

# Eight Ways Students Can Resist Bad Policy

## Catholic colleges have the duty to bear clear witness to the saving message of the Gospel.

by E. Christian Brugger

**Q.** Do you have any advice for a parent who found out her child's Catholic college is allowing biological men and women to room together if one or more of the students identifies as the opposite sex?

**A.** St. Paul says in Ephesians, "Be angry but do not sin." But he doesn't say, "Don't be angry!" Anger is exactly what I felt when I read your question about this morally compromised institution for failing in its one overarching duty. As apostolates of the Catholic Church, Catholic colleges have the duty to bear perspicuous witness to the saving message of the Gospel — including its call to discipleship and moral rectitude — through the ministry of offering excellence in higher education. When they undermine that witness by instituting gravely immoral policies, they betray Christ and his Church.

However much we may sympathize with the distress experienced by gender-confused individuals, we mustn't lose sight of the fact that although a man can feel like he is a woman and a woman can feel like she is a man, he can never become a woman, and she can never become a man. Pretending otherwise, and forcing others to do so, harms the confused individuals as well as the community. The question is how best to reply to this instance of what Pope Francis aptly calls "ideological colonization."

You are a stakeholder in this college and so have a right to speak up against its unjust policies. You might consider letting the college know that not only do you as a committed Catholic take offense at this policy, but that you are prepared to take action to have it rescinded. I offer here a few examples of actions you might take. The list does not exhaust the possibilities, but I hope it will help you begin thinking about the question.

1. After getting irrefutable evidence of the bad policy, approach the college's student housing office and request a different roommate for your child if he or she is directly threatened by the policy. Better yet, request that your child be permitted to transfer to a residence hall that doesn't allow such nonsense. (For the sake of your child's welfare, I strongly recommend that you adopt at least this recommendation. The others I leave to your discernment.)
2. Approach the senior administration of the college and formally petition that the policy be rescinded. Explain clearly and respectfully the reasons you think this policy is bad for your child, the college, and even for the gender-confused individuals.
3. Find out the names of the college's board members or board of regents. (Check its website under tabs such as "About" or "Leadership," call the administration office and request their names and contact information, or look up the college's publicly filed documents with the state's secretary of state or other relevant government agencies.) Then ask around to find out if any of the members may be sympathetic to your complaint, approach him or her, and discuss possible means of recourse for getting the policy rescinded. If you find no one to be an inside ally, you might still request a meeting with the chair or with the whole board to voice your concerns — if possible, in collaboration with other concerned parents.
4. Publicize the situation to other parents, to alumni, and to other college stakeholders — especially, if possible, to big donors. Seek to put collective pressure, especially financial pressure, on the college to rescind its policy.
5. Approach your bishop and ask him to intervene. As shepherd of the faithful in his diocese, what is he going to do to protect vulnerable students from the college's anti-Catholic policy? Ask him to consider threatening to remove the designation "Catholic" if the college fails to uphold the divinely revealed truth that each human being is created in God's image as male or female.

6. Bring negative media attention to the controversial policy. College administrators generally have a strong allergy against becoming a lightning rod for controversy. See if any reputable secular media sources might pick up the story. Try also to contact reputable Catholic media.
7. Consider filing a lawsuit against the college. I don't know if this is possible. The college must have a mission/vision/values statement that specifies its Catholic identity. The Catholic Church clearly teaches the truths of human sexual difference and complementarity and their orientation toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2333), and the Church condemns all efforts to obscure or erase sexual difference. See especially Paragraphs 55-59 of the recently published Vatican document, *Dignitas Infinita*, including the strong statement: "All attempts to obscure reference to the ineliminable sexual difference between man and woman are to be rejected" (59). The college's noxious housing/roommate policy seems contrary to these teachings. You might consider consulting a trustworthy legal organization such as Alliance Defending Freedom for legal advice on the matter.
8. Transfer to another college.

Most of us find confrontation unpleasant. This is especially true with those whose lives are characterized by the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). To fulfill any of the above recommendations will doubtlessly require personal courage, grit, and determination in the face of resistance. I encourage you to pray for both the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the courage to do whatever he tells you.

In the end, success in matters like this is beyond our control, but faithfulness is not. Even when our requests are given no redress, including by the institutional Church, our witness to what's good and true will be noted — in this case by the college, by those from whom you seek assistance, and, especially, by your child, who (like all our children) needs constant evangelization.

When St. Polycarp was being led to his death in the arena in the second century, tradition tells us that a voice came from heaven, saying, "Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man." These are fitting — and fighting! — words for all who face the prospect of defending what is right.

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