Letter to the Editors

Lapp on Academic Freedom at EMU

Dear Friends,

As readers of The Weather Vane know, there have been recent articles, letters and editorials related to homosexuality and academic freedom in this paper. I prefer face-to-face discussion on these topics rather than communication via The Weather Vane. However, public comments require public responses.

EMU is an educational institution of the Mennonite Church USA (MC USA). As an institution, we have agreed to support the confessions and positions of the MC USA. All faculty and staff individually agreed to support these as well. Academic freedom is not unlimited in a church-related university. (And I would strongly argue academic freedom is never truly unlimited in any university.) Instead, we uphold the church’s positions and our own personal search for understanding of God’s truth as revealed in the Scriptures through the Holy Spirit’s leading. Our position as an institution changes only when the church as a whole shifts position.

Regarding homosexuality, the MC USA position is that same gender sexual relationships are wrong. Such commitments should not be supported or blessed by Mennonite pastors. EMU supports this position and will not permit persons in such relationships to be a part of its faculty and staff. Students also agree to live by this behavioral standard. EMU values its relationship with the MC USA and wishes to strengthen this tie. We ask our faculty and staff to remain sensitive toward this commitment that has characterized our 85-year history as an institution.

The intentions of EMU leaders to attract students who express their commitment to EMU and to the MC USA. All faculty and staff individually agreed to support these as well. Academic freedom is not unlimited in a church-related university. (And I would strongly argue academic freedom is never truly unlimited in any university.) Instead, we uphold the church’s positions and our own personal search for understanding of God’s truth as revealed in the Scriptures through the Holy Spirit’s leading. Our position as an institution changes only when the church as a whole shifts position.

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Kevin Docherty, for your excellent editorial, "Debate: Don’t Silence It" in the October 17 Weather Vane. I especially appreciated your comment, "An education without a free exchange of ideas is not an education. It is manipulation." It is important to resist, as you so ably do, attempts to stifle our mutual discernment efforts.

I would like to add that I strongly believe that it would be a serious mistake to see a contradiction between the college campus and the church on the issue of free exchange of ideas. That is, just as we need a free exchange of ideas, without fear of censor- sorship or intimidation, in order to have a healthy campus intellectual environment, we also need a free exchange of ideas to have a healthy church.

The issues that Ken Roth raised in his recent essay are issues that the church must freely discuss if the church is to hope to discern God’s will for it in our present day. So, I think EMU the better for having addressed for such a discussion is part of EMU’s mission to serve the church. It is good to have faculty such as Ken, who express their commitment to EMU and to the Mennonite Church in the way he has. And it is good to have Weather Vane editors such as Kevin who so ably support such expression.

Yours truly,
Joseph L. Lapp, President

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Letter to the Editors

Free Discussion Positive for the Church

To The Weather Vane:

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Ted Grimend, Assistant Professor of Theology and Peace Studies

Letter to the Editors

When Two Worlds Collide

It seems to me that several good things have come out of the College Night military recruiters "controversy." First of all, it’s good that students and faculty care about the issue of military involve- ment. In some sectors of the Mennonite church there is less concern about military participation and a peace witness than earlier in our history. If the recruiters had been here and left objection had happened, that would be cause for concern. It’s good that people care deeply about the Mennonite theological stance on peace, non-violence and non- participation in the military, especially in the cur- rent climate of threat of war.

On the other hand, it’s good that EMU leaders have wanted to hold the College Night on campus. It’s good to attract local students to attend EMU, some of whom may know little about EMU’s values of peace and non-violence. There’s little question that holding College Night here can attract students who might otherwise never visit the campus. EMU is seeking a diverse and increased student body—incorporating the chance to shape the values and beliefs of students who might not otherwise give one moment’s thought to a Mennonite-shaped edu-

Oppen

ation.

Would it he worth having military recruiters on campus for College Night if, in the process, say five or 10 additional non-Mennonite students spent four years here and perhaps embraced a theology where peace and non-violence became central to their faith? What about the value of having an alternative service table giving out information on volunteer opportunities? If College Night is held elsewhere next year, military recruitment goes on robustly and we all forget about the whole thing, is that the best outcome?

The intentions of EMU leaders to attract stu- dents and build strong local ties is good and the objections of students and faculty to military recruiters on campus is also good. It is a clash of two goods, not a clash of good against bad, some- thing our culture constantly nudges us into thinking. It is a situation ripe for respectful dialogue. Let’s find ways to continue practicing dialogue, acknowl-

edge the validity of the “other’s” point of view.

Byron Peachey
CAMBUS Pastor

Letter to the Editors

Professor Grateful for Open Dialogue at EMU

Dear Editors,

I write to express my admiration and gratitude for Kevin Docherty’s Oct. 17 editorial. The concept of the university as a space in which I can meet my students to share ideas and exchange opinions is one which spurred me towards becoming a professor in the first place. My favorite moments as a teacher are those when my students and I listen respectfully to each other and thus encour- age each other’s intellectual, spiritual and emotional growth. Such listening and growth cannot occur in an environment where debate is discouraged and any ideas outside the established normative are considered frightening or threatening. I would much rather that a student present an unconventional idea in classroom discussions than to refuse to engage at all. I would much rather that a student argue with me than to simply numb out.

In this moment of our country’s history perhaps more than ever, it is essential that we work towards a spirit of openness. It is essential that we make clear our reasons for believing what we believe, that we are honest about the differences or disagreements in which we are involved. To do otherwise is to undermine both the democratic ideals and the belief in community which we pro- cess to hold dear.

I am grateful to have been part of a community here at EMU where creative, responsible dialogue is possible. I am grateful for my colleagues and students alike who care enough about each other—as members of this university, of the church and of the world—to dare to ask the hard questions and to listen to each other’s responses.

Thank you, Kevin, for encouraging us to keep on!

Sincerely,
Patricia G. King
Assistant Professor of English

What do you think?
Tell us.
The Weather Vane welcomes your comments and letters. Opinions do not necessarily need to address issues discussed in The Weather Vane. Please send us your letters via campus mail or e-mail to wvane@emu.edu

Hugs & Slugs

A good-new-fashioned-hug to Homestar Runner. What a great cartoon. For those of you not drowning in return- from-Fall Break homework, check them out at homestar-runner.com

A regime-change-begins-at-home hug to all those enduring the onslaught of cam- paigns in order to vote in November.

Letter to the Editors

Hugs & Slugs

A don’t-feel-the-pavement-hug to those people dumping their feet feed trash in the parking lots around campus.

A it’s-about-time slug to the long-delayed arrival of the campus direction. We would note this date in our campus calendar, but those seem to have been complete- ly misplaced.

A great hug to all those enduring the onslaught of cam- paigns in order to vote in November.

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