Dear LSTC community:

I recently met with several persons in our community who are persons of color or come to us from international settings, a meeting they requested in order to tell me of their experiences of racism and racial harassment at LSTC. During our seventy-five minute conversation, they identified many specific incidents and encounters during the past year alone that were deeply distressing, items that I now share with you in broader categories:

- Feeling bullied by particular faculty or staff members in classroom and work settings
- Having their concerns, proposals, and thoughts ignored or treated dismissively
- Facing culturally degrading comments from students about themselves or others
- Perceiving insensitivity to race or culture in public events, or alienation from these
- Being treated in workplace environments in demeaning or infantilizing ways
- Receiving treatment in classroom and elsewhere that differed from other students
- Enduring the aftereffects of “behind the back” conversations about themselves

The type and range of these concerns is serious indeed, without even considering comparable situations that may have happened with others at LSTC but remain unspoken. It would be easy to try to deflect this by debating whether particular things happened in the manner stated, but doing so misses the real impact. What I witnessed were the very strong feelings expressed by persons reacting directly to racially or culturally motivated behaviors that left them confused, trivialized, disrespected, harassed, threatened, unsafe, and alone. This was compounded by the appearance late yesterday afternoon of a racially hostile statement on the west windows of the refectory, reinforcing the sense that this is a perilous setting.

No one should ever be subjected to such treatment under any circumstances. It is all the more dismaying when this happens in a Christian setting where love of neighbor, welcome to the stranger, and reconciliation in Christ should be the norm. When such behavior happens at LSTC during my service as president, it is part of my calling to respond, and in ways that I pray will be consonant with our faith and hope. This letter is the first of several such responses in order to begin an institutional process toward amending our ways.

I therefore acknowledge and confess that the kinds of racial and cultural harm stated above are sinful and stand opposed to God’s ways of love shown through Christ Jesus. On behalf of our school, I beg forgiveness from those persons who have been harmed by our sinful behavior. Such behavior ought to have no place at LSTC and we should seek God’s help to repent of it and amend our ways. We have a communal responsibility to address this behavior, for to leave it unexamined and unaddressed only deepens the sin and its effects on our sisters and brothers. Finally, I pledge that as a school we will address these racial and cultural concerns by further training, policy revisions, and seeking consultative services.
Let me close by thanking the persons who spoke with me for their courage and candor during our conversation. Their remarks were as thoughtful and faithful as they were difficult to hear. On their model, I also encourage you to pray about this and consider your own responsibility in confronting racism as a faithful witness to Christ. As always, I welcome your responses, in what I hope will be a spirit of mutual openness about what needs to happen next. May God bless you during these final weeks of this season of Christ’s resurrection life.

Sincerely,

James Nieman
President