

Sent December 4, 2019, at 3:17pm

Dear Columbia Seminary community,

Over the last couple of days, I have received expressions of concern, pain, confusion, and anger regarding a recent personnel decision at the seminary. Most of you have heard that Rev. Ruth-Aimée Belonni-Rosario Govens is no longer employed by Columbia. In this context, I want to communicate to you that Columbia Theological Seminary remains committed to fair and equitable personnel practices. We are limited by those very commitments in what we can share publicly about this particular case, but I can affirm that the seminary has and will continue to carefully follow its personnel protocols and its robust anti-discrimination process.

Of course, that does not lessen the pain and dismay that many of us feel. And it does not change the distrust and resentment that is already being voiced by some of us. For me, it is especially difficult to see this community characterized as a place where discrimination and exclusion are encouraged. By contrast, I see a community that is hard at work trying to dismantle structures of oppression and educating a new generation of leaders committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion. I am constantly amazed by the courage, the insight, and the love that I witness among our faculty, staff, and students.

However, it is true that we are also a community marked by painful histories and hampered by a lack of mutual trust. Perhaps even reading this email, some of us still feel suspicion, and some of us are exhausted and discouraged by this fresh wave of conflict. I feel that pain, too. This semester, the release of Erskine Clarke's history of Columbia has reminded us of Columbia's history and invited us to critique this institution and others shaped by white supremacy. While Columbia continues to diversify, we sometimes still experience the challenges associated with living and learning in an intercultural community. This spring, we will invite Dr. David Hooker to guide us through his Transformative Community Conferencing process wherein he will guide us in a series of conversations designed to help us engage our history and the ways it continues to plague us. This will be a long, tough journey that we have already begun. However, I am grateful to this community for weathering this season with as much grace and courage as you have, and I hope that each of you will commit to staying on the journey with us and continuing the work we still have to do.

I am always open to your questions and insights and invite you to see me in person or by email if you would like. As additional details become available, I will gladly share them as appropriate.

It is the season of Advent - when we yearn for restoration and lean hard into hope. I pray that these gifts of Advent will inform and strengthen you as we walk together.

Blessings,  
LVD