

Thursday July 8, 2021

An Open Letter to the Leadership of Gordon Conwell Theological School

We write with hope that in this unjust world, a still more excellent way is possible (1 Corinthians 12:31). As Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary's President Rev. Dr. Scott W. Sunquist wrote on April 29, 2021, "[When the world asks, "Is there any hope? Where is God?" we should be able to point to the Church."](#)

We write with our concerns about Gordon Conwell's actions against a dear colleague and critical institution. We have heard the news of the firing of the [Rev. Dr. Emmett Price III](#) from full professorship and the restructuring of the [Institute for the Study of the Black Christian Experience](#). We receive this news with confusion, anger, and a sense of betrayal.

We write and sign this letter as Church leaders and academics. Some of us write as Black leaders who have worked within predominantly white institutions that have again and again struggled to truly partner and share power with Black leadership. We write as Church leaders of all backgrounds advocating for justice in public institutions, yet heartsick that we cannot find such justice in the Church. We write as local church pastors who must counsel our people about where they can reliably go to seminary, where their experience as Black Christians will be taken as authentic and legitimate experiences of the embodied life of faith. How can we do this when Gordon Conwell's actions communicate a devaluing of Black life and leadership?

The relationship between white evangelical Christians and Black Christians is at a tense crossroads after exceptionally painful years. Demoting [one of Gordon Conwell's very few Black full faculty members](#) is offensive. [Gordon Conwell's senior faculty is notably lacking in honoring Black leadership](#). All the while, the school is promoting a vision of "[Diversity, hospitality and culture](#)" that refers to Dr. Price's work, and is dependent upon the ISBCE and the very Black intellectual capital and labor which you just fired.

We hope in the still more excellent way of 1 Corinthians 12:31, and we truly want a vibrant, faithful Gordon Conwell to be an institution of the Church we can point to in hope as a sign of redemption and justice. But at this particular moment in our nation's history, taking these actions against Dr. Price and the Institute for the Study of the Black Christian Experience is particularly detrimental and offensive.

What you need to know is that beyond Gordon Conwell, Rev. Dr. Price is an esteemed member of many religious and academic circles, Black and otherwise. He is highly valued as a preacher, teacher, musician, public intellectual, and colleague. Your actions are not an experience in isolation, but part of a pattern of behavior of predominately white institutions that use Black intellectual labor when helpful and then dispose of when perceived as inconvenient or expensive.

You've written with hope of positive actions taken at Gordon Conwell ["moving us away from ongoing divisions caused by race, class, and ethnicity and toward a more empathetic and hospitable institution."](#) This is not hospitable behavior. The distance between what you profess and what you practice is both painful and glaring.

We write to you so that you are fully informed as to how Dr. Price is valued and esteemed within the Church and the wider community, and how these actions are part of a larger pattern of devaluing of Black labor by predominately white higher education and Christian institutions. We understand that these are times of tight finances, but as Scripture says that where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. We fund what we value. Gordon Conwell is demonstrating what it values in its actions.

We understand that it may be too late to reverse this decision and we lament the damage that has been done. We invite you to begin the work of repairing lost trust and making restitution for harm. For this to happen, Gordon Conwell will need to formally interrogate and explicitly acknowledge systemic failures and structural racism at the school. We seek both a public apology and tangible commitments to demonstrate that Gordon Conwell takes these matters seriously and is committed to moving forward in a new direction. We look forward to meeting with you to discuss these matters.

In the hope of redemption and justice,

- Mr. Jeff Bass, Adjunct Professor at Gordon Conwell's CUME campus: Executive Director, Emmanuel Gospel Center, Boston MA
- Rev. Dr. Brandon Crowley: Senior Pastor, the Historic Myrtle Baptist Church, West Newton, MA & Instructor, Harvard Divinity School
- Rev. Marcus Doe, M.Div '16 & past GCTS Student Government President: Pastor, Redemption Church, Tucson AZ
- Rev. Laura Everett: Executive Director, Massachusetts Council of Churches
- Rev. Dr. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes: John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Professor of African-American Studies and Sociology and Director of the African American Studies Program at Colby College, Waterville, ME & Assistant Pastor, Union Baptist Church, Cambridge, MA

- Rev. Dr. Darrell Goodwin, Executive Conference Minister, Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ
- Rev. Jaron Green: Senior Pastor, Union Baptist Church, Cambridge, MA
- Rt. Rev. Gayle Harris: Bishop Suffragan, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
- Presiding Elder Jocelyn Hart Lovelace: Presiding Elder for the Boston-Hartford District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church
- Rev. Davie Hernandez: Pastor, Restoration City Church, Dorchester, MA
- Rev. Dr. Teddy Hickman-Maynard: Associate Dean for Students and Community Life & Assistant Professor of Black Church Studies, Boston University School of Theology
- Rev. Dr. Conley H. Hughes, Jr. D.Min & GCTS Adjunct Faculty: Senior Pastor, Concord Baptist Church, Milton, MA
- Rev. Dr. Deborah Jackson: Professor of Practice and Dean of the Robert A. Foisie Business School at Worcester Polytechnic Institute
- Rev. Dr. J. Anthony Lloyd, M.Div '82: Senior Pastor, Greater Framingham Community Church, Framingham, MA
- Rev. Carrington Moore: Lydia Fellows Program Director, Massachusetts Council of Churches & Associate Pastor for Youth & Families, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Boston, MA
- Rev. Irene Monroe: Co-host of GBH's "All Rev'd Up with Rev. Price, Public Theologian, Syndicated columnist
- Ms. Denicia Radley MA '16 World Missions and Evangelism & MA '16 in Theology and Ethics, Past President of both the Women Student Association and the Black Student Association: Director of Religious and Spiritual Life, Babson College

- Bishop Talbert Swan M.Div '08 & MA in Urban Ministry '08: Pastor, Spring of Hope Church of God in Christ, Springfield, MA and Brattleboro, VT; jurisdictional prelate of the Nova Scotia Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction; President of the Greater Springfield NAACP; Assistant General Secretary and Director of social justice for the Church of God in Christ
- Rev. Dr. Atu White: Senior Pastor, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Springfield & First Vice President of the United Baptist Convention of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New Hampshire
- Rev. Kenneth Young '14 & '15: Associate Director, Massachusetts Council of Churches & Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Haverhill, MA

Initial Signatories as of 7/7/21, 5pm. Institutions are for identification purposes only.

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