



A Catholic and Lasallian University

OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

Dear Colleagues,

On September 14, 1964, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a sermon to about 2,000 people in East Berlin at Saint Mary's Church, three years after the Berlin Wall was completed. The sermon referred to the wall, and to the divided city, itself, as a "symbol of the divisions of men on the face of the earth." King did not explicitly mention the atrocities carried out two decades earlier in that city, nor did he mention the oppressive terrors of the Soviet Bloc. Instead, he spoke with honesty and optimism about America's history and its need to reckon with the deep wounds of slavery and racism, incorporating both America and Europe in a sermon that offered an interpretation of the New Testament's message of reconciliation. "Corinthians speaks of a ministry of reconciliation," King said. "The Gospels speak directly and in parables about the responsibility which we have for one another, regardless of the differences of race and nation."

I hope it is in this spirit of responsibility to one another that we renew our work this week with the beginning of a new semester. This desire to work toward a "ministry of reconciliation" includes the reminder to work in collaboration, with mutual respect and collegiality. It is also a reminder that universities provide learning and skills that are foundational for any truly productive societal reconciliation: facts, history, critical and creative thinking, and the development of the attributes we require in future leaders: empathy, values, vocation, and the ability to resist systems of oppression and engage in dialogue across difference.

Under the leadership of Dr. Kristi Kelly, Vice President for Diversity and Associate Provost for Student Engagement, Equity, and Inclusion, along with many others on campus, faculty and staff at Lewis have taken concrete action this year to make meaningful progress toward understanding systemic racism and to promoting a commitment to live out our [Sanctified Zone](#) statement. I want to emphasize some aspects of this work that relate directly to a ministry of reconciliation.

- We are committed to providing resources and support to process and discuss the events that have played out on the national stage over the of the past two weeks. This includes these [events](#).
- As a recipient of the [Healing Illinois](#) grant, a racial justice grant, we will continue to promote dialogue and conversations to build understanding and empathy, encourage collaboration in order to be in community, and facilitate learning to build or enhance knowledge.
- I want to extend a special recognition and gratitude to the [Brother Jeffrey Gros Institute](#) for its work in leading Peace Circles in service of restorative justice with various communities on and off campus. I hope to expand that work in the future.
- I am grateful to the University Faculty Affairs Committee and Office of Human Resources for addressing the issue of bullying and drafting language that defines bullying and creates a transparent process for responding to it. Our Faculty Senate, Leadership Team, and Board of Trustees will be reviewing this work in the Spring.

- We continue to support the reporting of [bias incidents](#) on campus. This semester we incorporated the LewisU App more formally into our community by aligning rights and responsibilities for using the app with our community standards, highlighting behaviors that are inconsistent with our expectation of each other.
- Last semester we began what I hope will become a tradition at Lewis: faculty expert panels on societal or cultural issues, or problems, under consideration in faculty scholarship and research. In the Fall I hosted panels focused on the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2020 election. Recognizing that democracy forces us to engage in dialogue across difference in order to break down the barriers to a flourishing society, I plan to host two panels this semester designed to help us better consider the nuances of a functioning democracy.

This message began with reference to the symbol of the Berlin wall. I'd like to end by looking at another symbol that has been the source of some attention and commentary in the last two weeks: the United States Capitol dome. On February 13, 1861, a mob gathered outside the Capitol building to enter and interfere with the electoral certification of Abraham Lincoln and was rebuffed by soldiers who were assembled as a result of reporting that pointed to a planned insurrection by armed militias and others. At the time, the replacement dome for the Capitol was under construction, and photographs of Lincoln's inauguration show an empty, scaffolded space where the dome would be. It's been noted that, in retrospect, the unfinished dome was a metaphor of an unfinished union. After the ravages of the Civil War began, Lincoln defended the use of resources dedicated to the completion of the dome, arguing that "if people see the Capitol going up, it is a sign that we intend the union shall go on."

The poet Walt Whitman was one of those people who saw the new Capitol dome going up. While volunteering as a nurse in Washington, D.C. during the war, Whitman described the construction project in a letter to his sister. I remembered that this week because the poet George Oppen chose an excerpt of that letter to conclude his extraordinary poem from 1968, "On Being Numerous." Whitman's words in this context, with Oppen's arrangement, are another reminder of the important outcomes of our work: knowledge, community, liberty, inspiration, and wonder.

The capitol grows upon one in time, especially as they have got the great figure on top of it now, and you can see it very well. It is a great bronze figure, the Genius of Liberty I suppose. It looks wonderful toward sundown. I love to go to look at it. The sun when it is nearly down shines on the headpiece and it dazzles and glistens like a big star: it looks quite

Curious....

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Christopher Sindt
Provost