

Dear Members of the Lawrence Community,

Like many of us, I am deeply troubled by the events of this past summer. So much violence and so many lives lost, both here in the United States and abroad, that underlined society's conflicts about race, sexual orientation, and religion. Each week seemed to bring more tragedy, more sources of division in the world at large. Even more concerning to me was the lack of real discussion and progress toward solutions for the issues that troubled us in the United States. In many ways the presidential election and its coverage by the media seem to be exacerbating this situation rather than providing us with opportunities to discuss these issues and find common ground.

At a memorial service in Dallas, President Obama said: "I know that Americans are struggling right now with what we've witnessed over the past week. All of it has left us wounded, and angry, and hurt. It's as if the deepest fault lines of our democracy have suddenly been exposed, perhaps even widened. And although we know that such divisions are not new—though they have surely been worse in even the recent past—that offers us little comfort."

Many of us now return to campus carrying the pain of these events. Even here, the past year was marked by slights and insults posted on social media and shared in discussion on campus. As a liberal arts college, one of our core beliefs is addressing the complex issues that face society today through thoughtful discussion and careful research of all points of view. We, as a community, must find ways to work against the stream of outside events, to create a learning community here that is a hallmark of the Lawrence experience. I ask each of us to join in reaffirming our core principles.

As former President George W. Bush said at the Dallas memorial, "Too often, we judge other groups by their worst examples, while judging ourselves by our best intentions. And this has strained our bonds of understanding and common purpose. But Americans, I think, have a great advantage. To renew our unity, we only need to remember our values. We have never been held together by blood or background. We are bound by things of the spirit, by shared commitments to common ideals. At our best, we practice empathy, imagining ourselves in the lives and circumstances of others. This is the bridge across our nation's deepest divisions."

We at Lawrence believe that difference makes us stronger as a community; difference provides us opportunities to learn and to grow. As we begin this academic year, I ask you to think of the words and intent of President Obama and former President Bush. We can and should choose another path as a campus community here at Lawrence. Whatever our individual political and social viewpoint, racial, ethnic or gender identities, sexual orientation, or religious creed, we must uphold Lawrence's commitment to maintaining a learning community that welcomes and supports us all. That fosters civil discourse.

We have put in place a number of initiatives this fall in support of this aim, and I want to thank all of you who have worked hard to make this possible. Dean Lauderdale will launch Lawrence's version of [Sustained Dialogue](#) a national program focused on training students, faculty, and staff to be effective small group discussion leaders and to engage in meaningful dialogue about

relevant and sometimes difficult topics. Sustained Dialogue professionals will begin training on the Lawrence campus October 21.

The Curriculum Committee will continue to rewrite the university's statement on academic freedom. This important work will help us to see more clearly how the classroom, the studio, and the laboratory can foster open and challenging conversation, intellectual engagement, and enhance mutual understanding. Many new courses this year will explore the issue of difference and hopefully give us a chance to practice the art of civil discourse and develop the skills of collective problem solving that seem to be so necessary now.

I know this has been a trying time for many of us personally. I urge all of us to show compassion for one another as we process the latest tragedies and developments in our own ways. I encourage you to prioritize your own well-being and that of fellow community members. The university resources listed below stand ready to help you process these events and help determine your own personal response.

This coming week we welcome over 400 new students and more than a dozen new faculty and staff to our campus. Let us encourage constructive discourse throughout our community. Let us reject violence, whether physical or rhetorical. Together we can create the considerate, respectful, caring environment that makes us proud to call this place home.

I look forward to seeing you on campus in the coming weeks.

Yours,

Mark

Mark Burstein
President, Lawrence University

University Resources:

Health and Wellness Center - for health, counseling and wellness:
<http://www.lawrence.edu/students/wellness> or 920-832-6574

Employee Assistance Program for staff and faculty: For more information, contact ASSIST EAP at 1-800-222-8590 and identify yourself as a participant of Lawrence University's ASSIST EAP, or log on to [AssistERC](#).

Diversity Center: stop by first floor of Memorial Hall or contact Pa Lee Moua, Associate Dean of Students for Diversity at palee.moua@lawrence.edu or 920-832-7030 or Chris Vue, Diversity Center Coordinator at chris.n.vue@lawrence.edu or 920-832-6695

Curt Lauderdale, Dean of Students
Contact Curt at: curt.lauderdale@lawrence.edu or 920-832-6596

Kimberly Barrett, Vice President for Diversity & Inclusion and Associate Dean of the Faculty
Contact Kimberly at: kimberly.a.barrett@lawrence.edu or 920-832-7451

Rev. Linda Morgan-Clement, Julie Esch Hurvis Dean of Spiritual and Religious Life
Contact Linda at: linda.morgan-clement@lawrence.edu or 920-832-6673

Rochelle Blindauer, Director of Human Resources
Contact Rochelle at: rochelle.l.blindauer@lawrence.edu or 920-832-6541