Response to Student Protest

*April 29, 2016*

The vision for Bethel College is to “welcome with open hearts, stimulate personal and spiritual discovery, transform through the power of community and inspire the leaders of tomorrow” in order to serve out our mission of “…preparing students to become critical thinkers and engaged global citizens.” This vision and mission are grounded in values fundamental to a Bethel education, including – among others – service, community, peace and social justice, and diversity.

Today, a group of Bethel students lived out our vision, mission and values as they united their voices to speak out against racism on campus. Their venue of choice – convocation, our all-school assembly designed explicitly to help build community, broaden horizons and explore basic value issues. What ensued was dialogue. Dialogue, which included questioning, supporting, and countering the perceptions presented.

Students shared of personal discovery and exhibited the potential power community has to transform thought and action. They stepped forward to engage other Bethel students in dialogue surrounding issues of social justice and diversity. They challenged Bethel – students, employees, administration, and Board alike – to consider whether we’re living out our vision to “welcome with open hearts.”

We have taken some steps toward ensuring every Bethel student feels valued and supported. All employees participated in an inclusion and diversity awareness seminar as part of our annual Fall Retreat in 2013. For the past five years, the curriculum has included a Diversity Seminar through which students from diverse backgrounds grapple with issues of diversity and share their insights with campus in convocation. Our strategic plan, “Extending Our Heritage, Expanding Our Impact,” passed in October 2015, includes initiatives that attempt to address relevant issues such as recruiting diverse employees.

Today our students reinforced just how important this work is to our community. We do not shy away from their discontent. We will engage their concerns — in support of all our students. As an institution built on and for conflict resolution, should the dialogue warrant, we will engage KIPCOR. As noted by some students in the convocation, the civil rights movement did not happen overnight. However, we must not rest on the good work already done. We must work together as a campus community to ensure meaningful improvement is realized in a timely fashion.

Our students, illustrating Bethel’s vision, mission and values, have sparked the opportunity for all of us to engage, learn and grow together as a welcoming and supportive community, regardless of our background and path to Bethel College.