

August 13, 2020

Dear College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University alumnae/i and supporters,

Thank you for your advocacy for racial justice at Saint Ben's and Saint John's. We share your commitment to building an anti-racist community on our campuses and welcome the voices of alums and friends who call for an end to racial oppression. We believe our Catholic and Benedictine Values call us to this work based on the belief that each of us are made in the image and likeness of God and based on the Catholic Social Teaching of embracing the dignity of every person. We have a special mission at Saint Ben's and Saint John's to assist our students in their development of the Benedictine traits of listening, deep respect and justice for all. We acknowledge that we have much work to do to correct the impact of generations of racism in our society and to change racist behaviors, beliefs, systems, and policies that exist on our campuses.

Our approach is two-fold: first, working with our faculty and staff to pursue and enact an anti-racist agenda in the classroom and in student spaces; and second, in the administration at Saint Ben's and Saint John's. Our faculty has already developed an action plan tied primarily to the curriculum and our student development staff to the co-curriculum. The College of Saint Benedict Student Senate and the Saint John's Senate have jointly issued an Official Call to Action, which in many ways mirrors the ideas you identified. We are very much looking forward to working directly with our student leaders, who are passionate, well-informed on the issues and intent on progress. We remain committed to the issues of diversity, equity, social justice and anti-racism and enthusiastically enter this work with them as partners.

In the spirit of our Benedictine founders, we pledge as a leadership team to listen to your voices and the voices of all people of color in our community, to learn and to work for an anti-racist community at CSB and SJU.

You have identified possible actions in five different areas. We will structure our more detailed responses accordingly.

1) Teaching anti-racism

We fully agree that that CSB/SJU classrooms must be centers for discussion and learning about historic and systemic racism and how it shapes the lived reality of persons of color today. To that end, our faculty have adopted an Integrations Curriculum that will be implemented this fall and that specifically identifies examining the social construction of race and its resulting inequities as one of its learning outcomes. All students are required to take at least two courses in cultural and social difference, one at the identity level in their first year, and another at the systems level later in their college career. A more detailed description of the Integrations Curriculum can be found here: <https://www.csbsju.edu/integrations-curriculum>.

Our faculty has also spent the past three years participating in workshops, scholarship, and dialogue groups focusing on inclusion and racial justice as part of a grant from the Mellon Foundation, with the goal of creating "a cycle of learning, practicing, teaching, and sharing,

to ensure that we embed inclusion deeply and widely on campus and share what we learn with others.”

And, as part of the First Year Experience, a required College Success course this fall will include multiple sessions on anti-racism in addition to other foundational information all students need as they begin their college careers.

2) Representation among faculty and staff

We agree that a diverse, and well-supported, faculty and staff is essential to creating an anti-racist Saint Ben’s and Saint John’s. We have had mixed results with our efforts so far. CSB and SJU implemented a Search Advocate process designed to enhance equity, validity and diversity in college/university hiring. Over fifty Search Advocates have been trained from among our faculty and staff. A Search Advocate is required to sit on every hiring committee, asking questions and promoting practices that advance diversity and equity, and minimizing the impacts of cognitive and structural biases. Since the implementation of this program, we have hired the most diverse classes of faculty in the history of the two institutions.

CSB and SJU have also joined the Consortium for Faculty Diversity and the Upper Midwest Higher Education Recruitment Consortium and have created the Human Resources Inclusion Advisory Committee that includes representation from faculty and staff from all parts of the institutions. We recognize that we have much more work to do to achieve a faculty and staff that reflect the identities of our students.

3) Accurate representation in all publications sent out by CSB/SJU

We value and promote the agency of students to speak for themselves in the marketing and admission pieces we produce. In recognition of the need for more accurate representation of Black, Indigenous and People of Color faculty, staff and students, CSB and SJU are creating an editorial process that includes direct, active, and accountable steps to accurately reflect the true characteristics of our community, and also the individuality of every person. We commit to documenting this process in writing and sharing it publicly.

4) Understanding how racism and colonialism have operated throughout CSB/SJU’s history

Saint Ben’s and Saint John’s acknowledge our debt to the Dakhóta and Anishinaabe peoples on whose land we live, teach, learn, and work. We support the work of faculty and student researchers who are exploring the historical relationship between the institutions and the indigenous peoples of this area, including Dr. Theodor Gordon, an anthropologist who recently received a grant to interrogate the role of Benedictines in the creation and support of Native American boarding schools. He and his team of student researchers have built relationships with local communities of indigenous peoples to research, understand, and educate about the harm the schools inflicted. Though the work of this grant has been put on hold because of the pandemic, we expect it to begin again sometime during the coming year and fully expect that work to impact our community. We also acknowledge the need to develop a process to review the naming of buildings on our campuses and will do so this fall.

