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Statement to the Illinois Wesleyan Community

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Statement to the Illinois Wesleyan Community

June 1, 2020

Once again, shock at injustice and its aftermath wracks our country and our community, as it has far too many times, this time witnessing the death of George Floyd and the painful response around our country. Yesterday, in the Bloomington/Normal community, we experienced both peaceful and productive protests, and unfortunate incidents of looting and violence. As individuals and as an institution, we, the community of Illinois Wesleyan University, are part of a shared humanity compelled to ask ourselves: Who are we as a people? How can we heal the inequality that wounds us again and again? And: What can I do?

The turmoil of recent events reveals — if ever there was doubt — why the commitment that drives our university is so important. The words of our mission must not ring hollow; we must infuse them with renewed meaning in the present moment: Diversity. Democratic Citizenship. Social Justice. Acting, each in our own way, to advance those values is what we can and must do.

When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke in the 1960's, both on our campus and elsewhere, he cautioned those gathered, in that era of change and uncertainty, progress and setback, lest they come to repent the "appalling silence and indifference" of good people in the face of racial injustice.

The “appalling silence and indifference,” of which Dr. King warned, remain with us today, more than fifty years later. As an educational community, we must cultivate leaders able to grapple with difficult realities, speak out for justice, and take action to bring about change. Our university’s mission calls upon those who have been transformed by their IWU experience to *not* be silent, to *not* be indifferent, but to use their talents and gifts to make a positive difference. In our communities. In our country.

We must be part of an ongoing quest to enable this and future generations to come to find ways to understand and value one another and to break through the barriers dividing the people of this country. The state of our nation today brings home to us both the prophetic wisdom and the tragic limits of one man's vision, a vision still unrealized. Only by acting together to confront injustice will we ultimately achieve Dr. King’s goal to someday "emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man’s inhumanity to man, into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice."

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