

# BRYN MAWR

COLLEGE

Office of the President  
101 North Merion Avenue  
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

August 22, 2017

Dear Members of the Bryn Mawr Community,

The events that occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia earlier this month continue to be profoundly disturbing to me. Many of you have said that you share this feeling. The views and actions of neo-Nazis, the KKK, and white supremacist and xenophobic groups are antithetical to the values we strive to embrace at Bryn Mawr.

We join many across the country in thinking about how to address institutional histories shaped by racism and anti-Semitism. In this context, many of you have suggested that we confront the objectionable beliefs of one of our founders, M. Carey Thomas—beliefs still so poignantly evident in the recent events of our country. I agree, and I know that many others do as well. While Thomas had a profound impact on opportunities for women in higher education, on the academic development and identity of Bryn Mawr, and on the physical plan of the campus, she also openly and vigorously advanced racism and anti-Semitism as part of her vision of the College. Some of you have suggested that the College rename Thomas Library and Thomas Great Hall because of this legacy, and others have suggested making that history explicit in other ways.

Last semester the College began a process to address this issue within a broad discussion of our legacies of exclusion. As you may remember, Dean Walters announced in the spring that she would form a working group of faculty, students, staff, trustees, and alumnae/i to educate us and to lead reflection on our institutional histories of exclusion, as well as resistance, and to organize our thinking and actions as a community. Bryn Mawr's model of shared governance requires that we engage in shared decision-making on important issues such as these.

I understand, however, that this is an especially raw moment for members of many different marginalized groups whose rights and dignities are being attacked so openly and so viciously. To address this, I have decided that the College will place a moratorium on the use of the names of "Thomas" Great Hall and "Thomas" Library for the 2017-18 academic year while the issue is taken up by the working group. In the interim we will refer to these spaces as Great Hall (or GH) in reference to the building's large gathering space and College Hall to refer to the building itself. We will make a concerted effort to remove as many references to the name as is possible for this year. Please note that some changes may take time to complete,

and that you may continue to see the name Thomas in materials printed before this announcement. This change is one that requires some intentionality on the part of each one of us, as well as patience when habits cause mistakes.

No solution is ideal, but my hope is that by fully acknowledging Thomas' legacy of racism and anti-Semitism through this action, we will grant the community time for discernment: serious and thoughtful study, exchange of views, reflection, and action planning about our legacies of exclusion and resistance. The decision to declare a moratorium on the use of Thomas' name in no way preempts the important deliberations of the working group. Rather, I see it as a first step to make our values unequivocally clear --- both our stand against racial, religious, and other forms of exclusion and our stand for thoughtful, shared, and reflective decision-making. While I know the working group will not finish all its work before the end of the coming academic year, I ask that it make recommendations early in the second semester on how we publicly address the legacy of M. Carey Thomas going forward.

It is my hope that this community work of grappling with our histories will lead us to wisdom and clarity about how to advance us toward the ideals to which we aspire. I hope you will contact Dean Walters if you would like to contribute to this effort.

I look forward to working together to support one another in these trying times and to continue to challenge ourselves to strive to make Bryn Mawr all we desire it to be.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Devin Curran".