5) Ongoing financial resources are required to support all the actions above

We agree that significant financial resources must be dedicated to creating just, equitable, and transformative inclusion on our campuses.

Saint Ben's has prioritized raising funds to support women from historically underrepresented communities. Because of centuries of racial inequity, there is significant overlap between persons of color and those who are from low income families and/or those who are first in their families to attend college. Thirty percent of Saint Ben's students are the first in their families to attend college and over 30% are eligible for Pell Grants or are near-Pell-eligible. We have focused much of our fundraising to provide access for young women from a variety of backgrounds to attend and graduate from Saint Ben's.

The recently completed *Illuminating Lives* campaign set out to raise significant scholarship funding to support women from underrepresented communities. Currently, Saint Ben's endowment holds over \$11.2 million in these dedicated scholarships. The vast majority of this was raised in the *Illuminating Lives* campaign. In addition, over \$11 million was raised through the campaign to provide stipends for low-income students to take part in internships and global study, educational opportunities that should be available to all students, regardless of family income. Millions of dollars of estate plan commitments that will come to the college at some point in the future have also been raised for this purpose.

Saint Ben's has also created the Breonna Taylor Scholarship for Racial Justice, both a permanently endowed scholarship fund as well as a currently expendable fund that will support women from historically underrepresented communities. Because of CSB's identity and mission as a college for women, we felt it was important to lift up the name of a woman of color who was a victim of police violence. The scholarship was publicly announced today, with opportunities for alumnae and friends to make gifts in support. Raising funds for scholarships and support for experiential learning for women from underrepresented communities will be a priority for current and future campaigns.

In the last 20 years SJU has renewed its historic commitment to educating first generation college students, setting an ambitious target of reaching 25% of the student body, a goal that has been reached and surpassed. The key element to this strategy was a dramatic increase in scholarship support for first generation college students, particularly young men of color, and a corresponding increase in the diversity of our student body. Saint John's has raised significant funds in support of scholarships that benefit students of color, including Intercultural LEAD, First Gen, Immokalee, Cristo Rey, and the Phillips Scholars, to name a few. These scholarships are earmarked to students with financial need, with a preference for underserved African American, Native American and Latinx students who desire to attend Saint John's University.

Presently, the size of this specific SJU scholarship portfolio is nearly \$18 million, with over \$4.7 million in scholarships awarded since 2002. In addition, donors have signed and documented another \$12.5 million in estate gift commitments designated to these existing scholarships. Saint John's total cash and pledges targeted for this scholarship purpose presently exceed \$30 million. Most recently, benefactors have stepped forward to establish two Racial Justice Scholarship Funds in memory of George Floyd. One is an endowment

fund, and the other is a \$100,000 commitment in immediate scholarship support for African American students.

Finally, a \$600,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation was secured to launch Becoming Community, an initiative that seeks to create transformative inclusion on the CSB/SJU campuses. The Becoming Community initiative has engaged students, faculty, and staff in a variety of workshops, seminars, action groups and conversations regarding how to create community that is truly transformatively inclusive. You can read more about the work of Becoming Community at <https://www.csbsju.edu/becoming-community>.

To augment this response, we invite you to turn to documents located on the “Office of the President” page at <https://www.csbsju.edu/about/college-of-saint-benedict/office-of-the-president> for a summary of CSB’s and SJU’s current work toward transformative inclusion. In the sidebar on the right side of the page, under the “updates” section, you will find two documents, *Actions Toward a More Inclusive CSB/SJU* (July 2020) and *CSB Inclusion Ecosystem*. Together, they summarize important work that is already underway on our campuses. We know that continued and focused work is required.

Thank you for your commitment to racial justice and your willingness to help make Saint Ben’s and Saint John’s a more just, equitable, and inclusive community. We see you as allies in this work. We commit to working with faculty, staff, and students from across our campuses to build on work that has already begun and to create actions that lead to an anti-racist campus of true community.

Sincerely,

Laurie Hamen, Interim President, College of Saint Benedict
Gene McAllister, Interim President, Saint John’s University