The Genesis Story of the Dignity, Equity, Accountability, and Responsibility (DEAR) Declaration:

The Process of How “DEAR” Came Into Being

In preparation for our 2021 re-accreditation self-study with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), a working group was created in 2020 to draft a document to delineate our Equity Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) statement. This group consisted of eight people: four faculty, two staff, a student rep and an alumni rep. This group had fruitful conversations over the course of a few months; some of the highlights included shared feelings of uneasiness with the use of the term “diversity” and “inclusion,” as these terms can be easily co-opted by dominant groups and often fail to address the actual reality of oppressions and domination. The group felt “equity” was an important term to include as it implies that we do not come on an equal footing and that different people need different kinds and levels of support to overcome systemic and historical inequality and inaccessibility.

One of the most important concepts the group named was “dignity,” an innately precious human quality that each person should be afforded, and a value that needs to be affirmed regardless of human-made identities and barriers. After establishing the terms Dignity and Equity, discussion shifted to the ideas of “accountability and responsibility.” These words were suggested as commitments to ensure Dignity and Equity. Adding these two actionable elements in the document, we realized that we could put together, Dignity, Equity, Accountability, Responsibility to create the acronym DEAR, which then became our DEAR document/declaration. Once the group agreed on Dignity, Equity, Accountability, and Responsibility, as core principles, the eight members paired off and worked on each section separately, then, all sections were integrated with consistency. Once a draft was ready to share, there were consultations among various constituents, faculty, students through Emmanuel College Student Society (ECSS), staff, and alumni/ae through Emmanuel College Alumni Association (ECAA), as well as the Advisory Committee (that included the Victoria University Board of Regents, TST and United Church of Canada members).

In short, the DEAR document was born out of a collective labor of love and emerged out of College-wide consultations. This document is a declaration, a sacred and living document that points us towards actions for change, nudging us to do better!