

# Everyone loses when diversity initiatives are diminished

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**W**e have watched with growing alarm as the federal attack on diversity, equity and inclusion has begun to impact our neighboring institutions of learning in Charleston. In recent weeks, for example, the College of Charleston Board of Trustees made the decision to preemptively terminate the race, equity and inclusion requirement for its students.

As a result, all courses for the fall semester that were framed with race, equity and inclusion content were canceled. All College of Charleston programming that has requirements based on race, equity or inclusion principles such as the Pride Center or the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs have

either been shut down or subsumed by other departments.

At the same time, the Charleston County School District decided to eliminate its office of cultural competency.

These decisions are being defended as efforts to comply with new interpretations of federal law suggesting that offering any programming



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for a minority group is discriminatory for the majority of the population. As area faith leaders, we could not disagree more.

Our three congregations, St. Stephen's, St. Mark's and Historic Calvary Episco-

pal churches, have a shared commitment to serving historically marginalized populations, be they African American or members of the LGBTQIA community. We are mindful, therefore, of the ways in which our country's history of racism, white supremacy, homophobia and even ableism continues to advantage some over and above others in our society.

These advantages extend not just to opportunities for social advancement but also to equitable access to resources and impact the ways our collective history in Charleston gets

told. The very existence of DEI initiatives is meant to tackle these corrosive effects on our entire community.

They exist as an acknowledgement that we are still far away from a city or country where the kind of "beloved

community" that Martin Luther King Jr. once envisioned becomes a practical reality for the whole human family. How do principles of diversity, equity and inclusion possibly diminish a community and institution like the College of Charleston, which publishes a stated purpose of commitment "to developing ethically centered, intellectually versatile and globally fluent citizens who create innovative solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges"? An institution that says its core purpose "is to pursue and share knowledge through study, inquiry and creation in order to empower the individual and enrich society"?

We believe deeply that all human beings have inherent worth and dignity as beloved children of God. Every life is precious and sacred. All souls are deserving of feeling safe and should be allowed to grow fully into whoever God has made them to be.

We also believe that discrimination anywhere is discrimination everywhere. We believe, therefore, that we are all diminished — we all lose — when diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives are diminished, degraded or done away with at any level of society.

Let's be clear. Attacks on DEI impact all of us, not just minorities. These decisions affect the programming and coursework our young people have opportunities to take, and they impact scholarship assistance, teaching and research grants, and efforts to improve public health. They may even impact the degree to which professors or other classroom instructors can share truthfully and completely the full depth and breadth of their assigned subject matter. If so, all students are detrimentally impacted and their educational experience diminished.

As faith leaders and partners in ministry, we urge

local decision makers to reconsider moves made out of fear and intimidation that disenfranchise some and diminish all. We call our fellow community members in Charleston to join with us, and so many others of faith and goodwill, in raising these concerns for the sake of the common good.

Let us all find ways to stand up for the inherent worth and dignity of every human being and especially our city's young people. It's what we believe God calls us to do and how we continue to form a more perfect union.

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