

Dear Colleagues:

The Black Death, among the world's worst pandemics, drove Giovanni Boccaccio to pen the [*Decameron*](#), one of the famed works of the Italian Renaissance. "Thirteen hundred and forty-eight years had passed since the fruitful Incarnation of the Son of God, when there came into the noble city of Florence, the most beautiful of all Italian cities, a deadly pestilence," he writes. Boccaccio describes shocking scenes of death, full of ghastly details, yet without evident sensationalism. At least half, and possibly 75 percent, of the Florentine population died.

Under dire circumstances, "the sick were barred from entering the city, and many instructions were given to preserve health." But despite herculean efforts to contain the plague, "whenever the diseased mixed with healthy people, like a fire through dry grass or oil it would rush upon the healthy." Some left in harried fear, never to return. Others partied, "satisfying all one's appetites whenever possible and laughing at the whole bloody thing."

Our pandemic, COVID-19, is not remotely akin to what Boccaccio witnessed, and for that we can be grateful beyond words. Yet many of the widespread disruptions in civic and social life that Boccaccio describes have parallels today. The Florentines of old dwelt on "diverse fears and imaginings." In Boccaccio's city each "citizen avoided another, everybody neglected their neighbors, and rarely or never visited their parents and relatives unless from a distance." Why? Because "this thing, death, which even the wise never accept with patience, even though it occur rarely and relatively unobtrusively, had appeared manifestly."

During our season of conscientious handwashing and social distancing—critically important practices backed by epidemiological science—we have opportunity, if we choose, to remember the infirmity of our bodies and the contingencies of a social order that we too often take for granted. Perhaps we also have a rare occasion to help our students apprehend wisdom in these matters, for life's great disruptions present opportunities for them to ask hard questions and seek authentic answers. How fortunate for us it is that Christian universities have long encouraged this work, for through the centuries they have offered an education attuned to life's fragile beauty, fallen greatness, and redemptive hope through Christ's grace. May we carry on that tradition in our work with students in the weeks ahead.

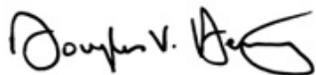
Please note the following items of importance for our Honors College community:

- The University response to the COVID-19 pandemic continues to call for resourcefulness as we adjust advising, teaching, and other work practices. The [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Information](#) website is the best place to turn for updates. For the week ahead, President Livingstone's latest email notes that the "the campus is open, all University operations will continue as normal, and faculty and staff are expected to resume their regular work schedules and activities." However, we have been given latitude to "work remotely on a temporary basis" under a [Telework Policy](#), and "provisions regarding a 12-month employment requirement, dependent childcare during telework and the completion of the telework agreement form have been waived at this time." Please make good decisions for your health and others' well-being, knowing that you have my support. I do ask that

you coordinate telework plans with your program directors and/or supervisors, and that you document those plans by email so that expectations are clear.

- Our dean search has entered a key stage, with two candidates completing campus visits just before spring break and two more candidates slated early this week. Search chair **Brad Toben** and the rest of the search committee welcome the insights of our faculty and staff, so please plan to attend candidate presentations as announced, or view videos if unable to attend in person, and follow up with feedback for the search committee.
- Recent data show we are reaching high marks in multiple areas. Compared to other undergraduates, HC students report greater **faculty and staff interest** in their success, as well as a stronger **sense of belonging** at Baylor. Our 2019 freshman-sophomore **retention rate** came in at 95.1%, just over the top of our HC goal of 95%. And as of this year, our **minority student enrollment** stands at 31.2%, giving us the most diverse student community we have enjoyed in the last five years. You have my appreciation, one and all, for the dedicated, effective work that undergirds these commendable results.
- **Barry Harvey**, professor of theology in the Great Texts Program, has published [*Baptists and the Catholic Tradition: Reimagining the Church's Witness in the Modern World*](#) (BakerAcademic). Featuring a re-envisioned, re-contextualized line of argument made in an earlier edition (*Can These Bones Live?*), Barry's ecclesiology unites Baptist history and conviction with longing for the unity of Christ's church. Called a "masterful account of the contemporary church," an "exciting and pastorally relevant ecclesiology grounded in scripture, tradition, and critical thinking," and a "fine compendium of ecclesial wisdom for making Christian witness to the principalities and powers of our age," the book deserves a wide hearing and heeding. Congratulations, Barry!
- The [Faculty Senate](#) "serves and functions as the representative, deliberative, and legislative body" of Baylor's faculty, and offers guidance on many issues, including compensation/benefits, committee appointments, academic policy, and strategic planning, among others. We have two Senators: **Bill Neilson** (term ends 2020) and **Lynn Tatum** (term ends 2022)—and a word of appreciation for their service is well deserved. In anticipation of the end of Bill's second, and therefore, final term in May, please consider nominations of colleagues or self-nominations. The Senate finds it helpful to know that nominees are able and willing to serve, so do relay this information if you can. Nominations may be mailed or emailed to [Michael Long](#) (Senate Secretary) before **Monday, March 23 at 5:00 p.m.** Full-time faculty members holding continuous appointments within the Honors College are eligible to serve and vote.

All the best,



Douglas V. Henry | Interim Dean

Honors College | Baylor University

baylor.edu/honorscollege | 254.710.7689