

Dear ACSI Community:

We have all been immersed in national race-related tension and dissension. NFL Hall of Fame Football Coach, Tony Dungy, a long-time friend and mentor, said it best, *“America is in a very sad place today. We have seen a man die senselessly, at the hands of the very people who are supposed to be protecting our citizens. What happened to George Floyd was inexcusable and it should never happen. Justice needs to be served ...”*

The video of George Floyd is painful to my soul, and the widespread violent protests sting my heart. Race-related issues and incidents are complex and require a multifaceted solution. ACSI believes that God’s Word addresses the racial, class, and cultural issues of our day. Regardless of one’s race or opinions, what we are currently experiencing calls for continued prayer, conversation, and a genuine pursuit of biblical reconciliation. It is a heart and internal character transformed by the power of God that enables a person to sincerely love deeply. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated:

“Nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a man, but you refuse to hate him.”

In his famous letter written from a Birmingham jail cell, Dr. King also wrote about the person *“... who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.”* Dr. King went on to say that, *“I have heard numerous southern religious leaders admonish their worshipers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers declare: ‘Follow this decree because integration is morally right and because the Negro is your brother.’”* King was right on this point and his quest for “positive peace” will always be a top priority for our ACSI community.

Christian schools cannot fit every cultural issue into their training, but civil rights, justice, and human dignity are topics that need the voice and thoughtful consideration of the Christian community. They transcend all other issues, as they speak to humanity, the sanctity of life, and foundational biblical principles. I want to remind the ACSI community of our longstanding dedication to biblically based diversity. Our primary focus of race-related issues will always revolve around the conviction of developing a biblical worldview for our ACSI staff, school leaders, faculty, students, and the parents we serve.

Over the last 20 years, under the leadership of Dr. Vernard Gant, ACSI’s focus on race-related issues facing our schools has been a priority. During this time, Dr. Gant has led robust discussions, planning, and training. Several months ago, long before our current national crisis, ACSI hired Jerry Nelson to join Dr. Gant with the specific assignment of elevating race relations, and all other aspects of diversity, throughout ACSI. We have also assembled key leaders among our staff, board, and heads of school to develop a multi-phase strategy and comprehensive plan to create depth in understanding and talking about race related issues from a biblical perspective. Our goal is to develop a biblical worldview—one not based on political party or ethnicity. The transcendent guideline for our thoughts, ideas, and opinions must filter through the Bible. Our responsibility is to lead, guide, **listen**, and challenge our students, parents, and all stakeholders to critically analyze political policy and ideology as Christ would. Our allegiance is to Christ and Him alone.

Even with a strong commitment to race and diversity-based unity, ACSI schools will not be immune from internal issues and incidents. Our goal is to remain steadfast in preparing Christian thinkers and advocates to be ambassadors of influence throughout all sectors of society. Developing depth in thinking and action is no easy task, but this is

precisely our objective. Dr. King states:

“Rarely do we find men who willingly engage in hard, solid thinking. There is an almost universal quest for easy answers and half-baked solutions. Nothing pains some people more than having to think.”

Dr. King modeled the power of civil dialogue. He said:

“Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue.”

Dialogue versus monologue—I believe Dr. King’s desire for dialogue is as relevant today as it was on April 16, 1963 when he wrote this letter. What conversations are parents having with their children regarding race relations? What discussions are schools having with their students and faculty? And is our dialogue filtered first through Scripture, or is it formed by personal opinions, or historical and cultural traditions? As an educator and father, I have grown to respect the importance of hearing different perspectives and wrestling with difficult topics and principles. We want to show our students that people can have civil “dialogue” on this very divisive issue, unlike the shallow noise on talk-radio or partisan-oriented TV news. What an opportunity we have in our educational efforts to take students to a deeper level—and we must. Dr. King stated:

“To save man from the morass of propaganda, in my opinion, is one of the chief aims of education. Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction.”

Maturation is a process, and part of the process is having conversations ... over and over. I wish it was as simple as some people think, that the only thing a school leader (or a parent, coach, or pastor) has to do is gather the students for a special chapel service, tell them what is right and wrong, and expect all of them to abide. We all know it is not that easy. We cannot alleviate all of the race-related issues in our community or in our nation, but we can try to make things better. We need to bring people together by creating dialogue.

I am motivated afresh to remain steadfast in my commitment to continue the essential conversations within my sphere of influence. I am encouraged by these conversations. I hope you are also emboldened. I pray that the powerful work of the Holy Spirit is transforming one mind/heart at a time and that the fruit of our labor will produce a great harvest that includes transformed hearts and an eternal/biblical perspective on race-related issues. I am hopeful that our young men and women will lead the way in bringing people together.

Long before Dr. King led marches, our Lord Jesus Christ marched. He marched up a hill carrying the cross he would be nailed to. Through His death and resurrection, He proclaimed a message of hope, forgiveness, salvation, and love. Let us prayerfully yield to God’s call, that for “such a time as this,” ACSI, and every Christian school, needs to step into this space and lead with courage, empathy, and conviction.

Larry Taylor, Ph.D.
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