

**Hamilton Student
Association Executive Team**

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

130 Essex Street, South-Hamilton, MA
Phone: 267.403.7532

July 14, 2021

► **Bishop Claude R. Alexander, Jr.**

Chairman of the Board of Trustees
For all the Members of the Board of Trustees

Call to Racial Accountability & Responsibility

“They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say when there was no peace.” - Jeremiah 6:14

Dear Board of Trustees,

Blake Phillips, Jessica Cheng, and I (Fatu Kanu) write to you today as the Student Association Executive Team, representing the student body at the Hamilton Campus, with the purpose of calling for Christ-like accountability and responsibility concerning how Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary handles racial matters on its Hamilton campus. This call is in keeping with Gordon-Conwell’s institutional mission to “think theologically, engage globally, and live biblically.”

As the nation’s heightened awareness of racial injustice continues since the tragic murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and with the exponentially increasing hateful and violent attacks against the Asian community, many students of color on our campus are still struggling with these national traumas but through their personal experiences. It is disheartening that not only are oppressive systems affecting students of color nationally, but many of these same systems are also affecting students here at Gordon-Conwell.

Yet, our Seminary provides no genuine initiative to help students cope with the traumatic effects of racism. There is no effective programming or facilitated conversations to help students engage with the ongoing cruel injustices in our nation and on our campus. Yes, there have been instances when administrators attempted to address these issues, but students of color consistently report that the administration failed to resolve their problems adequately. In most cases, the Seminary’s attempt to address microaggressions and racial injustices on campus added another hurtful incident to a student’s experiences at Gordon-Conwell.

These forms of toxicity occur to such a degree that many Black students have switched their degree program (i.e., Master's of Divinity track to shorter Master's of Arts track) in order to lessen their time in Gordon-Conwell Hamilton's racist environment. Additionally, students of color also move from the dorms to the apartments to minimize interaction with racist students and to avoid opportunities for abuse. Still, others resort to accepting off-campus jobs rather than work on campus. Unfortunately, rather than receiving support from the institution, students deal with on-campus racism unassisted by the administration. If students dare speak up or file a report, they are then ostracized and treated with the suspicion of being dangerous both by the administration and other racist students.

These incidents, alongside many others, represent the ongoing racial injustices and insensitivity that the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary administration continues to ignore. Black students, specifically African Americans, do not feel safe on campus. These students continue to have traumatizing experiences and pain inflicted upon them repeatedly by the administration, classroom lectures, and other students at Gordon-Conwell. Some of our students of Asian descent are so traumatized such that it affects the way they interact with people on campus. The current administration continues to oppress their students of color by severely undermining cases of racism on campus and failing to address the issue adequately. Likewise, similar situations continue to occur within the international student population and their families. Students are recruited globally yet often are excluded from many conversations both in and outside the classroom. We cannot be a loving, global, Christ-centered community of disciples when we fail to address the social injustices happening right at our front door. Our Christian faith advocates global disciples to address the unsolved and ignored social inequities. Thus far, Gordon-Conwell Hamilton has failed.

For example, during the past two years, the Black Student Association and Institute for the Study of the Black Christian Experience (ISBCE) have collectively provided two written statements to the administration expressing grievances and offering suggestions for implementing racial reconciliation. Unfortunately, the administration did little to nothing except establish the patronizing requirement for faculty members to list one book authored by a person of color in the course reading materials.

One student said, "it does seem to have gotten worse over the last several years." Indeed, it has gotten worse at the Hamilton campus. We went from having two full-time Black faculty (Dr. Patrick Smith and Dr. Emmett G. Price III) to having none. When a group of students in 2019 went to President Sunquist to express their concern regarding Dr. Emmett G. Price III's resignation as Dean of the Chapel, one Black male student summarized the interaction as simply being "yelled at" instead of being listened to or affirmed. Despite the efforts of the students, the administration now refuse to renew the contract of the only full-time Black faculty member at the Hamilton campus. Dr. Price served as a primary resource for support, mentorship, and spiritual direction to Hispanic, Black, White, and Asian students at the Hamilton Campus and other campuses. The administration's refusal to renew Dr. Price's

contract for Fall 2021 is a grievous disservice to the many students who have been crying out for better representation among staff and faculty of color at the Hamilton Campus. From the students' perspective, their treatment during that meeting in 2019 echoed the disrespect that Dr. Price endured under the administration of Dr. Jeffrey Arthurs and Dr. Scott Sunquist.

Likewise, the absence of Blacks and other people of color in key staff positions like the Dean of Students (Michelle Williams) and admissions (Tiffany Miller, Kenneth Young) is equally concerning with the departure of Dr. Price. So please, let us not be complacent and silent about the resulting impacts these changes have had on all students of color.

