

Message to Diederich College Students from Members of the Diederich Faculty and Staff:

As the events of the past week have demonstrated, our minoritized¹ and marginalized communities, along with their allies, are struggling to assert and exercise their unalienable rights: “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” We recognize that they are fighting for something many take for granted: the right to exercise their First Amendment rights to freedom of speech, peaceable assembly and petitioning the government for the redress of grievances.

Racism is not news, especially for those who have been on the receiving end of it; however, this is a moment of recognition that we should not let pass. The journey to end racism along with other systems of oppression is hard. To heal and redress the suffering of our students, faculty, staff of the Marquette and broader Milwaukee communities, we need to engage in a process of individual and especially systemic transformation. The process, as we see it now, involves three action steps: to recognize, to become accountable, and to engage in institutional change.

We join with Pope Francis who said: “We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life.” The Catholic and Jesuit values that guide Marquette University and, thus, the Diederich College of Communication call us all to devote our careers and lives to the pursuit of social justice. More than an abstract concept, an Ignatian understanding of social justice embodies three conventions:

1. A basic attitude of respect for all people.
2. A firm resolve never to profit from, or allow ourselves to be suborned by, positions of power derived from privilege, for to do so, even passively, equates to active oppression.
3. An attitude not simply of refusal but of *counterattack* against injustice; thus, setting free the weak, the oppressed, and the marginalized of the world. ([Arrupe 1973](#))

In this spirit, we invite our Diederich College and Milwaukee communities to become a part of the transformation process and solution.

Starting, then, with recognition, here as a College we make explicit our awareness of and solidarity with the experiences of marginalized and minoritized¹ communities in and outside our campus. The solidarities expressed below are not stated in hierarchical order: We are equally committed to all these communities regardless of their position in the list. Furthermore, these solidarities are intersectional, as we are aware of the layered nature of identity and the systems of oppression that act upon these identities. We invite everyone to join us in recognizing:

- The Indigenous community and the legacy of settler colonialism that has worked to displace, sicken, and kill Indigenous people in the United States for centuries, including during the Coronavirus pandemic.
- The African American community who have been oppressed since 1619. We acknowledge how the legacies of slavery shape the culture and actions of all American institutions. We also see these connections in the violent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, Sandra Bland, Dontre Hamilton, Mya Hall, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile, Sylville Smith and many others whose names did not make the news or the hashtags.

¹ The term ‘minoritized’ addresses the fact that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities are not naturally minorities in the United States. Violence and neglect stemming from settler colonialism and racism have rendered these communities minorities; in other words, they have been *minoritized*. Uncritically thinking of BIPOCs as minorities unduly erases these violent histories and undermines anti-racist work.

- The immigrant community whose human rights continue to be violated even during the Coronavirus pandemic.
- The Asian community who have experienced racialized hostility in the United States amidst the Coronavirus pandemic that serves to bring back the harmful myth of “yellow peril.”
- The LGBTQ community whose lives intersect with race and have been marginalized and discriminated against, especially in terms of policing and healthcare.

We realize that coming to terms with the above might be challenging, especially for people with racial and class privilege. But expressing these solidarities allows us as individuals and as an institution to be open to accountability and to accept that we have been part of the problem. It gives the College direction. We realize we have made mistakes and, as we commit to do social justice work, we will keep making mistakes. It is inevitable. We pledge to learn from these mistakes and to listen and to speak, even when it gets hard. Thus, we take the second action step and acknowledge our shortcomings in identifying, addressing, and alleviating the oppression and suffering of marginalized and minoritized communities. We encourage our colleagues, students, faculty, staff and alumni to keep critiquing and informing our efforts as we move forward.

The third action step is to engage in institutional change. One of the steps we are undertaking as we work toward transformation is enacting the College Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan. The plan spells out steps, tasks and timelines to progressively achieve a genuinely just and egalitarian campus. The plan will soon be available on our college website. It includes training for unlearning racism, expanding our community outreach, exposing our students to BIPOC practitioners, scholars, organizations and their works.

Specifically, as communications professionals and instructors, we will also foster and develop skills of dialogue to promote an ability to talk about power, privilege, and systemic oppression; we will ask critical questions about our professions and how we practice them; we will work to build awareness of problematic ideologies that might undermine our curriculum and professional practices; we will use our scholarly and creative skills to capture the lived experience of minoritized and marginalized communities; and finally we will advocate for policy and cultural change that contributes to a more representative and justice-oriented environment at all levels of the Marquette community.

As we continue to communicate and enact social justice initiatives in the short-, medium-, and long-term, we call on students, faculty and staff in and out of the College and in surrounding communities to help us render our efforts meaningful. We are responsible and accountable. We are Marquette.