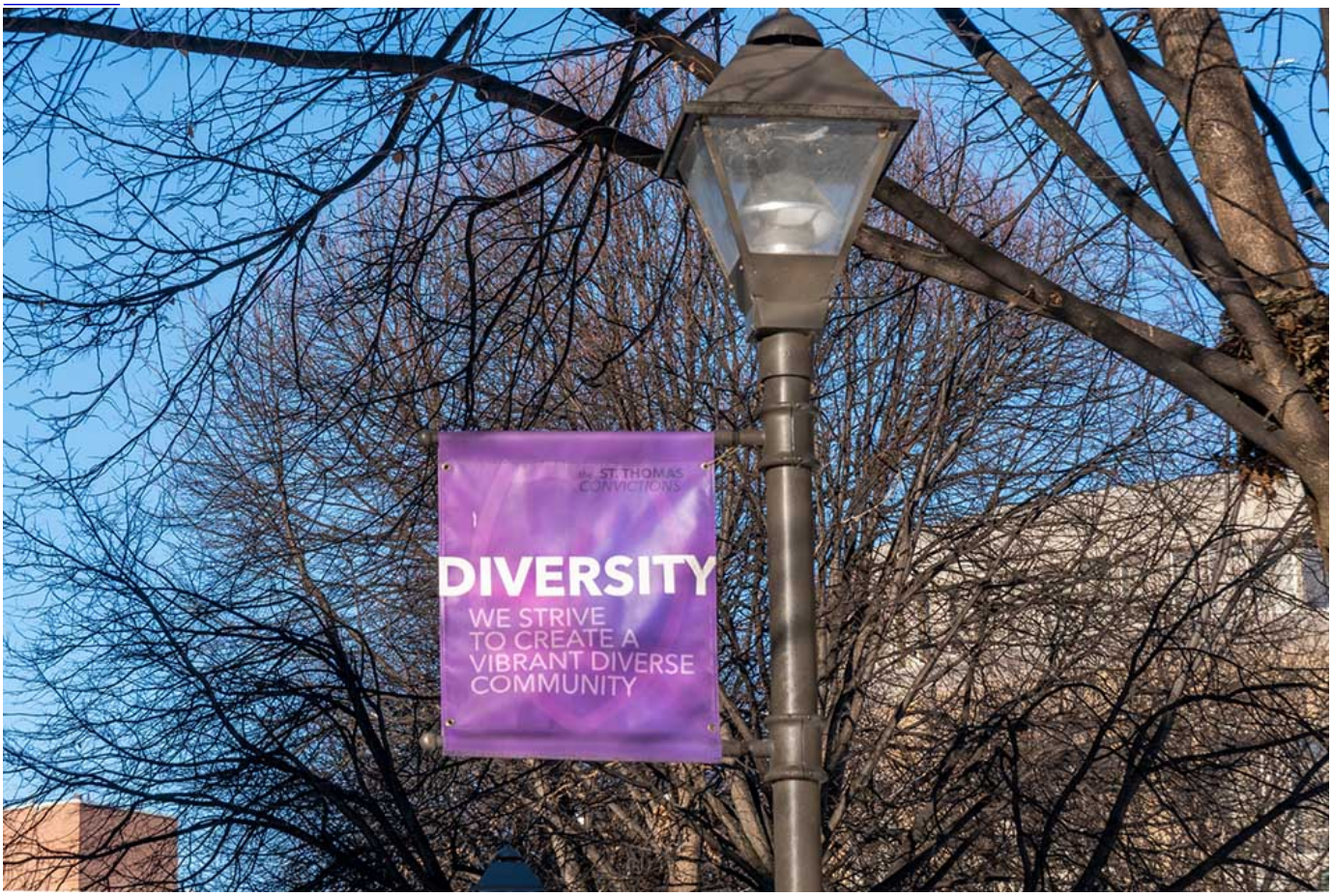
News
Vatican



A sign on the campus of the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, in January 2020 (Dreamstime/Ken Wolter)

by Liam Adams

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Catholic college students across the United States have expressed disappointment in the Vatican's March 15 decree banning priests from blessing same-sex unions. At least eight college newspapers have featured op-eds in recent weeks criticizing the decree, with many demanding their institutions rebuke the Vatican.

