



## Opening Prayer | Fall 2016 LOUISVILLE SEMINARY CONVOCATION

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This past summer, we witnessed horrific violence and expressions of hatred against people of color, gays and lesbians, members of the transgender community, immigrants, Muslims, and other vulnerable persons in our society. We saw acts of terror against innocents around the world, party-goers having a fun evening with friends, and families on vacation, and children just being children in war-torn cities. We saw shameful acts of vandalism and intimidation, often very close to home, against people no less innocent than those maimed in the name of terror. We saw brutality and deadly force unleashed by those charged to keep the peace in our communities, and we saw brutality and deadly force used against peace officers who were only protecting and serving. We witnessed hatred packaged as a political commodity and peddled like soap, often with the cooperation of powerful leaders who know but refuse to act better. We have seen the resurgence of tribalism and nativism and even fascism around the world under the guise of local interests and security, and we have seen the cynical manipulation of even the most legitimate concerns and worries into political movements that threaten to undo generations of painstaking diplomacy and democratic processes.

Christian Faith has a public role to play, especially in such moments as this, when fear threatens to consume all virtue. And we Christians, because we follow Jesus Christ and because we are humans and are accountable before God and all creation, bear the responsibility both to pray for our leaders and people and also to speak and work for peace, justice, mercy and goodness. We have a sacred duty to listen to one another. We also bear the duty to speak plainly, truthfully and clearly, when lies and innuendo are broadcast via media old and new. We must be willing to say, for example, that washing and ironing their sheets doesn't make the Klan any less hateful. And calling the old racist bigotry and misogyny by a new name, such as "Alt. Conservatism," doesn't make it any less repugnant.

Grace is not an anemic resignation to whatever evils compete to prevail; Grace is the fire of God's love incarnated in the lives of ordinary people on behalf of others, the strangers, the defenseless, the marginal. As St. Benedict told us long ago, we are seen to glorify God most fully when we do that which is not in our own interests.

I am saying all of this today, at the beginning of the new fall term of 2016, to remind us of the particular calling we have as teachers and learners and community members in this theological school, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Many of us either have read during the summer or are reading now *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence*, a book by Derald Wing Sue. I encourage you to read this book, and to participate in a discussion group, and to find ways in your life and community to live out its lessons. I encourage you to attend not only class, but life, during this critical moment in history.

We live in a park, but we also live in a city. We go to school, but it is a school in this particular country, on this small planet. We study a theology grounded in the scandal of a God who showed up in human history. And this God calls us to show up too.

I cannot recall a time in modern history when our distinctive approach to theological education at Louisville Seminary was more needed in our society, when we needed so much people who try to build bridges and to bring others together rather than to construct walls to keep them apart. As we begin this term, I ask that we pray for God to give us the wisdom, and the strength, the courage, and the endurance to live so that, as George MacLeod once said, we can "be to others what Christ has become for us."

Let us pray:

***We give you thanks, God, that you brought us to this hour. Help us not to waste your time. Amen.***