A CALL FOR CONSENSUS
Unionization and Our Community

Spring is a very special time at Saint Martin’s, especially as so many members of our community prepare for our 11th Annual Dragon Boat Festival on April 30. We are humbled by the shared pride, passion, and coordinated work of the teams of diverse paddlers and as well as by the efforts of the many faculty, staff and students who work together to make this day a celebration of community. We are also reminded that in so many ways this extraordinary event symbolizes what makes Saint Martin’s so unique. We reflect especially on the teamwork of the dragon boaters and how each team, through collegial, compassionate collaboration and communication, works through adversity to power their boats. This is in contrast to the campaign by the labor union attempting to disrupt a key component of Saint Martin’s by unionizing your faculty. The university’s leadership, including our governing Board of Trustees, does not support such an effort and wants you and our entire community to understand why.

While we deeply respect and value every faculty member, unionization is incompatible with our values, which constitute a collective responsibility to serve each constituent, starting with you, our students. As a small university that values personal interaction and collaboration, our current model of shared governance and direct communication among faculty, students, staff, and the community promotes meaningful discussion and debate, often resulting in the goal of consensus. This should continue because this direct participation affords equality to each member of our community.

To be clear, your university’s leadership is not anti-labor or insensitive to the needs of working men and women. The issue is not the concept of organized labor, but whether a labor union is appropriate here, on a campus defined by our Benedictine commitment to listen to every voice. We believe that change to a union model would be antithetical to our belief system as well as our educational model. It would only serve to add layers of bureaucracy (and associated costs) to the decision-making process regarding faculty affairs, reduce operational flexibility, and compromise our ability to support academic excellence.

As you know, Saint Martin’s is founded on the tenets of the Rule of St. Benedict and the community described in that text is what we strive for every day. Is ours a perfect process? No. We can and strive to do better every day. But the processes we have put in place are designed to foster a deep strong respect and understanding for one another and the work that we each undertake in contributing to our university’s success.

As a community with shared values and aspirations, let us continue this conversation, not stifle it. While we are now seeing some strained conversations because of the polarizing tone taken by the campaign rhetoric, we will continue to engage in direct, fact-based, and respectful dialogue. Consistent with our mission, and in the spirit of transparency and inclusive decision-making, we will do all we can to enable each of our faculty and staff to formulate independent opinions and make informed choices. And we will continue to work on important issues, including compensation, which we have identified together as a firm priority in our new strategic plan. We make these efforts because we value our faculty and staff and prize their dedication to you, our students.
For more information on unionization efforts at Saint Martin’s, visit https://www.stmartin.edu/faculty-and-staff/saint-martins-university-and-unionization-efforts.

As always, we will be available to intently listen and act in the best interest of every member of our unique community.

Abbot Neal Roth, O.S.B.
Chancellor

Roy Heynderickx, Ph.D.
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