

Attached to this email is a petition with 230 signatures. It is titled "Petition for PLNU Chapel to Preach the Gospel." This petition was mostly done through personal connection, largely avoiding confronting strangers. Therefore, I believe that while there are 230 signatures, the true number of students who feel this way is much larger.

Notable signatures on this petition include:



Carter Taylor - Worship Arts Intern

Ashley Portillo - Worship Arts Intern

Multiple Family Group and Alpha Leaders

Multiple Resident Assistants

In order to avoid any misunderstandings, I would like to clarify what this petition is and what it is not.

What this petition is NOT:

A rebellion against Chapel

- This is not a rebellion against Chapel. The goal is not to stir up trouble, stage a walkout, rile up students, or the like. This is to bring our concerns forward in a strong and united way.

A slight against anyone or their ministry

- We have the utmost respect for everyone on the Chapel team, appreciate their work day in and day out to minister to our campus, and respect their intentionality with Chapel.

This petition is not about the “who” of Chapel, but about the methodology and mindset.

What this petition IS:

Addressing an evident need on this campus

- This petition was sparked out of an evident need for students at PLNU to better understand the biblical gospel. Many students agree that this is an issue and believe that something needs to be done about it.

A healthy way for students to express their frustration

- Many students have been upset with Chapel and their seeming avoidance of mentioning difficult and convicting ideas. This is a way for us as one to bring up our concerns in a powerful way while minimizing conflict.

An invitation

- This petition is not about people “taking sides.” This is an invitation to re-open a friendly dialogue over how PLNU Chapel can best minister to its students.

Now, I would like to address the wording of the petition to explain the meaning behind what was written and expel any overly harsh interpretation anyone may have.

“It is unfortunate, but PLNU Chapel has largely stopped preaching the gospel.”

- This does not mean that PLNU Chapel denies the gospel. This does not mean that Chapel believes it to be unnecessary, or that Chapel purposely tries to exclude it. However, this

statement means that when examining Chapel, the biblical gospel (including sin, our condemnation, and Christ as the atonement of sin) has not been explicitly stated, or if it has, the presentation was not very clear or effective.

“They avoid talking about sin and our need for a savior, which diminishes the power of the cross.”

- For many on this campus, it seems that Chapel purposely avoids mentioning sin and our need for a savior. Unfortunately, this greatly diminishes any understanding the students will have of Christianity. How can we expect students to truly appreciate the sacrifice Christ made if we never explain the severity of sin that was forgiven? How can we expect students to have a good grasp on Jesus and Christianity if we avoid the thing central to it all: the cross? How can we expect students to love their neighbor in a Christlike way if loving their neighbor is not tied back to the cross?

“Chapel intentionally avoids preaching convicting and deep messages in order to not offend the student population, which, in turn, hurts the students’ understanding of Christ.”

- This ties back into the previous statement. I understand the balance Chapel faces in preaching truth, while understanding the target audience. I do not envy this position at all. Still, I believe that with this approach of “playing it safe,” we hurt the students’ understanding of Christ and what Christianity is about.

“This also contributes to why many students feel that Chapel is unengaging, because there is not much given for students to engage with.”

- This is a theme that came up multiple times while I was petitioning and talking to students around campus. It is no secret that a large percentage of students find Chapel “unengaging” or “boring.” This sentiment is shared by those who are committed

Christians, those who are new to the faith, and those with no Christian background at all.

It is my firm belief that this is because not much is given for students to engage with.

With convicting and challenging messages that push the students, as well as teach them something new, a large part of the student population will be better encouraged to go to Chapel and to lean in.

“For the students attending Chapel week after week, Jesus and the Gospel are reduced to ‘love your neighbor and you are good to go.’”

