An Open Letter from the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Committee

June 9, 2020

To the Boston College Community:

For almost forty years the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Committee at Boston College has promoted the principles that Dr. King envisioned and for which he gave his life: an end to oppression and injustice wherever they exist, non-violence, and solidarity between all peoples in the pursuit of justice. As a diverse community representing BC faculty, staff, administrators, and students, we raise our voices together and join them to other voices on this campus and around this nation. We mourn and protest the centuries-old pattern of persecution and killing of Black men and women, a pattern most recently visible in the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, and Rayshard Brooks. We insist that Black lives, like all other lives, must be protected; as when other lives are lost, justice must be pursued when Black life is lost.

We applaud our President, Father William Leahy, SJ, and university leadership for inaugurating the Boston College Forum on Racial Justice. We echo the commitment from the Boston College community as a whole, and we reiterate our support and commitment to the undergraduate students of color whom we most directly serve. In solidarity with students, staff, and faculty, we support continued dialogue and reflection upon appropriate reform both locally and nationally.

We recognize the advantages and privileges that we have, as members of a prestigious institution whose religious identity necessitates the pursuit of racial justice, and whose platform as an R-1 university has the potential to massively empower this pursuit. As we apply our resources to the national inquiry, may we also discern where we ourselves, as individuals and as members of an institution, fall short. May we have the humility, courage, and creativity to discern and address systemic injustices that are woven within the fabric of our nation, wherever we may find them.

Dr. King himself exhorts us to fervently promote justice and love, here in his "Letter from A Birmingham Jail":

Was not Jesus an extremist for love: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream." Was not Paul an extremist ... Was not Martin Luther an extremist... And John Bunyan ...
And Abraham Lincoln... And Thomas Jefferson... So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love?

To paraphrase the end of the same paragraph, for our own situation: Perhaps the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists. We also realize that we might fail, just as many have failed before us. Nevertheless, we must try, guided by Dr. King's own faith:

I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.

Respectfully submitted,

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Committee

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