



## STATEMENT OF LAMENT, REPENTANCE, ACTION, AND SOLIDARITY

Though any one statement from an institution fails to capture adequately the experiences of every member of the community, the Seminary must speak. We must speak to decry anti-black violence in any form, at any time. We must speak to lament the loss of life, the divisions in God's world, and our individual and collective complicity in violence and death and division.

In response to these most recent events—and to a long history of anti-black violence—lament is the primary and most fitting posture for our community. For colleagues who are persons of color, tears, anger, and weariness likely predominate this time. For others, we are called not only to lament, but to confess and repent and learn. It is from a posture of confession and repentance—and from a desire to enact solidarity with our full community—that a group of our faculty and staff drafted the letter found below. This letter goes beyond this moment of violence and unrest to name broader patterns of social and economic violence.

I invite any among the Seminary community who wish to publicly join the confession of the letter. I also invite those who would like to acknowledge or support the work it articulates to add their names. Some may add their names to join in confession. Others may add their names in prayer that the commitments named in the letter hold true. Some may choose not to sign at all, and to sit in silent hope. What is most critical is that each of us respond in whatever way we are called as the Spirit moves in and through us in this moment.

During these demanding times I invite all of us to be in prayer for each member of our Seminary community, each member of our nation, and each member of God's world, particularly those who experience suffering most directly and acutely.

My commitment is to continue to shape an institution responsive to the reality of pain and injustice that for too long has remained unattended to and thus unresolved.

In closing, I offer this prayer from the Australian Prayer Book:

*Most merciful God,  
we humbly admit that we need your help.  
We confess that we have wandered from your way:  
we have done wrong, and we have failed to do what is right.  
You alone can save us.  
Have mercy on us:  
wipe out our sins and teach us to forgive others.  
Bring forth in us the fruit of the Spirit  
that we may live as disciples of Christ.  
This we ask in the name of Jesus our Savior. Amen.*

David Esterline, President and Professor of Cross-cultural Theological Education

## STATEMENT

*Thus says the Lord:  
A voice is heard in Ramah,  
lamentation and bitter weeping.  
Rachel is weeping for her children;  
she refuses to be comforted for her children,  
because they are no more.*

Jeremiah 31:15

*All his sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, “No, I shall go down to Sheol, to my son, mourning.” Thus his father bewailed him.*

Genesis 37:35

It is long past time for all of us to join Rachel and Jacob on the mourning bench: a place worn thin over many years by the parents of so many beautiful children whose lives have been snatched away in the machine of racial violence and inequity baked into the very foundation of our democracy. Maria, enslaved and murdered by Eliza Rowland<sup>[i]</sup>, Emmet Till, Frank Stack, Laura Nelson<sup>[ii]</sup>, Mary Turner, J.A. Burris, Hezekiah Rankin, and thousands of other men and women lynched and tortured<sup>[iii]</sup>; Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, Melissa Ventura, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Antwon Rose Jr. . . . and now Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, all dead at the hands of law enforcement; “essential workers” Jason Hargrove<sup>[iv]</sup> and Rolando Aravena<sup>[v]</sup> whose lives and deaths punctuate the damning reality that we have created a political and economic structure leading to more than half of the deaths from COVID-19 in our country occurring in disproportionately black counties.<sup>[vi]</sup> The rage afoot in our streets and country is not surprising. It is holy grief in company with Rachel, Jacob, and Mary, the mother of Jesus: a refusal to be consoled.

Our unwillingness to disrupt these patterns of social and economic violence reveals our willingness to sacrifice the lives of beloved children of God on the altar of whiteness, an altar built upon a hunger for control, power, and economic security. This whiteness undergirds not only blatant acts of racial violence, but also well-intentioned complacency among all of us who benefit from a system that privileges white skin while looking away and even justifying patterns of death targeting dark skin. As theologians and people of faith we stand convicted in our complicity, knowing that the beauty and life of each of these brown and black bodied women and men proclaimed the *imago dei*—the very image and gift of God to our world. In neglecting to disrupt the patterns that lead to these deaths, we refuse to honor the very gifts of God.

