

To every member of the Northbrook Chapter:

Let's review our situation: We are dealing with a disease pandemic. Combine that with the worst economic meltdown in at least a generation. And now, mix in racial strife, violence, and social unrest. It is a trifecta of unpleasantness. One might ask, what would it be like if 1918, 1929 and 1968 all happened at once? *May you live in interesting times.* Indeed.

We could do worse. For example, the BHS leadership could, in the middle of this, turn inwards and initiate an internal spat rather than focusing on the current collective woes.

Whether we like it or not, this is our situation. Our communities and very way of life have been ravaged this year. All manner of our daily lives continues to be disrupted, and there are forces at work that are driving us further down this horrible path. There appears to be no choice but to see where this goes.

We need to focus on the real problems at hand. Prevailing over these sorts of situations requires togetherness and unity, not continued divisiveness or discrimination. We as an organization must come together, speaking – *singing* – with one voice, unifying others along the way, regardless of background, culture, religion, sexual orientation, or skin color. Effective leaders know this to be true – and that unity is, in fact, an important theme that we as the BHS today encode into our values and ethics. We must practice what we preach.

While it is not in our organization's DNA to deal with Covid-19 or economic chaos, we as the Barbershop Harmony Society – as the Northbrook Chapter of S.P.E.B.S.Q.S.A. – can and must speak to the social upheaval. Given the Society's history with regards to racial discrimination, it is in our own best interest not to be silent on this issue. *Silence can speak volumes.*

To that end, and in following with our principles, our ethics, and indeed our mission, we offer the following statement:

Statement of Unity and Support by the Northbrook Chapter of SPEBSQSA

Our values as an organization are rooted in the unified Society Vision for *Everyone In Harmony* – and as such, we stand firmly in solidarity with all individuals who continue to struggle against systemic racism and discrimination in their fight for their own liberties.

Given the recent events in our national conversation, we are all being reminded of our racial history in the treatment of others that we somehow think are different. We acknowledge that our own hobby's musical heritage originates with African-American roots and therefore we absolutely cannot ignore the continued racism feeding the civil unrest happening to our country today. The history of the Barbershop Harmony Society itself has a discriminatory past that we are not proud of, but it is a hard lesson that we have learned. It is foundational behind our current vision of *Everyone In Harmony*, a guiding principle that is desperately needed *now* more now than ever. We are all one people, and we all deserve to be treated well – and never, *never* suffer discrimination.

Moving forward, we recognize our opportunity and responsibility to listen louder, to exercise empathy, and to give ourselves permission to grow. Some of our most cherished performances capture various aspects of the human experience we've all shared at points in time: fighting for independence in our *Les Miserables* contest package, longing for a brighter tomorrow in *Over the Rainbow*, and keeping hope in our *Tribute to World Peace*.

Discrimination in any form is, quite simply, in conflict with the ethics that we value in our organization. We are all better when we work together and share in our burdens. In that context, in this current time – in this moment of our history – a large burden is being unfairly carried by a racial minority. They need to know that they should not have to carry that load by themselves – that they matter. Therefore, let this be known:

We stand in solidarity with all organizations and communities who strive to answer the call for equity and justice, especially during the recent violence experienced in diverse communities.

We also recognize this sentiment is long overdue. Truthfully, we needed time to educate ourselves and have these difficult, but important, conversations. Of course, the dialogue should not end here. As members we will continue to ask, listen, and improve as we strive to make the New Tradition risers a more inclusive and welcoming space together.

We as a Board feel it is important that we *publicly* put down this stake, to reassure others outside of our organization where we stand. We have sincere hope that this statement “resonates” with our membership. Some may feel this is obvious. Others may consider this all as politics and we should stay out of it. Sadly, these divergent views result in more divisiveness, which is precisely the *last* thing we need right now. As a barbershop chapter we represent many different walks of life, and as such we will tend to reflect our society's divisive behavior without even realizing it. That is why this is really a social issue, and it is why it is in our own best interest to address it. We need to *show by example* how we, as a society, can unify ourselves, to speak – *sing* – with that one voice.

There is an adage which we have all certainly heard: *Those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it.* One can cite many examples of recent events where “we” seemingly do not know our world's history and are repeating it. Let's *not* see where that goes. Our own Society's history teaches us that hard lesson about discrimination, the need for unity, and about inclusiveness. That is *our* history. We know it. We have learned from it. So, in this trifecta of chaos and upheaval, let us follow a better path. It starts with a statement of togetherness, a commitment to unity. It must continue with our actions. Let us be effective leaders, and exhibit that role model behavior that we, deep down, wish all to follow.

Sincerely,

The Northbrook Chapter Board