June 24, 2020

Dear Members of the Notre Dame Community,

We have seen the outrage over the killing of George Floyd in police custody—along with so many other deaths of other Black men and women that preceded and followed—give rise to protests around the nation and the world. The protests have drawn our attention to urgent issues in our society, and the need to combat racism.

In recent weeks, I’ve been able to speak with Black trustees, alumni, students, faculty and staff in our Notre Dame community. These conversations have shown me that, for many, the pain associated with injustices in the broader society has been made more acute by racist or discriminatory experiences on our campus. The first and perhaps most important thing I want to say to these members of our community is: I am sorry. I am sorry for these experiences that are so contrary to what we want Notre Dame to be.

We must do better. I have also received recently petitions and letters from various groups and individuals making requests and suggestions for what the University should do. The following is a partial list of the requests:

- Increase the number of Black students, other students of color and students from under-resourced communities.
- Create a culture that is intolerant of discrimination and racism and increase
transparency regarding the administration’s response to racist or discriminatory incidents.

- All students—and particularly majority students—should support an inclusive environment by educating themselves, avoiding racist remarks or actions and calling out others when they make such remarks or do such actions.
- Enhance instruction in cultural competency in the first-year Moreau course and/or in other parts of the curriculum.
- Increase the number of Black faculty and staff.
- Ensure racial bias training for the Notre Dame Police Department.
- Enhance health care and counseling services for underrepresented students.
- Create a body to oversee, advise, and hold the University accountable in its diversity efforts.

In the coming weeks, we will give these requests serious consideration as we discern a course of action. Members of my leadership group will soon meet with some student leaders as part of our ongoing efforts to listen and formulate possible action steps.

The current moment, while deeply tragic, is also an opportunity for reflecting on the ways we can make Notre Dame more fully the community we want it to be and to combat racism wherever we find it. We must seize that opportunity. Yet any successful effort will be one which first considers initiatives that have been undertaken, assesses their effectiveness and builds on what has been successful while replacing or altering initiatives that have been unsuccessful.

In September 2013, I created the President’s Oversight Committee on Diversity and Inclusion. Its purpose is to facilitate communication, coordination and accountability in our efforts across the University to make Notre Dame an even more diverse and inclusive community. The committee achieves this end by ensuring that initiatives are underway, that we set achievable and measurable goals, and that we are monitoring progress toward these goals. The membership of this group has changed over time, and I’m grateful for the dedication and leadership of many. You can find annual progress reports on various initiatives for students, faculty and staff here.

The current moment calls us to discern the further steps we must take. My leadership team and I will listen, dialogue with others, reflect and formulate our next steps, which we will announce in the coming weeks. I call on every member of the Notre Dame community to join with us in making ours an ever more inclusive community committed to combating racism. Either we all walk together in mutual support, or we do not walk at all. Either we are all Notre Dame, or none of us are. Let us become more fully the Notre Dame we seek to be.

In Notre Dame,

Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.
President