We are keenly aware that the structure of American institutions was fashioned, ensuring immense generational advantages for whites and disadvantages for Blacks and other people of color. As followers of Jesus Christ, leadership at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary should and can lead in the more important matters of justice, mercy, and faithfulness without neglecting the teaching of the word (Matthew 23:23). As a Christian institution, we *must* work toward being anti-racists and anti-hateful with systemic wickedness. If we do not intentionally and proactively initiate change on our campus, these injustices will endure. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary must not keep ignoring the cries of students for racial justice on campus—from the curriculum design to faculty representation and treatment of Blacks, Asians, and other students of color. Indeed, “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 17:15).

Therefore, today, the Student Association Executive Team calls on the Board of Trustees to hold Dr. Scott Sunquist and the rest of the administration at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary accountable and responsible for advocating for racial justice and reconciliation at the Hamilton Campus. The Gospel of Jesus Christ calls us into the multi-racial family of God that exhibits love and value for each member of the Body (Matthew 12:50, Genesis 1:27), of which we are all members (1 Corinthians 12:12). In his life, ministry, death, and resurrection, Christ calls His followers to collectively embody cross-cultural solidarity and advocacy for the oppressed, the prisoners, the marginalized, and the captives (Isaiah 61:1-3, Luke 13:30, Philippians 2:1-8).

As we are sure you agree, having intellectual discussions alone will not solve the problem of racial injustices, biases, and other hate-filled acts on our campus. Instead, we must walk the talk by embodying what we speak through Christ's light as a Christian community. This is true whether communicating online, marketing to prospective students or financial donors, interacting with the community at large, or during face-to-face exchanges on our campus.

Our Student Association Executive Team is praying for the vision of Revelation 7, where all cultures are united in a loving community of worship of Jesus Christ. Further, we hope for a campus environment where: Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and other persons of color are also heard and represented; all students feel safe and belong; course materials are not dominated by

one culture; students are trained in the history of racial injustices in the American Church and how to tackle these issues for a better society to the delight of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

We are also committed to working with the administration and Board of Trustees to ensure and hold the administration accountable in cultivating a loving, global, Christ-centered community on campus. Racism, prejudice, and bias are, in truth, matters of the heart. Yet, we serve a loving Savior whose blood can crush these social ills when we yield to Him. Therefore, these issues must not be ignored but responsibly addressed by our institution's leaders. When they are, all members of our community can thrive and flourish.

To that end, below are ways we recommend Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Hamilton embody Revelation 7 as it pertains to racial injustices. Likewise, Blake, Jessica, and I would like to meet with the Trustees of Student Affairs to collaborate and pray into this matter. Thank you for taking the time to read and respond to this communication.

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In order to ensure that the evils of racism are lessened at the Hamilton campus, we ask that the following actions be taken:

1. Hire a professional with a proven track record honoring inclusivity as Head of Diversity and Inclusion at the Hamilton Campus. This person must share in the decision-making process of the Seminary to influence priorities and offer meaningful oversight on behalf of Black students, faculty, staff, and other students of color.
2. Proactively express steadfast support for students at every opportunity while also denouncing all acts of hate targeting students of color, and commitments must go beyond expressing discontentment. The Office of the President, Chairman of the Board, and Dean of Students must publicly and emphatically denounce all racism, hate, and discrimination after each incident.
3. Respond to the trauma experienced by Asians, Blacks, and other students of color on campus by offering group counseling with a counselor of color. We recognize that the need for professional assistance increases with every hate-filled act on campus and off.
4. Implement an institution-wide hate and bias incident reporting system with safeguards for victims and transparent methods for addressing all reports effectively, including disseminating data from incidents for analysis, policy improvements, and prevention (led by the Head of Diversity and Inclusion).
5. Incentivize departments, centers, and faculty to form curriculum and research that are racially, ethnically, and gender diverse.
6. Enlist a third-party consultation and training organization geared toward racial reconciliation by investing in Arrabon's Reconciling Community Transformational Journey. From past conversations with fellow students, promises from within are often not consistently honored.
7. Host once a year mandatory antiracism workshops and teach-ins for department faculty, Seminary staff, and students led by experts in their respective disciplines.
8. Ensure an increase in open positions to be filled by qualified applicants of a diverse cultural/racial background.
9. Increase the representation of Black students in faculty and other key positions on campus by immediately reinstating Dr. Emmett Price III as a full-time faculty, if he is agreeable. Our changing demographics of the student body must be met with

corresponding shifts in the makeup of faculty, staff, and cabinet employees. If Dr. Price no longer wants the position, a full-time Black faculty must be hired immediately to start in the Fall Semester.

10. Expand the core curriculum to provide the opportunity for students to be fully educated on matters of race and reconciliation by making Dr. Price's Project of Reconciliation an option for fulfilling a core requirement of all degree programs at GCTS, including MDiv, MA, and MACO degrees
11. Lower tuition fees and create sliding-scale tuition structures for students of color.