Dear ESP Members,

I have been moved by current events and encouraged by colleagues to share the following message. I hope that you will read it with grace and understanding as it was a difficult piece to write, but one I hope expresses my solidarity to our colleagues who can speak personally to the challenges of racism.

The tragic death of George Floyd has mobilized a nationwide protest against police brutality towards the African American community and the unequal justice that results. I respect the voices of those who have brought to center stage our country’s unresolved issues with systemic racism. I have also been moved personally by the dialog and transparency that has highlighted the ongoing struggles people of color endure on a day-to-day basis. One colleague expressed concern for the lives of her grown sons that they too could become the next victim of police brutality or hate crime. Upon reading her comments, I realized I have not had to face that fear with my own adult children. Additionally, my cultural awareness was heightened by my niece who shared culturally insensitive to racist comments she encountered growing up as an African American in a largely white community. These experiences serve as a reminder that white privilege exists whether we choose to recognize it or not. As Extension Professionals, we have the opportunity to be a part of the solution and it begins with our own personal growth into cultural awareness. Presenters of the ESP Webinar Developing Cultural Competency: Lessons Learned from A Philippines Study Program (https://espnational.org/Webinars) shared Milton J. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. It describes the perspectives and behaviors on a continuum of increasing cultural awareness. The journey begins when one recognizes the actions that deny, defend, and minimize cultural differences in an effort to hold your culture as superior. Growth occurs when you experience your own culture in the context of others. This is evident by being accepting and sensitive about the culture of others and adapting your behavior to better communicate and interact.

As Extension professionals we bring the knowledge and resources of the Land Grant University System to the people. The LGU system was established to provide education and upward advancement for people who were previously excluded. I encourage all my Extension colleagues to take steps to support the voices for equal justice within your community. Extension programs have long been charged with building a better tomorrow for the people we serve. Over 50 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned a future, “that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’ ESP provides opportunities to come together through the ESP Urban and Culturally Diverse Audiences Affinity Group. Below are the updated Vision and Mission statements that will guide their work in the coming months and years. To learn more and or join the effort please visit: https://espnational.org/Affinity-Groups
Vision:

The Affinity Group is a collaborative space that connects and supports Extension professionals serving urban communities and/or culturally diverse audiences.

Mission:

The Affinity Group creates a network for Extension professionals in ESP who seek to extend the resources of our land-grant universities to address the needs of urban communities and/or culturally diverse or underserved audiences. The Affinity Group provides support, training, professional development, and other opportunities across all program areas and the Extension system to advance the mission of land-grant universities while ensuring diversity, equity, inclusion and engagement.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and to grow personally through the experience.

Sincerely,

Mike Knutz, National President
Epsilon Sigma Phi

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Unsubscribe