

February 11, 2021

Dear SPU Board of Trustees:

Please find the attached Letter of Lament written by faculty and staff at SPU to be shared at the February board meeting. We ask that each board member prayerfully read our laments and seek to understand the stories and lived experiences that they represent. This Letter of Lament was conceived in Winter 2021 and has been written thoughtfully, respectfully, and prayerfully.

We lament because Scripture teaches us that lament is faith seeking understanding, a means of voicing our cries to God. It is a form of worship, transformational for the believer and essential for the journey of reconciliation.

We understand that the Board of Trustees is composed of individuals with varying perspectives and has been entrusted with a unique role in guiding this university. We also believe that the Board cares about the wellbeing of each community member, as well as the flourishing of this beloved institution. Therefore, we feel compelled to share with you the deep impact on our community resulting from SPU's public statements and policies regarding human sexuality. In sharing this, we seek to build bridges of understanding, shared pain, and healing, as well as to advocate for silenced voices and effect change in SPU's written policy and institutional practices regarding human sexuality.

Because we are faithfully seeking reconciliation, we prayerfully submit this Letter of Lament.

Please Note: The use of LGBTQIA+ in the attached letter stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Agender, +. More specific information about these terms and others can be found at <https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary>.

A Letter of Lament

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We believe that the SPU Board of Trustees cares about the emotional pain of every person affiliated with our university, and deeply desires our community to be a place of care and safety for all members, including LGBTQIA+ people and their families. Therefore, we ask that you join us in lamenting the emotional pain of LGBTQIA+ people, their families, and their allies, within the SPU community.

- ❖ **We lament** that SPU has chosen not to provide a fully welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ students, faculty, and staff.
- ❖ **We lament** for all of SPU's LGBTQIA+ students, faculty, staff, and alumni who have felt silenced, isolated, and judged. We also lament for the families that care for them and share their pain.
- ❖ **We lament** that many LGBTQIA+ Christians need to hide a part of themselves, in order to feel they are loved by God and embraced by our community.
- ❖ **We lament** that LGBTQIA+ students do not always have a safe space to process their sexuality and gender in the context of their Christian faith, and may even set aside their faith, because SPU is falling short of its commitment to care for and nurture them.
- ❖ **We lament** that those in the LGBTQIA+ community, who are also people of color, must navigate the cumulative and intersecting layers of discrimination and harm.
- ❖ **We lament** that SPU's institutional hiring practices, behavior towards affirming student groups, and Statement of Human Sexuality have effectively denied community members their equal rights and dignity.
- ❖ **We lament** the rhetoric and behaviors on campus that perpetuate LGBTQIA+ stigma, which can cause serious psychological harm for sexual orientation and gender minority people.
- ❖ **We lament** that LGBTQIA+ people are pushed to the margins of many Christian faith communities, and often experience mental health concerns resulting from marginalization, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and suicide.
- ❖ **We lament** the complicit role that faith communities have had in suggesting that LGBTQIA+ people should try to change their sexual orientation, despite substantial evidence that so-called "reparative" or "conversion" therapies are unlikely to succeed and may result in harm.

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We believe that the SPU Board of Trustees desires that our university community be genuinely ecumenical, rich in Christian theological diversity, and a welcoming place for each of God's blessed children. Therefore, we ask that you join us in lamenting that diversity has been stifled in our community and that SPU has not felt welcoming to the LGBTQIA+ community.

- ❖ ***We lament** the feeling of exclusion caused when SPU talks about diversity and inclusion, but does not act in accordance when it comes to the LGBTQIA+ community.*
- ❖ ***We lament** that while Christians around the world have a wide spectrum of beliefs around human sexuality, SPU upholds one singular perspective as correct.*
- ❖ ***We lament** the missed opportunities to serve our vibrant local LGBTQIA+ community and its members lovingly and with affirmation, due to SPU's exclusionary institutional language and policies.*
- ❖ ***We lament** that our LGBTQIA+ students are not given the same opportunity to learn and receive care from faculty and staff who share a similar identity and lived experience.*
- ❖ ***We lament** that students from gender and sexual minority groups, especially those who are questioning or newly engaging with their sexual orientation, do not have access to "out" LGBTQIA+ faculty and staff role models on campus.*
- ❖ ***We lament** that as a Christian university, our ministry to students is inhibited by past and present policies discriminating against our LGBTQIA+ students, staff, and faculty.*
- ❖ ***We lament** for each of our friends that have left SPU, or otherwise decided not to be a part of the SPU community, because they or their friends and family members did not feel fully included in our community.*

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We believe that the SPU Board of Trustees wants to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and to the Spirit's work at our university and in our community. Therefore, we ask that you join us in lamenting the ways the Spirit has been stayed at our university and in our community.

