

Dear McKendree University community,

Last spring, after we hosted a series of activities related specifically to the events of Ferguson, I established the **Social Justice and Equity Committee** to continue our broader efforts to promote knowledge and understanding among all members of the McKendree community about issues of diversity, inclusion, social justice, and equity. As you will recall, I appointed [Mr. Ranadore Foggs](#) to chair the SJEC, and I am pleased to report that the committee has been diligently meeting, discussing, and planning for an exciting university-wide initiative to launch this spring.

The SJEC plans to host “**Connection Groups**,” or small dialogue groups, throughout the campus community. During the fall semester, the committee recruited and trained several “change ambassadors” who will serve as facilitators of the Connection Groups this spring. Each Connection Group will meet twice a month for approximately two hours each time, during the months of February, March, and April, for a total of six two-hour meetings. The purpose of the meetings is to provide an opportunity for members of the campus community to participate in diversity awareness activities and engage in dialogue about important issues of race, diversity, and social justice. My hope is that many faculty, staff, and students will choose to engage in these small groups and get to know people who are different from themselves on a personal level. Unless and until we commit to learning about each other, befriending each other, sharing conversations with each other, and living in community with each other, real change on a campus and more global level cannot occur. The McKendree Connection Groups will provide one avenue for our campus community to learn about diversity and social justice, not from a textbook or the media, but directly from each other.

The SJEC will host multiple opportunities for you (students, faculty, and staff) to sign-up to join a Connection Group. The sign-up process will take just a minute.

Please consider joining a Connection Group. At the very least, you will meet new people, participate in some interesting activities, engage in dialogue about important issues, and learn something about the diverse McKendree community of which we are all a part. I urge you to say “yes” to this opportunity.

In closing, I’ve copied the mission statement of the SJEC:

*McKendree University values the dignity and sacred worth of all members of our community. To achieve this end, the Social Justice and Equity Committee engages diverse members of McKendree University in meaningful activities to promote positive and sustained relationships among all persons inclusive of race/ethnicity, gender, religion, social class, sexuality, and all other aspects of the human experience.*

Thank you for considering this invitation to join this exciting new initiative!

Sincerely,

President Dr. James M. Dennis