

November 15, 2018

Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.  
Archbishop of Denver  
1300 South Steele Street  
Denver, CO 80210-2599

Dear Archbishop Aquila,

Thank you for your letter of October 31, 2018 and for your expressions of concern. I hear and understand your concerns.

Very respectfully, I would like to respond to a number of points in your letter, and above all, address the broader civic, university, and pastoral context in which the Queer Resource Alliance, with the approval of the Provost, issued its recommendations in the campus announcement dated October 29, 2018.

The announcement, it is important to note, was a direct response to proposed changes in federal policy that would eliminate federal protections for transgender people. Historically and even to this day, as you know, visibility, for persons in the LGBTQ community is terrifying. Too often visibility can mean death, the real threat of physical and emotional harm; to be exposed is to invite innumerable forms of discrimination. For us, the Gospel call to accompany and care for “the least” requires a clear and public commitment to defend the sacred dignity and rights of the most vulnerable members of society.

For Regis University, *cura personalis* means a commitment to ensure that every member of our community feels safe and welcome on our campus. No student or staff member who, in conscience before God, identifies as lesbian, gay, or transgender, should ever be made to feel unsafe or unwelcome in our company. If the church, in Pope Francis’s striking image, is called to be a “field hospital after battle,” then our LGBTQ students often come to us as the most deeply wounded of society’s citizens. They yearn for a community where they might find genuine welcome, friendship, and love.

While visibility for them is dangerous, invisibility implies another kind of death. The Queer Resource Alliance was established with the intention that no person at Regis would ever feel alone or fearful such that they might choose to remain invisible. Our gay, lesbian, and transgender students are not abstractions. No less than our heterosexual students, they are persons with beautiful names, stories, and journeys of discovery that we are privileged to share. As Pope Francis puts it, “In life, God accompanies persons, and we must accompany them, starting from their situation. It is necessary to accompany them with mercy.”

For us, to accompany LGBTQ persons with the mercy of Christ means allowing them the dignity of telling their stories and naming their experience in terms that ring true for them, even while critically examining those terms in light of Catholic teaching. It is for this reason that Regis University, like many other Catholic universities across the United States, creates a supportive space for LGBTQ students. Our doing so parallels the special care we extend to African-American and Latinx students, to students who are veterans, to students with disabilities, and other groups whose minority status calls out from us a special response of care.

There is no question that certain aspects of what Pope Francis and others have called “gender ideology” are deeply problematic in light of Catholic teachings on sexuality and the dignity of the human person. As emphasized by panelists in a recent symposium held at the University of Notre Dame (reported by CRUX, November 7, 2018), the moral and social implications of emerging secular norms and practices linked to gender theory must be critically questioned and sometimes, to be sure, vigorously resisted. Regis University, like other Catholic universities, thus serves the Church by maintaining a holy balance between supporting LGBTQ students and doing so critically. Father James Martin, consultant to the Vatican Secretariat for Communications, underscores the importance of our complete commitment to the dignity of persons and the dignity of Church teaching. “It is important for the institutional church to understand the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Catholics. It is also important for this group of Catholics to understand what the church believes and teaches.” The recent synod in Rome offered a powerful witness to the kind of mutual listening and dialogue with young people that Father Martin advocates. It was a sign of hope and healing in the suffering body of Christ.

To take one example of how Regis University strikes this balance, a major session of our recent symposium, *The Vision of Pope Francis: Mercy in a Suffering World*, featured Bishop Stephen Biegler of the Diocese of Cheyenne, Wyoming, and a lay Catholic married couple witnessing to the graces they have found through Marriage Encounter and in Pope Francis’s *Amoris Laetitia*. Further examples abound: many of our core curriculum classes for traditional undergraduates include sustained discussions of human sexuality, with Catholic teaching holding a prominent place in the dialogue. To engage the depth and breadth of church teachings with young people in a sustained way is one of the great privileges and graces of the Jesuit university classroom. In an analogous way, while a “Drag Show” might appear out of place on a Jesuit, Catholic campus, once again, such events, like the Queer Resource Alliance, open a safe space, a merciful space, if you will, for LGBTQ students to show their care and support for one another. The event is private, open only to Regis students, faculty, and staff, and includes a panel conversation that engages Catholic teaching on human sexuality.

I do not say that we embody our Jesuit, Catholic values perfectly, without error or room for improvement. I can say that we are deeply committed as a Catholic institution to embodying the full range of the Church’s teachings and to meeting our students where they are, to

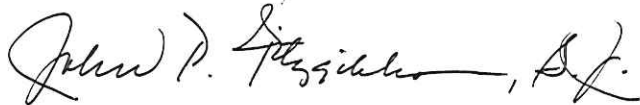


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accompanying them lovingly and mercifully in their growth as whole persons. Our fidelity is not to ideologies, it is to persons and to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Thank you again, Archbishop Aquila, for your letter, and I look forward to meeting with you to discuss these matters in person.

Sincerely,



John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J.  
President

Cc: Very Reverend Ronald A. Mercier, S.J., UCS Provincial