



# Statement From President Giordano

June 2, 2020 | [Press Release](#)

Dear Villa Maria College Community,

We are living through extremely challenging times, as a college, as a city, and as a nation.

The unrest, confusion, pain, and outrage we are experiencing are clarion calls for the necessity—in fact, the urgency—of the core values of the Felician Sisters and of Villa Maria College: solidarity with the poor, respect for human dignity, compassion, justice and peace, and transformation.

Our tradition teaches us that the answers to what currently ails us must begin and end with an affirmation of these values. We cannot overcome our myriad challenges by reflexively casting aspersions on others, sowing discord and hate, or seeking to cause chaos and enmity.

Instead, our Franciscan roots tell us to look deep within ourselves and find the courage and the capacity to understand how we contribute to perpetuating injustice and inequality, to recognize when we lack the moral courage to treat our fellow citizens with empathy and humanity, and to summon the strength to change our ways.

This is transformation.

Transformation is hard work, perhaps the hardest work we can ever pursue. It requires unfiltered honesty with one's self, it mandates that we listen closely and fully to others without judgment, and it calls on us to be open to changing our ways.

Intellectually, I know what it takes, but, like most of us, I have fallen well short of doing all that it entails.

Our country has been engaged in the push and pull of transformation around issues of race, inequality, and systemic discrimination since its founding. These moments that currently resonate so profoundly with us today have played out throughout our history, over and over. Whether we like it or not, they are part and parcel of the American experience.

As a college, we must address these issues. Villa proudly enrolls the most diverse student body of any private college in the region. Many of our students and staff members can recount their lifelong experiences with institutionalized oppression and discrimination. We know that our college itself reflects the disproportionate racial makeup that characterizes and contributes to the racial and class disparities that have always afflicted our country.

Given our demographics, our mission, and our beliefs, Villa must stand for its values now more than ever.

Over the coming months, as we deal with the pandemic, an economic freefall, the protest movement, and what promises to be a highly fraught election season, the rhetoric will continue to escalate. We will be frustrated and outraged at times, and, as a result, we will be tempted to treat our neighbors as our enemies. For example, we will see something a fellow student or a colleague posted on social media and be incensed. We will feel the irresistible urge to call them out, to fan the flames.

In these moments, as hard as it is, I ask you to reflect on our core values and how they call us to behave. They serve as a guidepost to help us navigate these difficult moments in a productive way, and to remain focused on the pursuit of justice and peace.

That does not mean that we shy away from or avoid addressing the issues that are prevailing in our country. On the contrary, it means that we engage them with the intention of bringing us back to our values, reminding us of the need to champion the common humanity and dignity we all share as God's children.

It means that we boldly call out injustice as it occurs: when Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd; when Louisville police killed Breonna Taylor, when white citizens ambushed and murdered Ahmaud Arbery as he jogged down the street.

It means that we exercise compassion as we work to change society, even in the most tense and charged moments, and with the people with whom we find it most challenging.

It means that we embrace nonviolent direct action to strive for peace.

When we live out our values in the most difficult and trying of moments, we create the conditions for understanding, for change, for healing, and for resolution.

When we live out our values in times like these, we create the conditions for true transformation.

Our patrons, St. Francis, St. Clare, St. Felix, and Blessed Mary Angela, showed us how to work for justice by insisting on the dignity of all people. This is our legacy, and it is now our charge.

Let us accept this charge as the close-knit college community we are, work together to heal our divided and hurting nation, and help bring an end to racism, violence, and oppression.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Giordano". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Matthew Giordano, Ph.D.  
President, Villa Maria College

