



***Opening Remarks***  
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**President**

*A Prayer Service for Healing*  
*July 19, 2016*

As a faith-based college, we come together in solidarity, prayer and mutual support in times of grief, mourning, anger and fear.

Iona College was founded on the values of peace, justice, service and the pursuit of truth.

Yet, aided by technology, we are witnessing first hand our world that is struggling to find peace; our country that is struggling to find justice; and we are living in a period when aggression seems to overshadow our service and humanity.

As a College, we are struggling to find truth and meaning from what, at times, appears to be utter madness. It is at moments like these that our faith, our unity, our pursuit of learning becomes even more important.

In the past two weeks, we prayed for the families of Philando Castile, Alton Sterling and the injured and fallen officers in Dallas. Since planning this service, we witnessed the further murders in Nice, France, Turkey, and of police officers in Louisiana.

We stand unified against bias, senseless acts of violence, and murder at anyone's hands. We respect and support the fundamental right that every person should be able to return safely to their home every day.

Inexplicably, many leaders, people seeking public office, and political leaders are wrongly leveraging the incidents to create division for personal gain: division across race, religion, socio-economic status, country of origin, locus of affection.

I join President Obama in his call for unity and the valuing of life. President Obama noted, "There is sorrow, there is anger, there is confusion about next steps..., but there is unity in recognizing that this is not how we want our communities to operate. This is not who we want to be as Americans."

My hope for our Iona community is that we continue to come more firmly together in what we are for, rather than what we are against, by facing division by building bridges of unity.

We are for intellectual inquiry, community engagement and an appreciation for diversity. We respect one another and encourage enrichment through diversity, faith and intellectual inquiry. We are committed to continuing our efforts to support underrepresented populations, embrace the marginalized, and demonstrate our values of justice, peace and service, deciding who we want to be as children of God, as Americans and as Ionians. Let us be an example for our country, our nation, let us move the world by demonstrating how to build bridges of unity in the face of great division.

We have so much more to do.

The horrific events of last two weeks demonstrate just how far we have yet to go. As a veteran and a father of young children, I have an overwhelming feeling of sadness as I listen to parents who feel compelled to tell their children to fear the police. Our sadness is compounded by witnessing the death and destruction of lives, all lives. Then witnessing a call for division.

President Obama noted that when police officers are attacked, it is an attack on all of us and our country.

We cannot survive as a civilized nation if substantial segments of our population feel they cannot trust the criminal justice system or fear physical violence. Hence, the call for unity -- if they divide us, they win!

As a place for higher learning, Iona College must proactively ensure that its community can wrestle with these difficult questions through open and informed dialogue, in and out of the classroom. We must take actions that make our College an even more welcoming and educational environment for all.

There are many examples when schools, colleges and universities teach political leaders, the country and the world how to overcome injustice and division. Iona has done it before and must do it again!

In January 1957, Iona College took the floor to play the University of Mississippi at a basketball tournament in Kentucky. The governor of Mississippi refused to allow their team to take the floor against Iona, a school with an African American player named Stanley Hill. Iona recorded a 2-0 victory, Mississippi didn't record the game. That evening, the Mississippi players came to the hotel where Iona was staying. They came to apologize to Stanley Hill and to Iona. The next night, the fans cheered Iona as they took the floor. Nine months later, in September 1957, supported by Dr. Martin Luther King, the nation witnessed the Little Rock 9 attend public schools in Little Rock, Ark.

By 1968, assassins, filled with hate, had taken the lives of JFK, then Dr. King, then RFK; three men who had graced our campus.

We cannot let the assignation of life assassinate hope, faith or our mutual love and respect for all God's children. Let us not be divided but united!

I am asking, I am inviting, our students, faculty, and staff to come together to take great action, to find reasoned solutions, to mutually support one another, to overcome the cancer of division spreading in this county. I'm inviting you to be part of the solution, showing the nation how to build bridges of unity in the face of division, injustice and hate.

Let us move the world by our actions and deeds to build bridges of unity in the face of great division. May we come together in prayer, in mutual support, in conversation and respectful dialogue, in governance and leadership, in service, and in our educational pursuits to face division by building bridges of unity. As noted in my letter to you last week, I am inviting students, faculty and staff to the table to take even greater action in the face of division, fear, anger and sadness.

We may be at a crossroads in this country. At key moments in our country's history, suffering and injustice has been turned into hope and progress. I pray that this is one of those moments.

As we often pray "go out into the world in peace. Have courage! Hold fast to what is good. Return no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the suffering. Honor all people. Love and serve the Lord your God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit."

May we build bridges of unity in the face of great division and may God bless you all!