August 12, 2020

Dear Linfield community,

I hope by now you have seen the message from the Executive Committee of the Board regarding recent allegations of misconduct by two current trustees.

I’m writing to inform you that I am one of the trustees accused of inappropriate behavior. The process has been a learning experience for me, and I’ll share my thoughts about it below.

But first, I believe it’s important to put this – and recent events on campus – in some perspective.

I came here two years ago with a mandate to bring sweeping change and an expertise in organizational management to Linfield. It has been eventful, to say the least.

Last year, we had to make some personnel cuts to ensure our survival as an institution. This year, we are weathering an unprecedented pandemic and engaging in a national conversation about systemic racism – all amid a much-needed discussion about power dynamics, gender equality and workplace harassment. At Linfield, we are rewriting our bylaws to better reflect the realities of a modern university, a process that has caused great concern among some of our liberal-arts faculty members.

Moreover, Linfield has been tarnished by the case of a former trustee who has been charged with sexual assault. With a jury trial expected, we will no doubt hear more about that case in the months ahead.

All of this has kept our university community on edge. It has led to hurt feelings, anxiety and a great deal of misunderstanding. It also has made some of us wary about each other, which I have learned first-hand.

I was told in early March of a complaint submitted to Linfield’s Office of Human Resources that I had touched a faculty member on the shoulders while remarking that I looked forward to a scheduled meeting the next day.

The complaint came as a complete shock to me. I readily agreed to fully cooperate.

A trained independent employment attorney was retained to conduct a thorough investigation and to interview the complainant, me and other witnesses. After reviewing all of the evidence, the investigator concluded that no Linfield policies were violated and no misconduct had occurred. The outside investigator reached the same conclusion about a similar allegation made by the faculty member against a second trustee.

I apologize for causing discomfort to this faculty member. I harbor no ill will against my accuser. I am in a position of power. Aside from handshakes, I pledge to you that I will seek consent before touching anyone, no matter my intent.

I also was accused by a faculty member of making anti-Semitic and inappropriate religious comments, which I deny in the strongest terms possible. These claims of bias on my part are fictitious, and were thoroughly investigated. I will not dignify the allegations by discussing them further.
Sadly, this controversy is partly an outgrowth of the lack of trust that has developed between some members of the faculty and the administration. Change is difficult, but the Board of Trustees, the administration and not an insignificant amount of faculty believe fervently that the changes taking place now will make Linfield a better university for our most important constituents – our students.

I am sorry that our community has had to endure this painful year. What matters now is bringing the community back together, having deep and honest conversations about what we can do better, and working together to be the kind of institution we all want to be associated with.

I promise that I will continue to do my best to see everyone’s perspective and understand the anxiety that change brings. And I ask everyone else to do the same.

A final note: On a recent afternoon, I drove out to Erratic Rock State Natural Site, just outside McMinnville. For those of you who haven’t been, the central feature of the park is a 90-ton “erratic,” a glacial rock that floated more than 500 miles in an Ice Age flood before sinking here in Yamhill County. The view from the rock is stunning.

Laying there, on this stone that had weathered centuries of wind, rain and sun, I pondered the tectonic shifts happening at Linfield. I came to realize the troubles of one person, or even a 162-year-old institution, don’t amount to much in geologic time. What matters is how we treat each other here and now, and how we make peace with our lives in whatever way makes sense to us.

As we start a new school year, I vow that I will give my all to Linfield and the people of our community. Thank you to everyone for weathering this tumultuous time.

Be well; be blessed.

Miles K. Davis, Ph. D.