June 12, 2020

Dear Members of the University Community,

Please allow us to speak for the entire University of Lynchburg community in expressing our deep sadness over recent events in Minneapolis and around the country. The racial violence and senseless deaths of African Americans — including George Floyd in Minneapolis, Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, and Breonna Taylor in Kentucky — should prompt all of us to pause and ask some difficult questions.

How can we dismantle systems of oppression, racism, and privilege? How can we, as a community, make a positive difference? In this already turbulent time of the pandemic, can we set aside our differences and biases to come together for meaningful change? How can you, as an individual, bring to bear the core values instilled at the University of Lynchburg and begin to affect positive change and healing in your community?

Make no mistake, while we are deeply saddened and disturbed by the killings and violence that has erupted over the past week, we are also deeply offended and angry. We condemn racial and judicial discrimination of any form. We stand with the citizens of Minneapolis and the dozens of other communities around the country where peaceful protests have devolved into violence.

While these events appear to be removed from the University and the City of Lynchburg, their force has a profound impact upon members of our community. They are a stark reminder that we continue to reflect upon and address our own systems and biases. It is so important that you know that the University of Lynchburg is not sitting idly and being silent.

And whereas, we have taken proactive steps to educate our campus community on understanding and combating racial injustices, how to advocate for social justice, along with a myriad of other valuable resources, we will not stop here. Additionally, we have commenced with the following initiatives, which we know is moving us in the right direction toward social healing.

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Webinar Series
- Courageous Conversations with classes and Alumni
- Dialogue on the Dell (around social justice issues)
- Developing a grant which will provide coaching/counseling services to our students, who are dealing with emotions of uncertainty, not feeling safe, anger, and helplessness, as it relates to the police killings of unarmed African-Americans
- Institutional audit, which will deeply examine all facets of the University and make bold recommendations on areas needing improvement, which directly impact our African-American campus community

(cont.)
However, we know that we still have work to do, to ensure that our campus stakeholders, especially our African-American students, faculty, and staff feel safe, valued, and respected. We genuinely and with strong convictions make this statement, because we know without a doubt that their lives matter!

We ask that all members of our community continue to come together and to stay connected in these turbulent times. Talk with family, friends, classmates, and colleagues. Raise your voices and take action against all racial injustices and senseless acts of violence.

But, please do so in a peaceful and respectful way.

Students, faculty and staff, we want to remind you of the resources available through the University’s Office of Spiritual Life, Office of Equity and Inclusion, and the Counseling Center. We urge you to seek out their support.

It is important that we support and care for one another in these challenging times and that we remember that we are all empowered to stand up and speak out against injustice.

Our thoughts are with you wherever you are around the country. Please be safe and always remember to speak your truth.

Sincerely,

Kenneth R. Garren, PhD
President

Alison Morrison-Shetlar, PhD
President-elect

Robert L. Canida, PhD
Diversity and Inclusion Officer