

August 14th, 2017

Dear Faculty and Staff,

As we return to school this morning, I felt it was important to address the events that took place this weekend in Charlottesville, Virginia. The images were revolting, disheartening, and left me saddened and sickened. I want to personally condemn the evil individuals who perpetrated this hate and violence. Today we call on those who claim the name of Jesus to join us in denouncing white nationalism, white supremacy, and racism in all forms.

I am sure that many students and families have seen and heard the news reports. We need to be prepared to wisely facilitate discussions should they continue onto campus. Each conversation will be unique based on the age of the students in your classroom. However, my expectation is that every conversation point students to the hope and truth of the Gospel. Below you will find a question that may be asked and a brief discussion guide. More in-depth information is available on our website at thefirstacademy.org/about/diversity.

"Did you hear about what happened in Charlottesville?"

1. What happened was unacceptable and grieves my heart and the heart of Jesus.

It is comforting for students to know that we stand firmly against these horrible events and evil ideologies.

2. What lies beneath racism, hatred, and violence is sin. It chains its victims. As Pastor David said this weekend at FBCO, "Jesus came to break all chains and set us free to love and serve one another and Him." If we confess our sins, Jesus will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (sin) - I John 1:9.

Labeling sin allows us to share the remedy for sin - the Gospel!

3. This incident reminds us that there is much work to be done in the area of racial reconciliation. There is no hope for us apart from Christ and each of us needs to "Tell our Story" to as many as will hear. The Gospel message will bring freedom, hope, and healing to all who hear and receive.

Redirecting students to Jesus' plan of salvation strips the story of its destructive power and introduces hope and healing.

4. Let's pray now for the healing of the injured, the comfort of those who lost a loved one, and for opportunities to share Jesus with others. He alone can set them free!

The action step allows students to have a productive response to the incident.

As God's image-bearers, we choose to believe the best about each other, to create a culture of mutual respect, and to encourage deep affection for one another. The fruit of these labors is a learning environment which shapes not only the mind but the heart as well and produces the kind of people who are prepared to be God-exalting, others-focused leaders in their homes, churches, and communities.

I want to thank Marci Chavalas for her assistance in preparing this email. We are blessed to have her at TFA. I want to thank each one of you for placing your confidence in the King of kings and the Lord of Lords. And, I want to thank you for creating conversations across campus this week that lift up the Gospel as the remedy for sin and tragedies like Charlottesville.

Dr. Whitaker