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Gonzaga University to review Knights of Columbus group status

by Dan Morris-Young

Declaring concern "that all of the factors involved in this decision have not been represented in their entirety, and thus may be misunderstood," Gonzaga University has announced it will review denial of official student club status to a Knights of Columbus campus organization.

Gonzaga University president Thayne McCulloh "is personally conducting the review," according to Mary Joan Hahn, the school's director of community and public relations.

"He's moving through it as quickly as possible," she told *NCR* in an email, adding, "It needs to be thorough. At this point, it's uncertain specifically how long the review will take, but it's not expected to exceed the estimate."

According to news reports, the Knights of Columbus group was notified of the denial in March by Dean of Students Kassi Kain and Assistant Director for Student Activities David Rovick.

A letter explaining the decision, signed by Sue Weitz, vice president for Student Life, is quoted as saying the Knights of Columbus' all-male, Catholic-only membership criteria is "inconsistent with the policy and practice of student organization recognition at Gonzaga University, as well as the university's commitment to non-discrimination based on certain characteristics, one of which is religion."

The April 6 posting on the Gonzaga website said McCulloh "has received a request from the sponsoring student to review the institution's decision regarding the recognition of the organization as a student club, and has decided to undertake this review. The review is expected to take 30-45 days."

A Knights of Columbus College Council does operate on the Jesuit campus, but lacking official status, it

does not qualify for student government funds and may not officially use the Gonzaga name.

"News of the denial spread fast, mostly through religious periodicals," reported *The Spokesman-Review*, Spokane's daily newspaper, on Thursday. "The Catholic community, including GU alumni and parents of current students, are decrying what many are calling a hypocritical decision."

Reporter Jody Lawrence-Turner quoted Spokane resident and GU alumna Valerie Mullen as saying, "Maybe the people who made this decision are not familiar with the Knights of Columbus and the role they play in the Catholic church. I think someone at Gonzaga was not thinking when they made this decision."

The Knights of Columbus have established "college councils" on more than 275 U.S. college and university campuses, according to the Knights' website. Those schools include the University of Notre Dame, The Catholic University of America, Texas A&M University, the Air Force Academy, Louisiana State University and Harvard University.

Those college councils include more than 24,000 members, according to the website.

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"We estimate more than 100 individuals have shared their perspectives with us, including alums, parents, students," Hahn said. "Most people who have connected have no direct affiliation with the university."

"The majority have shared their concerns with the decision. Some have expressed support."

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