In our conviction, we are also humbled. To the extent we have failed to join these legions of grieving parents on their mourner’s benches over the years, we have also failed to understand not only with our heads, but also with our hearts and our very bodies what it feels like to live in the midst of this level of terror and loss.

We are aware that our first act must be one of repentance: repentance from and for the many ways these patterns of violence were birthed in and have been sustained by political and religious practices we claim as our own. Slavery justified through scripture. Worship and teaching that privilege the witness of white Europeans and Americans over the lives, history, teaching, and testimony of people of color. Economic practices that render some bodies protected and worthy of care while others are left vulnerable and alone like Lazarus at the gates of the rich man. Organized policing birthed as social control within the terror and fear of slavery, and still bearing the markings of that birth.<sup>[vii]</sup>

Out of this place of conviction we pledge to do the following:

In our individual lives:

To adopt a daily posture of humility and repentance in our prayers.

To pray daily for a justice that goes deep and wide, requiring new eyes to see and new ears to hear.

To seek to listen to and learn from people of color in our communities and to recognize and feel the manifold ways their journeys have been fundamentally different than our own.

To seek out, learn from, and share anti-racism resources so readily available to us.

To call attention to racism and white supremacy whenever we recognize its insidious work among us.

To share time, resources, and new imagination on behalf of vulnerable people to whom the novel coronavirus is bringing additional vulnerability.

In our Seminary community:

To listen closely to people of color in our own community.

To pray for justice in the life of our Seminary and in the community in which we work and live.

To continue the work of identifying and untangling whiteness in our theological traditions and practices.

To continue decolonizing our curriculum.

To honor the journey and experience of all of our students and to privilege the voices of students of color as we seek to better understand the call of the gospel in this time.

To work with, listen to, learn from, and be changed by non-white congregations in our community.

To provide an opportunity for members of the Seminary community to address food insecurity and wage inequality affecting people of color in our own neighborhood.

In the communities where we live:

To develop awareness of and support for anti-racist organizations and work in our neighborhood.

To join in public conversations about policing practices in our community and to bring that information into our classroom teaching and community reflection.

To seek out opportunities to support anti-racist work in our community through ritual, prayer, and pastoral presence.

To show up and join in neighborhood anti-racist programs, protests, and projects.

In our nation:

To pray and work for just and compassionate leadership.

To pray that our nation's hardened heart might issue forth in new expressions of God's exodus and liberation.

To seek transparency and accountability from leaders at the local, state, and national levels.

To work for and participate in free and fair elections.

To advocate for laws and policies that recognize and seek to address the social and economic trauma created in our country through centuries of racism.

We invite you to join us in this pledge, trusting that when we approach the mourning bench, Jesus whom we love and seek to follow will be there waiting for us, having already accompanied, held, and cried out with and for these grieving parents through all their agony. We are certain that the God to whom we entrust our lives is able to do far more than we can ever ask or imagine, able even to equip us with the courage and capacity to reform our practices and our commitments toward the shalom God promises: the way of life rather than death.

Leanna K. Fuller, Associate Professor of Pastoral Care

Scott J. Hagley, Associate Professor of Missiology

L. Roger Owens, Associate Professor of Christian Spirituality and Ministry

Denise E. Thorpe, Interim Director Doctor of Ministry Program

Heather H. Vacek, Vice President for Academic Affairs / Dean of Faculty, Associate Professor of Church History

B. Hunter Farrell, Director, World Mission Initiative

[ii] Evelyn M. Simien, "Lynching Memorial Shows Women Were Victims, Too" at *The Conversation*. April 24, 2018. <https://theconversation.com/lynching-memorial-shows-women-were-victims-too-95029>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

[iii] "A Memorial to the Victims of Lynching" at *America's Black Holocaust Museum: Bringing Our History to Light*. <https://abhmuseum.org/category/lynching-victims-memorial/>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

[iv] Desha Johnson-Hargrove as told to Abby Vesoulis. "My Husband Died Trying to Protect His Bus Passengers from Coronavirus. Please Stay Home So His Death Isn't in Vain" at *Time Magazine*. April 9, 2020. <https://time.com/collection/coronavirus-heroes/5816894/jason-hargrove-bus-driver-coronavirus/>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

