

March 8, 2018

Thursday of the 3rd Week in Lent

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

I am deeply sorry and saddened by the events that have unfolded at United Lutheran Seminary ever since it came to light that its president, the Rev. Dr. Theresa Latini, was highly involved in an organization called OneByOne that believes same-sex relationships are sinful and advocated “reparative therapy” for LGBTQIA+ people.

As a ULS board member, I sincerely apologize for how this information was mishandled. I apologize for the pain it has caused our LGBTQIA+ brothers and sisters, as well as the confusion and mistrust it has generated for our seminary and its leaders. I apologize for my participation in the board’s actions that have caused so much harm.

Dr. Latini participated in OneByOne many years ago as a young college student. Although she has long since not only repudiated OneByOne and its mission, but also gone on to become an outspoken advocate for the rights of LGBTQIA+ people, this revelation has caused enormous pain and suffering to LGBTQIA+ people of the seminary and our church.

Reasonably, they question – if Dr. Latini had experienced a true change of heart that is readily apparent in her later actions – why then was her involvement with OneByOne not disclosed up front? Understandably, their questioning has caused them to mistrust the motives and transparency of Dr. Latini and the ULS Board of Trustees.

Over the last week, I and other ULS board members have listened to our LGBTQIA+ brothers and sisters as they relayed stories of their pain, isolation and struggle for identity and dignity in a cultural that is often antagonistic toward and dismissive of them. Many spoke of the cruel violence to mind, spirit and body that “reparative therapy” has done to them and their loved ones. It has left many scarred and damaged.

I join my voice with others in our church to condemn “reparative therapy.” I join them in proudly loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters as wonderfully created people of God. This position is not a new one for me or for our synod. In 2016, the Lower Susquehanna Synod became a Reconciling in Christ Synod, which underscores our commitment to all people. As a Reconciling in Christ synod, our welcome statement declares:

We welcome with full participation and inclusion all who are seeking God’s love and grace. We welcome all because God welcomes all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, or relationship status. We welcome all without regard to addictions, physical or mental health, imprisonment, socio-economic circumstances or anything that too often divides us. Our unity is in Jesus Christ.

I and other members of the ULS Board of Trustees have been working hard to listen with an open mind and heart to the stories and perspectives of all the seminary stakeholders, including our LGBTQIA+ brothers and sisters. The board is meeting March 14 to decide on a course of action and the future of leadership for the seminary. Meanwhile, the board has released an official apology (read it [here](#)).

As the seminary moves through this time of turmoil and pain, I pray that God will guide the ULS leadership and community to greater understanding. I pray that God will help us become a truly safe place for all and that we may continue our mission of training leaders to serve God's people.

Dr. Latini's story, though late in coming, is a story of redemption and new life. It is my hope that this, too, is the story of the United Lutheran Seminary. The formation of this new school is an opportunity for new life on the Gettysburg and Philadelphia campuses. We are a people whose story is centered in the death and resurrection. I am prayerful that out of these painful and difficult events will come new life.

I invite everyone in our synod and in the ULS community to join me prayer for God's light and guidance for healing, trust, wisdom, and compassion as we work through this current crisis.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James S. Dunlop". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

†James S. Dunlop, bishop
Lower Susquehanna Synod, ELCA
www.lss-elca.org
717-652-1852