, and its effect on our future as leaders, it's time to come together in one large circle to integrate the conversation and bear witness for each other. We believe that though some issues have been named, others have been veiled in fear or misunderstanding.

While we embrace change and innovation efforts, we seek space for people who are grieving -- grieving loss of physical spaces, student housing, curriculum changes, and accumulating staff departures. We tend the scars and open wounds left by the clutches of institutional racism, noticing the disproportionately low numbers of people of color from the USA, and uplift the voices of those Black seminarians who feel Luther is not a space for them. Our hearts ache with students facing financial struggles, especially the unique situation of international students, some of whom are unable to buy books, unsure of their resources, and uncertain if they will be punished or frowned upon for speaking up about their needs. We echo the importance of Luther becoming a Reconciling in Christ institution; actively preparing leaders to *be supported as* and/or *extend support to* LGBTQIA+ people. Luther Seminary is uniquely situated to equip servant leaders for all contexts, whether divided, unsure, hostile, secretive, or celebratory on topics of relationship and gender diversity.

Recognizing the power of vulnerability, we wish to unlock those attitudes that seek to shield students from painful conversations, for we would rather be a part of the healing, exercising our blossoming leadership skills and providing student perspectives, with special attention to the input of people marginalized in society.

We celebrate our current community, and deeply yearn for a greater sense of connectedness, belonging, and stability. Since students come and go, it is enormously difficult for our collective body to maintain an active and healthy community that doesn't feel like "starting from scratch" each year, from social togetherness to access to resources. We recognize our own continued responsibility as students, while calling out in frustration, turning to the leadership and structures of Luther Seminary that remain year-to-year – the administration, faculty, staff, and board – who have the power to sustain a vibrant, beautiful, and welcoming community for all who are part of this seminary.

Inviting you to join us in this solidarity, we ask that you:

1. Create a standing committee to act on the brokenness reflected in the examples above, utilizing information that has been gathered throughout the years about campus climate and needs, while seeking contemporary input.
 - a. This committee should be made up of executive members of the administration, students, staff, and faculty: striving for equal representation from each group.

- b. This committee should have an awareness of, and send special invitation to, marginalized voices, offering empowerment while deconstructing any impressions that people will be punished or ignored when contributing their perspectives.
 - c. This committee should develop an action plan by the end of the 2020 Spring Semester addressing the issues of Luther Seminary. There should be, in this plan, contributions from outside voices, and active checkpoints for two years to evaluate how the plan is being accomplished. This plan should involve conversation and action on the Reconciling in Christ journey, and measurable cultural competency training.
2. We seek regular weekly listening sessions, during which the executive leaders of the seminary will listen and allow space for issues and hopes to be named by the student body. These sessions should be scheduled at various times to accommodate a variety of schedules, and should be open to students who cannot be physically present. These sessions would benefit from an outside spiritual director or facilitator.
 3. We ask that Luther Seminary hire additional dedicated full-time staff members to contribute to the work being done to build healthy community among students and connect us with staff, faculty, spiritual formation, and livelihood resources. These hiring efforts should be especially focused on building beloved community, and continuing to increase marginalized voices among faculty and staff.
 4. Finally, we ask for more open and intentional conversation between the board of directors and student body addressing the issues and hopes that emerge from such listening sessions. These conversations should take place as often as the board of directors gathers on campus.

Thank you for acknowledging our requests, and we look forward to your swift response and action.

In Christ,

The students present today