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LGBT student organizations on Catholic campuses

by John McCarthy

NCR Today

As a bit of background, the note below was sent to me by Ryan Fecteau, the student at The Catholic University of America who helped to organize the unofficial LGBT student and ally group, CUAllies. Catholic University is the only official university of the church in the United States, founded in 1887 by the U.S. bishops with the support of Pope Leo XVI. This week, Notre Dame officially recognized an LGBT student group on campus, showing a stark contrast between CUA and Notre Dame's approach to LGBT inclusion on campuses. Please read Ryan's note and think about how we as a faith community can recognize the love of God most effectively in each of our brothers and sisters:

On October 15, 2012, over 30 student organization leaders sent a letter to President John Garvey of The Catholic University of America. The letter was titled "Open Letter to President John Garvey Regarding Princeton Review's Designation of CUA as the Sixth Least LGBTQ Friendly College or University in the United States". The four page letter outlined many of the concerns that students have regarding such designation from Princeton Review and also several steps that CUA could take moving forward. One of the proposals included official recognition for a student organization geared towards LGBTQ students.

Since February 21, 2012, a group of students submitted a proposal seeking official recognition for the organization CUAllies. The group aims to foster a safe, welcoming, and affirming outlet to students that identify as LGBTQ. Unlike a 2009 bid for official recognition that involved protesting and abrasive relationships with CUA administrations, the 2012 bid submitted a new vision, tone, and willingness to fully embrace Catholic identity. The group invited Fr. Peter Daly, a former CUA campus minister and current

pastor in Maryland, to speak on pastoral care for gay and lesbian people. The group held a campus-wide prayer vigil and procession. The group committed to service at the Missionaries of Charity. The group heard from a Catholic lesbian in Maryland who was denied communion at her mother's funeral; yet, still practices Catholicism. The group undoubtedly brought those who identify as LGBT to a place where they could participate in the Catholic faith.

CUA administrators considered the proposal for nine months until providing an answer on December 6, 2012. They determined the group could not be approved, because it "might become an advocacy organization." The answer came as a surprise given the University of Notre Dame's recent decision to approve an organization amongst other new initiatives geared towards LGBT students. It felt like I had worked on a paper without saving for nine months and suddenly my computer crashed -- losing all of it. If any university in the United States should understand and act to ensure that people participate in Catholicism and feel comfortable doing so, it should be The Catholic University of America. In essence, yesterday, Catholic University denied CUAllies and LGBT students communion. They said to us that we are not valued enough to participate in this community of faith.

President Garvey and other administrators promised the 15 students that attended a meeting with him yesterday that more discussion regarding the LGBT community will be had. He recognized that the University must do more. I am grateful for his recognition of this reality -- I am hopeful that progress will be made. I am hopeful that students who identify as LGBT will feel not only welcomed as a students, but as a participants in God's love through our Catholic Church. This means every facet at CUA must take a proactive approach towards fostering such a community -- including Campus Ministry, the Dean of Students, the Office of Campus Activities, and the President's Office.

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