[v] J. Chang, A. Lousko, J. Hopper, et al, "For Essential Workers Who Keep Communities Running During the Corona Virus Pandemic, Staying Home Isn't and Option". *ABC News*. April 8, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/essential-workers-communities-running-coronavirus-pandemic-staying-home/story?id=70027044>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

[vi] Vanessa Williams. Disproportionately Black Counties Account for Over Half of Coronavirus Cases in the US and Nearly 60% of Deaths, Study Finds. *The Washington Post*. May 6, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/05/06/study-finds-that-disproportionately-black-counties-account-more-than-half-covid-19-cases-us-nearly-60-percent-deaths/>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

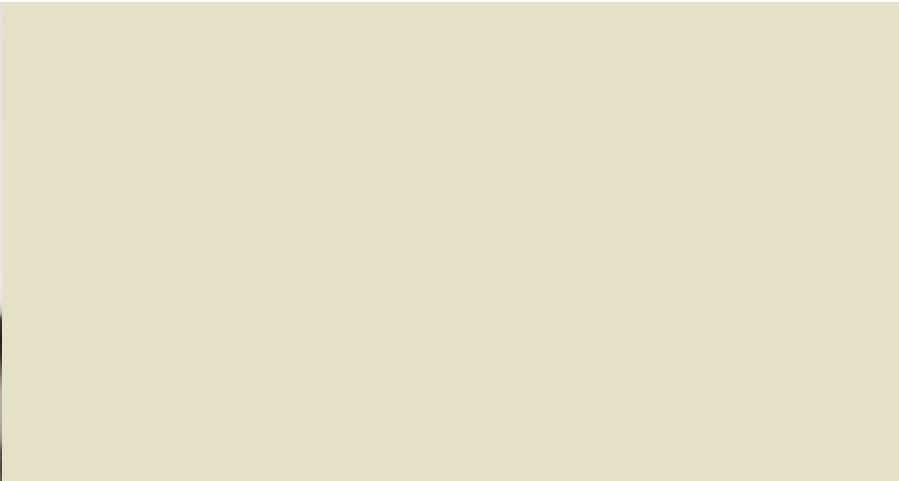
[vii] Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "Kneeling to Venerate Hate: The Meaning of a Police Killing in Minnesota" at *Religion News Service*. <https://religionnews.com/2020/05/27/kneeling-to-venerate-hate-the-meaning-of-a-police-murder-in-minnesota/?fbclid=IwAR3bjvJ0opOXdJdVYJSSWBNnrJERDsQi7e1ObJjKOH3PkAsbWbR4fLcRZ-g>. Accessed May 27, 2020; Sally Hadden, *Law and Violence in the Virginias and Carolinas* (Cambridge, MA: 2003). Chelsea Hansen, "Slave Patrols: An Early Form of American Policing" at Blog: *On the Beat*, National Law Enforcement Museum, July 10, 2019. <https://lawenforcementmuseum.org/2019/07/10/slave-patrols-an-early-form-of-american-policing/>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

## SIGNATURES OF SUPPORT

*The names below were submitted by 9:00 a.m. July 7, 2020. Additional signatures will be added once per day.*

Rebecca Abbott, Student  
Daniel Aleshire, PTS Board Member  
Ashley S. Ashley, Alum and PTS Board Member  
Lori Liller Arnold, Continuing Education Coordinator  
Lea Austin, Alum and Pastor, Apollo, Pa.  
John Balliet, Student and Pastor at Harmony Area UMC  
Helen M. Blier, Director of the Office of Continuing Education  
Barbara J. Blodgett, Associate Dean of Academic Programs and Assessment  
Catherine M. Brall, Director of Field Education  
Carrie Carter, Electronic Resources Librarian  
Jennifer Christmas, Associate Curator of the Kelso Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology  
Samantha Coggins, Alum  
Ron Cole-Turner, H. Parker Sharp Professor of Theology and Ethics  
Katie Conner, Student  
Lynn Corbett, Alum  
Carolyn Cranston, Director of Alumnae/i and Church Relations  
Jason Dauer, Student  
Erin M. Davenport, Director of the Miller Summer Youth Institute  
Donald Dawson, Retired Director of World Mission initiative  
Kerry Dowdy, Student  
James A. Durlusser, Visiting Professor of Doctor of Ministry Studies  
David Esterline, President and Professor of Cross-cultural Theological Education  
K. James Evans, PTS Board Member  
Tucker S. Ferda, Assistant Professor of New Testament  
Patrice Fowler-Searcy, PTS Board Member, Alum, Student, Mission Pastor at East Liberty PC  
Gary Glasser, Alum  
James Gockley, PTS Board Chair  
Suzanne Good, Alum, Commissioned Pastor of Bethel UPC, Hazelwood HOPE  
Andy Greenhow, Executive Assistant to the President and Secretary to the Board of Directors  
David Greusel, PTS Board Member  
Joan Haley, Former Metro-Urban Institute Fellows and Community Engagement Coordinator  
Angela Dienhart Hancock, Associate Professor of Homiletics and Worship  
Kathleen Hartzell, Student  
Linda Varrenti Hernandez, PTS Board Member  
Johnathon Hogan, Student  
Hallie Isadore, Database and Donor Services Specialist