- ❖ ***We lament** that SPU has not protected the vulnerable and oppressed.*
- ❖ ***We lament** a historic lack of opportunity for discernment as a Christian university.*
- ❖ ***We lament** for a university learning community that is divided, yet continues to curb open discussion regarding human sexuality, and in so doing does not realize our potential to better know and love God and each other in our diversity.*
- ❖ ***We lament** that non-believing friends do not consider the Christian faith, because of SPU's discriminating and unloving stance regarding the LGBTQIA+ community.*

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We believe that the SPU Board of Trustees envisions a bright future for SPU. We also believe that this bright future depends on the gifts and excellence brought to our community by a diverse student body and an empowered team of faculty and staff committed to preparing students to engage the culture and change the world. Therefore, we ask that you join us in lamenting the ways that SPU's current written policy and institutional practices regarding human sexuality do not contribute to the bright future that we share for our beloved institution.

- ❖ ***We lament** the loss of experiencing the fullness of God's kingdom and creation due to the exclusion of LGBTQIA+ members of the Body of Christ from SPU employment.*
- ❖ ***We lament** the tremendous loss of talent when people are denied using their God-given gifts for the benefit of SPU, because of their gender identity or sexual orientation.*
- ❖ ***We lament** the unseen costs to SPU, as reflected in empirical literature demonstrating that workplaces that have adopted LGBTQIA+-supportive policies have also benefited from improved health among those employees, as well as greater job commitment, job satisfaction, and productivity.*
- ❖ ***We lament** the challenge of recruiting and retaining faculty and staff who hold affirming viewpoints, therefore reducing institutional effectiveness, representation, and innovation.*
- ❖ ***We lament** the loss of excellence brought to campus by a diverse student body, when SPU's discriminatory language and policies make it difficult to attract and retain thoughtful, gifted, and motivated students.*
- ❖ ***We lament** the loss of opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to partner with innovative, global, and local companies and organizations that choose not to be associated with SPU because of the current LGBTQIA+ discriminatory policies and statements.*
- ❖ ***We lament** that allies of the LGBTQIA+ community are forced to go against deeply held values and beliefs in order to keep a job and support their families.*
- ❖ ***We lament** the disappointment and frustration of so many in the alumni community who have long hoped for change, who cannot stand in full solidarity with their alma mater.*

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Because true lament seeks action, we ask that the Board of Trustees implement the following requests, effective immediately.

- ❖ ***We request** that the Board of Trustees respond to this letter and our requests, by way of an official statement to the SPU Community.*
- ❖ ***We request** that the Board of Trustees remove the Statement on Human Sexuality from use and publication.*
- ❖ ***We request** that the Board of Trustees end the current limits on employment, as they relate to human sexuality.*
- ❖ ***We request** that the Board of Trustees amend SPU's non-discrimination language to include the protection of employment on the basis of gender identity, sexual orientation, and marital status.*
- ❖ ***We request** that the Board of Trustees develop and begin a process of reconciliation where our community can adequately grieve, be heard, repent, and begin the on-going process of healing this wound and engaging with this important aspect of human flourishing.*

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Because we love Jesus, the Bible, and LGBTQIA+ individuals impacted by Seattle Pacific University, we prayerfully sign this Letter of Lament on behalf of all those who are hurting in our community.

Sincerely,

Signatures of Support

As of 3pm on Friday, February 19th, we have received 1,256 signatures of support from those in the SPU wishing to add their voices to this lament. This support came from over 741 alumni, 39 donors, 356 current students, 117 faculty, and 135 staff. Former faculty, former staff, and other members of the community such as parents, community partners, and students who left SPU before finishing their degree have also added their voices to this lament.

Signatures Redacted