

Dear Students, Parents, Alumnae, Faculty, Staff and Friends:

I am sorry it has taken me this long to respond to the events that have occurred recently, in particular the senseless killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. This is not because I didn't care, wasn't paying attention, or was trying to sweep anything under the rug. It is because I was struggling to find exactly the right words to express my anger, horror, and grief at what I was seeing and hearing play out in the media.

Then, as many of our students and alumnae began sharing their experience of casual racism and unconscious bias here at Preston, I was stunned into silence. I realize now that there are no "exactly right words" to assuage the pain that people of color, including some of our students and alumnae, have endured for far too long. And, if we're being honest with ourselves, we have to include other groups of people in our community who have felt diminished or dismissed by our words or actions or inaction, including our LGBT students and alumnae.

A sincere apology won't cut it. We must begin with each of us engaging in honest self-reflection to identify what our hidden prejudices are, because we all have them, and then do the hard work to educate ourselves on how racism asserts itself in our interactions with our students, their families, and our colleagues, even unintentionally. We must resolve to make changes for the better in the way we treat *all* members of our community. And once resolved, we have to enact change by taking concrete steps to create a better, safer, more open-minded, welcoming community for all who study, teach, and work in our buildings. This must begin NOW.

Preston prides itself on being a racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse community. It makes us what we are. We think our diversity is a good thing, but not everyone in society agrees with that. More important than these outward characteristics, though, is our *diversity of thought* that allows critical and important conversations to occur. These conversations, when we truly listen to one another, develop empathy—the ability to step into the shoes of another person, aiming to understand their feelings and perspective. Empathy is the beginning of love and it is sorely needed in these troubled times.

We must measure our actions against what our mission and charism of compassion requires of us. We promote the virtues of Dignity, Honor, Respect and Compassion, but do we model them in our daily practice?

We have begun the task of developing an action plan, but we will need help from many people. We will be reaching out to our various stakeholders to be sure all our constituencies have representation and a voice in our planning. We will keep open the lines of communication so you will know of our progress and so you can hold us accountable.

Whatever form the reopening of our school takes, we want all members of our community to feel that they are welcomed, valued, and respected when they walk through our doors. We're going to take the advice of Maya Angelou: "*Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.*"

Respectfully,

Jane Grendell, Principal