Alan Irizarry-Graves Sr., Alum, PTS Board Member, Youth and College Pastor at New Hope Baptist Church Conway/North Little Rock, Ark.  
Ryan Jensema, Associate Director of Financial Aid  
David L. Keys, Website and Database Administrator  
S. Balajiedlang Khyllap, Associate Director of the World Mission Initiative  
James Kirk, Alum and Pastor of Valencia PC  
Sarah Knapp, Student  
Rebecca Konegen, Student  
Kurt Kusserow, PTS Board Member and Bishop of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA  
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Donald K. McKim, Alum and PTS Board Member  
Karen McMahan, Friend of the Seminary  
Robin Menard, Communications and Marketing Specialist  
Susan J. Meyer, Alum  
Megan Miles, Alum  
Colleen Molinaro, Alum and Pastor of Carnegie PC, Carnegie, Pa.  
Christin Moreland, Student  
Erin Morey, Student  
Kang Na, PTS Board Member  
Dominick Oliver, Director of Development  
Alan Olson, Alum and Pastor, First PC of Freehold, N.J.  
Mary O'Shan Overton, Director of the Center for Writing and Learning Support  
Ronald E. Peters, PTS Board Member and Founding Director of the Metro-Urban Institute and former Henry L. Hillman Professor of Urban Ministry  
Leigh Pogue, Student  
Joan Prentice, Alum, PTS Board Member, and Pastor/Director of The Ephesus Project  
Norma Prina Murphy, Alum  
Jeanette Rapp, Former PTS Director of Continuing Education and Special Events  
Tracy Riggle Young, Senior Director of Enrollment Services  
Karen Rohrer, Director of the Church Planting Initiative  
Rose Schrott, Student  
Cassandra Semler, Student  
John T. Shaver, Alum, PTS Board Member, and Pastor of San Dieguito UMC, Encinitas, Calif.  
John Shortridge, PTS Board Member  
Kendra Buckwalter Smith, Director of the Worship Program  
R. Drew Smith, Professor of Urban Ministry  
Joanne Spence, Alum, PTS Board Member, Director of Urban Oasis Pittsburgh  
Wesley Smith, Student  
Greg Spencer, PTS Board Member  
Melanie Sprenkel, Community Member  
Michelle Spomer, Donald G. Miller Librarian and Director of the Clifford E. Barbour Library  
Hunter Steinitz, Student  
Christopher J. Taylor, Admissions Counselor and Miller SYI Program Coordinator  
David Taylor, Friend of the Seminary  
Virginia Teitt, Pastor, Student, NWMC Director  
Ayana Teter, Director of Vocational Placement and Discernment  
Steven Tuell, James A. Kelso Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament  
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Lou Ventura, Alum and Pastor, Franklin PC, Va.  
Betty Voigt, Alum  
Shawn Weaver, Student and Pastor of Cheat Lake UMC  
Jeffrey Welch, Pastor of Dunnellon Presbyterian Church  
Victoria Wellstead, Student  
David Wirt, Student  
Kenneth J. Woo, Assistant Professor of Church History  
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Rebecca L. Young, Student  
Caitlin Zeiset, Student



\* FIRST AND LAST NAME:

TITLE:

**SUBMIT**

*\* required*

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