



New College

John Dorhauer
General Minister and President

In 1959, the UCC helped found and fund New College of Florida in Sarasota with this mandate: “The college shall be open to all students qualified for its academic program. Race, creed, national origin, or cultural status shall not be considered as a basis for denial of admission.”

Over the past few months, Governor Ron DeSantis removed seven Board members and replaced them with his own minions who now form a majority. They then proceeded to fire the school’s president—the first woman to serve—and replaced her with a puppet president of their own, who is now being paid five times the amount the woman the board fired was being paid. The board voted this week to—wait for it—close the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion office. Here is the ultimate irony. DeSantis is using the mandate we gave in founding the school as the reason for closing the office.

His twisted, cruel, Harvard and Yale-educated mind—much like the Grinch—came up with a Seussian ‘wonderful, awful idea’: “Hey, let’s argue that the only way to even measure diversity, equity, and inclusion is to notice race, creed, national origin, or cultural status—which we are not allowed to do.”

As I said on campus at a student protest rally, never trust a white bully who tells you he is colorblind and doesn’t see race. White men invented the social construct that is race and have used it to advantage and privilege themselves with wealth and power that accrues only to them. When they say they don’t see race, they are now saying they don’t want you to use your race as a means of leveling the playing field.

As founders of a college that has, in the true spirit of our ‘no matter who you are or where you are’ mantra and fully in keeping with its founding principles, become one of the most richly and beautifully

diverse campuses in the country, the United Church of Christ owes those students a robust show of support and advocacy. We are both a part of their birthing story and aware of the larger implications of an effort like this succeeding in a religious and cultural context in which zealots want entire curricula rewritten through the filters of Christian Nationalism.

Silence in the face of this kind of evil will create the conditions in which this virus spreads. We cannot, we must not let that happen.

I really encourage us all to learn everything we can about what DeSantis is doing in Sarasota on the campus of New College. Then find a way to respond. Write a letter to their Board of Directors, chaired now by Debra Jenks—a woman who wants to defund public schools. Tie up the phone of their President, Richard Corcoran, with voice mails and messages expressing your outrage and your interest as a member of the founding denomination. Write to students on campus expressing your solidarity and support, asking them what you can do that will be of value to them in their struggle to maintain education freedom and personal safety.

When I spoke on campus, hundreds of UCC members from over a dozen local churches were there on campus to listen to student leaders, to demonstrate resistance before the new President and Board, and to pledge their ongoing support to keep the vision and mission alive. It made me proud. Now, we must all take on the role of preserving what are our core values: inclusive excellence, extravagant welcome, changing lives, sustaining hope, courage in the struggle, and unconditional love. No bully gets to take that away from us, or from those we love.

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