- Chapel does not literally reduce the Gospel to just “love your neighbor.” Unfortunately, this can be what many students internalize. In avoiding topics such as sin, *hell*, and our need for a savior, yet overly emphasizing “love your neighbor,” what message is being sent to students? We emphasize when Jesus told us to love others, why having faith is important, and the importance of justice, but fail to mention when Jesus called us to repent and what our fate will be without the cross (Luke 13:5). I believe that, intentionally or unintentionally, this communicates an incorrect message to the students. It might not be explicitly stated, but if there is a greater focus on loving others more than loving God, a risk is run of students elevating dedication to their neighbor over dedication to Christ. I would also add that while loving our neighbor, doing good works, helping the poor, etc. are important parts of the Christian life, our desire to live that way ultimately stems from the cross (1 John 4:19). Without understanding the gospel, students will have an incomplete understanding of the Christian life.

“This petition is for PLNU Chapel to change their practices and preach the biblical Gospel which includes: our sin, the condemnation because of our sin, our subsequent need for a savior, Jesus’

death as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and our need to repent and trust in Christ in order to be saved.”

- This message is core to Christianity and the Bible. I believe it is the simplest representation of the gospel. We are sinners, which is bad news for us (Rom. 3:23). It is not bad news just because we hurt others, it makes the world a worse place, or the like. It is most importantly bad news because that means we are condemned under the weight of our sin (Rom. 6:23). Though we are condemned, Christ died in order to pay the price of our sins (Rom. 5:8). If we repent and turn from our sins, trusting in Christ as our savior, we will be saved (Rom. 10:13). I, and those who signed the petition, do not think that this message has been explicitly stated in Chapel (or in a way that we remember). Maybe bits and pieces of it are spread throughout the year, but this message has not been (as long as I can remember) blatantly preached at once in a unified way. While I respect the intention behind having the message spread out across multiple Chapel services, I believe that this risks obscuring the gospel truth, as opposed to presenting it altogether at once. The purpose of this petition is for Chapel to preach this message and avoid dancing around the subject. Furthermore, because of how the cross is central to the entire faith, every message is ultimately rooted in the gospel, which should be better reflected in Chapel practices.

“The gospel has been diminished, obscured, and euphemized to the point of unrecognizability, and if you get the gospel wrong, then you get salvation wrong.”

- This is the importance behind this petition, as well as my heart for starting this. The gospel truth is of utmost importance, and the only thing that can save any one of us. The last thing we would ever want is for a student to come to Loma, go through four years,

and leave with a faulty or incomplete picture of what the gospel is. Only the true gospel can save us, anything else is just Christian language. Throughout Chapel, different words are used in order to soften the gospel message. Our “brokenness” is emphasized, but never our sin. Jesus has “redeemed us,” without ever explaining what we have been redeemed from. We are “separated from God,” but the consequences of that are not described. If we do not know the severity of sin, we will never know the extent of the greatness of Christ’s forgiveness. If we believe a skewed gospel, it is not a gospel that can save us.

Furthermore, I would like to point out that this petition does not include Time Out Chapel. The recipient of this petition is PLNU Chapel, not the students that may be involved. I would also like to give Chapel credit for the positive impact they have. I will admit that there have been some amazing messages, such as Jong Yoon’s last year about avoiding sin, or Evan Wickham’s about the importance of keeping the sabbath. What all of these messages have in common, though, is that they have conviction and challenged us. They called us out for personal sin and shortcomings, and challenged us to better follow Christ, not simply addressing the ways we fall short in serving others, but also the ways we fall short of serving God.

I also understand that there is a balance that Chapel has to manage. How does one convey truth in a way that will not turn everyone away? That is a difficult question. Nonetheless, I believe that for the longest time, Chapel has played it “too safe.” When preaching the truth, there is always a risk of offending others. There will be people who are upset no matter what. Just because the gospel truth will offend some, it does not make it any less powerful, nor does it remove everyone’s need to hear it. The gospel is inherently offensive. It says that we are not

good enough and will never be good enough. It says that we need Christ's redemption in order to be saved. People will not like to hear that (1 Cor. 1:18). Just because some students may not like it, this does not outweigh all those who hear and have their lives changed. I would challenge Chapel to be proactive in figuring out the balance, trying to be as close to the line as possible, rather than resolving to just play it safe.