In interviews with NCR, three LGBT Catholic university students echoed those sentiments. One initially worried the new statement from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith might lead to judgment inside her family. Another worried about whether they might be able to marry one day.



Mia Laube, a student at the University of St. Thomas (Courtesy of Mia Laube)

Although the students recognize it is difficult for a Catholic university to issue a statement opposing the Vatican, they also want to see strong signs of support from their communities.

"When the pope says things that are potentially harmful to members of that Catholic institution and then the institution says or does nothing to protect its members, that is equally as damaging as if they were to come out and promote it themselves," said one of the students, an undergraduate at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, who asked not to be named for fear of reprisal.

The two other students, from Fairfield University in Connecticut and the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, described college experiences that have mostly been positive. The student from St. Thomas, Mia Laube, said: "For every wave of hate I have experienced, I have two waves of supporters saying, 'No, that's wrong, we don't want that here. We love you.' "

The Vatican decree told priests they could not offer blessings for same-sex couples because God "does not and cannot bless sin."

The student at Fairfield said she spoke with other members of her university's Gay-Straight Alliance about the decree. Some said it is an example of why they are not Catholic anymore.

In addition to Creighton, Fairfield and St. Thomas, students at Seton Hall University, Gonzaga University, St. Bonaventure University, St. Anslem College, Loyola Marymount University, St. Joseph's University and Mercyhurst University have protested the Vatican's decree in student newspaper articles or in op-eds.

The GLBTQ+ Leadership Council at Boston College drafted a petition that has garnered 275 signatures. It asks Boston's administration and its president, Jesuit Fr. William Leahy, to "clarify their position and to make a statement in support of Queer students and alumni."

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Explaining St. Thomas' position, university vice president for mission Fr. Larry Snyder said in a statement to NCR: "We were very concerned about the hurt and

pain they might be experiencing as a result of the [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's] statement. Thus, we thought the most helpful approach was direct outreach to our LGBTQIA+ community to offer our support, accompany them and listen to their concerns."

Snyder said the university sponsored a discussion for LGBTQ community members and that administration met with the queer faculty and staff group.

Lydia Cooper, an English professor at Creighton and a faculty adviser for the campus Gay-Straight Alliance, told NCR she was worried the Vatican decree would lead Creighton to roll back its health insurance benefits for employees in same-sex unions. She was relieved to learn that will not happen.

"Thanks to *Obergefell* [v. *Hodges*], I am legally in a relationship," Cooper said, referring to the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized same-sex marriage across the country. "But the Catholic church wouldn't consider it a relationship."

Cooper said that without a response to the Vatican from Creighton, she feels left with "this sense that the institution is extremely tolerant but is not really in a place to actively support queer students."



A view of Creighton University's campus in Omaha, Nebraska (Wikimedia Commons/Bluejayscholar)

Support, in the various forms it might come, is what LGBTQ students at Catholic institutions say they want most.

While the three students all said they feel mostly appreciated at their colleges as LGBTQ people, they have also dealt with situations that caused them discomfort. One mentioned a man who came to the University of St. Thomas campus to harass a gay adjunct professor. Another cited a comment from a student government candidate at Fairfield that offended LGBTQ students.

Whether or not their universities respond to the Vatican, there are other steps the students would like to see them take. Laube said she would like to see a physical space at St. Thomas for LGBTQ groups, similar to the university's Luann Dummer Center for Women.

The other two students are talking to their administrations about giving their Gay-Straight Alliance groups more freedom to hold events and to provide information to students about being Catholic and LGBTQ.

Said the Creighton student: "I feel that the institution needs to at least recognize that there is a disconnect, rather than assuming that there is harmony between both."

[Liam Adams is a Denver-based freelance reporter writing about religion. His work has also been featured in The Chronicle of Higher Education, Religion News Service, Sojourners, Baptist News Global and Christianity Today.]