

Date: February 24, 2021

To: Seattle Pacific University Board of Trustees

From: The Theology Student Union at Seattle Pacific University

I am a theology major at SPU. When I tell people this, though, I am aware of the ways that theology has been used to hurt others, particularly my LGBTQ+ sisters, brothers, and siblings in Christ. So when I tell people, “I’m a theology major,” I want to make it clear where I stand; that I don’t stand by the theology that tells people they need to change who they are in order to be loved by God. Rather, I want to make clear that I am a theology major who is affirming of all LGBTQ+ persons. I am a theology major who is inspired by God’s justice throughout Scripture, and I look to participate in God’s justice today. Theology is controversial, and though I believe there is room for theological differences, I will not stand for the weaponization of Scripture against my friends, peers, and neighbors. As a theology major at SPU, I don’t feel represented by the harmful and hurtful theology that is used in our hiring practices, and quite frankly, I don’t understand why our hiring practices are so discriminatory. As a theology major, I feel a sense of responsibility to urge you, the Board of Trustees, to choose to remedy our hurtful hiring practices, so that we can move towards a more healing and holistic theology together.

I am a theology major, but I also care about my LGBTQ+ community. On the day that the news about the lawsuit broke out, I remember seeing so many people hurting in my community (many of whom I do not interact with often). As a Theology major here at SPU, I have learned about the importance of Christian community: where communities of believers are called to love and support each other in worship to God. However, in this time, I am seeing a community that God has created hurting because of the selfish decisions being made by dehumanizing policies. As a theology major, I see the need for justice and restoration that God provides. As an individual who is called by God, I accept my duty to love the people in my community as my act of obedience and worship to God, regardless if I personally agree with their personal beliefs or actions. As a theology major, I see the need for loving communities to heal and bring love to our brokenness in our community: a need that must start from the institutional level. It’s time for SPU to show God’s love and healing for all of His people in our community by becoming a place of healing and acceptance: to demonstrate that all are welcomed and accepted by God here at SPU.

I am a theology major at SPU*. When asked what and where I study, I am aware that how I answer carries connotations, both good and bad, wanted and unwanted. Among these unwanted connotations is the dissonance between my theological education and experience in the classroom at SPU, and the way the university fails to embody those same theological groundings in practice, specifically regarding human sexuality. To sit in classes and community with fellow theologians and speak of love, acceptance, and inclusion, all the while within the same university

there is a statement of blatant exclusion for LGBTQ+ persons, our brothers and sisters in Christ. To spend class after class, time after time, and conversation after conversation with professors and peers learning what it means to engage, read, interpret, and use Scripture faithfully, all the while within the same university Scripture is still being weaponized for particular agendas outside of the good news. To learn about what it means to discern and live into missional, direct, and general callings, all the while in that same university context it has been made clear that not everyone has the opportunity to do so here. This dissonance is stark, loud, and needs to change. I am not ashamed to say I study theology, but as of the way policy is written right now, I am ashamed to say I do so within the context of SPU. I urge you, Board of Trustees, heed this dissonance, and get rid of any statement on human sexuality.

I am a theology major at SPU. But when I tell people that I am studying theology alongside a social justice degree, I am often faced with nothing but blank stares, for people outside of this community cannot imagine that somebody studying the Christian faith would also be passionate about justice. But how is it that a degree based in equality and liberation is thought to be incompatible with a God who calls us to fight for both? It is because of contradictions like the statement on human sexuality. For too long, Christians have defined themselves by the things they stand against, and Christian universities have upheld this rhetoric by putting up boundaries instead of tearing down walls. What would happen if this university chose to stand for something? To stand for love, acceptance and inclusion for all. To stand for those who have been hurt by political agendas and the weaponization of scripture. To stand for the LGBTQ+ community, who are perfectly and undoubtedly made in the beautiful image of God. As the Board of Trustees, this is your chance to stand for something; to stand for a university that upholds the true principles of love and justice in the Christian life instead of one built on the exclusion and hatred of bad doctrine. I am a theology major who is passionate about justice because I am a Christian, not despite it, and it is a shame on us all that I even have to explain that.

I am a theology major at SPU, and I am a queer individual. These are not opposing statements, and they are not treated as opposing within the school of Theology. Unfortunately, SPU's statement on human sexuality suggests they should be. The SPU school of theology is one of few places where I have been invited to accept my identity. Before I was affirming of myself, I had professors and peers clearly advocating for a place for people like me in Christian communities. I have experienced rejection from many Christian communities because I am queer, and it breaks my heart that the place who has accepted me can only do so with limitations. I am told I bear the image of God as a human, but according to the statement on human sexuality, the image of God in people like me is not considered worthy enough for positions of leadership. I am worthy enough to be trained as a theologian, but not worthy enough to share my training. My theology has shifted during my time at SPU to be less concerned with the blurry lines of personal morality, and more concerned with the love that is manifested through justice. The theology I have learned at SPU is not represented in policy.

Signatures

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leaders will accept it to get your signature added. Please feel free to contact
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