I also understand that there is a big difference between church and Chapel. Students should not be relying solely on Chapel for their spiritual nourishment and should be plugged into a local church community. I would like to address two points on this. First, though Chapel does not serve the same function as church, this does not remove the task of conveying the truth in love to others. While there may be different purposes, that does not mean that Chapel should intentionally water down messages. Secondly, for many students, Chapel is all the spiritual nourishment they get. Students either do not care about going to church, have a busy school schedule, or some other reasons which leads them to not attending a local church. For those students, Chapel is all the spiritual nourishment that they get. I believe Chapel is an amazing opportunity to communicate the gospel to those who otherwise would not have an opportunity to hear it (Rom. 10:14).

On PLNU's campus, I would argue that there are three groups of people. There are those who are sold out for God and are strong in their faith (let's call this Group 1). There are those who are new to Christianity or are exploring the faith (Group 2). There are also those who don't care (Group 3). By watering down Chapel messages and staying surface level, I believe all these groups are being underserved. The first group is not being fed spiritually in a deep way to foster growth. The second group may get an incorrect understanding of what Christianity is about. The third group, while they do not care, are given a potentially poor foundation if they were to

explore Christianity later. There will be a risk either way. If you blatantly mention sin and hell, you risk alienating people (though I would argue that they would have to hear it eventually). If you hold back too much, you risk portraying the wrong idea. Still, I believe that the prior is the much better option, especially considering the weight and importance of the Christian message.

Many students believe that Chapel presents an incomplete view of sin. Sin at its core is willful rebellion against God and His commandments. This includes a wide variety of things such as pride, sexual sin, idolatry, gossip, greed, as well as many others, including those which college students struggle with. In Chapel, the sin that is emphasized the most is failing to love your neighbor. This can provide students with an incomplete understanding of sin and a false sense of security, that as long as they are loving their neighbor they are on the straight and narrow path. While I believe that no one on the Chapel team believes this, there is concern to how much “loving your neighbor” is emphasized over other sins that may be more relevant to our generation and the population of PLNU. What one preaches about the most conveys a level of importance, and it seems like Chapel has unevenly emphasized talking about certain sins, while rarely, if ever, addressing others.

Additionally, I would ask that in some form these concerns are addressed to the student population. Whether it is an email explaining why Chapel avoids strong messages, or an announcement that Chapel is not church and the best place to build one’s theology, I strongly urge for there to be some type of communication to the students. This plea comes not just from me, but from the 200+ students who signed as well as many others that have, for a long time, been asking the question “why?” I believe, especially with this issue, transparency is important. It is important that all students clearly understand the intention of Chapel, the purposes behind



the messages preached, and where to go if they want a more complete picture. No one would want any student to unknowingly receive an incomplete view of Christianity.

Finally, and this is a personal request, I ask that any and all disciplinary actions will fall on me. I promised to those who signed this petition that any consequences would fall on me. Those who signed were not signing onto a rebellion or an “anti-Chapel” club, but are merely concerned students who agree with the written petition statement and want to see a change. Many knew that there was a risk involved with signing this: whether that be losing current leadership positions or losing the opportunity to gain future ones. I humbly ask that whatever happens, any disciplinary actions taken after this would fall on myself and myself alone.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I greatly appreciate and respect everyone who is a part of the Chapel team. Nonetheless, I believe that there is a serious need on this campus for PLNU students to hear powerful and convicting messages explicitly grounded in the entire biblical gospel. I ask that the Chapel team does not brush this off as “just a bunch of mad students,” but acknowledges that there is a serious enough need to cause something like this. I believe that Chapel will take this petition seriously, and figure out what is the best way to address the needs and concerns of those whom they are serving.