

Notre Dame-Backed Alumni Group Lauds Gay Marriage, Transgenderism

By Sean Salai

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — A new alumni group launched at the University of Notre Dame celebrated same-sex civil marriage and transgenderism on the Indiana campus over the April 8-10 weekend — with the Catholic university's official sponsorship. The Alumni Rainbow Community of Notre Dame (ARC) held its "ND LGBTQ+ Alumni — Past, Present & Future — A Celebration of Our Community's Journey" event from Friday to Sunday.

"We encourage everyone who has participated in this journey over the past 30+ years, as well as more recent alums, to join your fellow LGBTQ alums & friends for this fun and memorable celebration," the organization said in a press release promoting the gathering.

The events in South Bend included a Friday alumni networking event, Saturday night awards banquet and Palm Sunday Mass. Award recipients included 1982 alumnus Greg Bourke — who with his male spouse was a party to the U.S. Supreme Court's 2015 ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that legalized same-sex civil marriage — and "leading South Bend transgender LGBT activist" Meghan Buell. Holy Cross Father Joseph Corpora received the "Outstanding Faculty/Staff Award in Support of the ND LGBTQ+ Campus Community."

Catholic Response

Notre Dame alumni have called on the university's administration and alumni association to remove their sponsorship of the group for flaunting their opposition to Catholic teaching on marriage. But William Dempsey, president of the Sycamore Trust alumni group, said their protests have fallen on deaf ears. "Notre Dame's official blessing of an LGBT alumni group hostile to Church teaching on sex, marriage and gender has had its predictable result," Dempsey, who graduated from the school in 1952, told the Register in an email.

"The very first act of the new official LGBT organization is sponsorship of an 'LGBT Awards Weekend' to celebrate prominent proponents of same-sex marriage and gender change," added Dempsey, who has served on Sycamore Trust's board of directors since 2008. Dempsey called the awards banquet "a scandal of the first order" and a violation of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' declaration "Catholics in Political Life."

"Catholic institutions should not honor those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles. They should not be given awards, honors or platforms which would suggest support for their actions," the USCCB document says. Dempsey said both the university's president, Holy Cross Father John Jenkins, and the provincial of the Congregation of the Holy Cross have ignored multiple alumni complaints about their sponsorship of ARC. Notre Dame's alumni association did not respond to a request for comment.

But in a June 25 news release announcing that ARC would replace the unofficial Gay and Lesbian Alumni of Notre Dame and St. Mary's (GALA), the university defended its decision to create the group. "We have spent many months collaborating with the GALA-ND/SMC organization to incorporate their supportive mission into the fabric of our affinity groups structure," Dolly Duffy, executive director of the alumni association, said in the news release. "Today, I am so pleased to take this important step toward ensuring our LGBTQ alumni and allies always feel they have a home at Notre Dame," added Duffy, who is also associate vice president for university relations.

Before Notre Dame created ARC, GALA held LGBT alumni weekends outside of university sponsorship, but the school said those gatherings hadn't been held since 2019 due to COVID-19. After two years of pandemic-enforced cancellations, the university's alumni reunion weekend is now scheduled to return to campus June 2-5. The Alumni Rainbow Community will now be a more official part of the university's annual summer gatherings.

The Latest Step

According to Dempsey, the "LGBT" alumni celebrations on campus are the most recent manifestations of a long pattern of questionable actions during Father Jenkins' presidency, which began in 2005. One of the earliest occurrences was his approval of student stagings of the pornographic play *The Vagina Monologues*, which endorses lesbian activity, despite protests that included a statement of condemnation in 2008 from Bishop John

D'Arcy of South Bend, Indiana. Another instance documented by the Sycamore Trust was the university's financial support in 2009 for students participating in a "Gay Rights March" in 2009 in Washington, D.C., seeking recognition of same-sex marriage.

But probably the most significant tipping point in favor of endorsing "LGBT" advocacy occurred in December 2012, when Father Jenkins approved the formation of a student "LGBT" club called PRISM. That decision occurred following an intense campaign by campus activists in favor of the club and its endorsement by Notre Dame's student and faculty senates.

Another controversial move took place in October 2014, when Father Jenkins extended spousal benefits to same-sex married spouses of Notre Dame employees. Bishop Kevin Rhoades of South Bend, who had succeeded Bishop D'Arcy in 2010, responded by publishing a column criticizing that decision. "As a Catholic university, it is important that Notre Dame continues to affirm its fidelity to Catholic teaching on the true nature of marriage as a union of one man and one woman," Bishop Rhoades stated.

And in 2019, ARC's predecessor organization, GALA, was granted permission by the university to host a campus event honoring South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg, who was then running for the Democratic Party's 2020 presidential nomination, alongside of a panel discussion supporting same-sex married teachers at Catholic schools. Buttigieg, who is civilly married to a man and is now serving as transportation secretary in the Biden administration, was subsequently appointed as a 2020-2021 faculty fellow at the Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Study.

"Even just the breakthrough of even having an organization on campus recognized — better late than never — shows you that there's a trajectory here," Buttigieg said at the 2019 event, the Notre Dame Observer reported. "I wish the clock was ticking a little faster than it has been, but I do think you have a lot of people here who want to do the right thing."

'Secular Standards'

Notre Dame senior Mary Frances Myler, editor of the independent student-run newspaper The Irish Rover, critiqued the university's attempt to balance Catholic teaching with "secular standards set by the LGBT movement" in an Oct. 13 editorial. When asked for comment, she referred back to an interview she gave to the Register on Oct. 22. In that interview she quoted the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, responding last March 15 to a question from the German bishops about blessing same-sex unions.

The congregation wrote, "The Church recalls that God Himself never ceases to bless each of His pilgrim children in this world, because for Him 'we are more important to God than all of the sins that we can commit.' But he does not and cannot bless sin: He blesses sinful man, so that he may recognize that he is part of his plan of love and allow himself to be changed by him. He in fact 'takes us as we are, but never leaves us as we are.'"

Myler told the Register that Notre Dame's celebration of "LGBT" rainbow symbols and "allyship" often seems to "bless sin" in this way. "It's the lack of clarity about the meaning of the symbols that is confusing," the senior said. "There is a charitable way to read some nuance into the administration's actions and try to square them with Catholic teaching, but that's not the only way to interpret the symbols, and, in fact, it's not the most obvious interpretation."

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