

Observing and commemorating Juneteenth

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June 18, 2020

To: St. Mary's University community

From: Thomas Mengler, J.D., President

Subject: In recognition of Juneteenth, campus will close Friday afternoon for prayer and reflection

On June 19, 1865, more than two and a half years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation and freed all slaves in Confederate states occupied by Union troops, Union General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston and read an order that freed more than 200,000 slaves in Texas. Since that time, Juneteenth has celebrated this first groundbreaking step to emancipating African Americans in this country.

June 19, 1865, was an important moment in the history of Texas and our country. So too is this current moment. The brutal killing of George Floyd, along with incidents of racial injustice in Atlanta, Louisville, Kentucky, and other cities across our country, has underscored that there is still much work to do in our communities — including St. Mary's University — before we can rightly say that we stand for racial justice and affirm respect for the dignity of each person. As Pope Francis recently expressed, "We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life." We have work to do here at St. Mary's.

In observance of this important day of commemoration, we are closing campus business at noon tomorrow — Friday, June 19 — and urging members of our St. Mary's family to pray and reflect on issues of racial justice in our community and our responsibility to act for the common good.

In addition, dialogue and concrete action will be necessary for St. Mary's to become and stand firmly as an anti-racist university. Here are a few actions I am taking this summer

as we prepare for the return of students, faculty and staff to campus later this summer:

1. Establishing this summer a President's Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion charged with leading in the campus-wide development of a strategic plan for inclusive excellence at St. Mary's. This committee will include faculty, staff, students and alumni and be charged with focusing the University's work on topics including, but not limited to, implicit bias awareness, hiring, curriculum and co-curricular programming, faculty and staff training and development programming, community engagement and campus communications and marketing.
2. Directing all resources and programming for the 2020-2021 Lin Lecture Series and Conference on Justice and Social Concerns to focus on racial justice, education and faith.
3. With the advice of the President's Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, developing and implementing an Implicit Bias Awareness Initiative for students, staff and faculty. This initiative will include annual university-wide cultural competency, diversity and inclusion education; ongoing workshops and seminars for students, faculty and staff engagement, dialogue and prayerful reflection; and a comprehensive digital awareness campaign on campus.
4. Updating the University's internal and external websites to assure ease of reporting incidents of bias, discrimination and harassment and access to resolution procedures for reported complaints.

I urge all members of the St. Mary's community — students, faculty, staff and alumni — to join together and bring your passion, ideas and commitment to promoting a more just, compassionate and inclusive society. As Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, founder of the Society of Mary, wrote so eloquently 200 years ago, “We must courageously modify methods and forms that have nothing about them that is immutable in order to adapt. ...”

As we reflect on the meaning of Juneteenth, please join me in recognizing that our authentic conviction to justice cannot be fully realized apart from the pursuit of other important values, such as courage, humility and resolve. Please join me also on this day in prayer for the victims, past and present, of those who have suffered from the brutality of racial oppression.

Thomas M. Mengler, J.D.

President

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