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National Clergy Council Applauds Tufts University for Reestablishing Religious Freedom on Campus

Attempt to censure and expel Tufts Christian Fellowship student group thwarted

Washington, DC, May 19, 2000--The National Clergy Council applauds the Committee on Student Life at Tufts University for its unanimous decision on Monday, May 15, to restore official university recognition to the Tufts Christian Fellowship (TCF). That courageous and just action by the Committee effectively nullified a late-night punitive attempt by the student judiciary on April 13 to "de-recognize" the TCF: that is, to silence, expel from campus facilities, and strip \$5,700 of student activity funding from the TCF merely for refusing to allow practicing, unrepentant homosexuals to serve as student leaders and religious/moral role models for its own constituency.

While we rejoice with the students and staff of the TCF, we lament the continuing plight of embattled evangelical Christian student groups on five campuses. Other local chapters of the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) have either been expelled from campus (Grinnell College and Whitman College) or had their student activity funding frozen (Middlebury College) on the same grounds that the Tufts student judiciary cited. Three institutions (Ball State University, Williams College, and Middlebury College) have promulgated official policies that threaten the same results.

We deplore those actions and charge the administrations of Grinnell College, Whitman College, Middlebury College, Ball State University, and Williams College with several egregious offenses against the free exercise of religious preference and academic freedom on their campus:

1. An arrogant, self-righteous, coercive imposition of a radical ideology of sexual diversity masquerading as a universal principle of "non-discrimination";
2. A mean-spirited, prejudiced, bigoted assault on the religious and moral identity and internal polity of evangelical Christians;
3. A repressive, highly selective, hypocritical punitive policy directed at only one student

religious organization among several on campus that may share a common or a similar moral standard for student leadership positions.

We understand that the offending colleges and university purport to protect students from "harassment" or "discrimination" on the basis of "sexual orientation" or "affectional orientation," among other selective categories of human behavior or identity. But even that ambitious policy provides no excuse for the unwarranted and unwelcome intrusion into the community life of any student religious organization on any campus, whether publicly or privately supported. Such an action insults the intelligence of the IVCF students and their leaders, betrays an intolerant, totalitarian fear of genuine religious diversity on campus, and enacts the kind of "harassment" and "discrimination" that the several colleges and university pledge to prevent on campus in the first place.

The members of the NCC, therefore, summon the administrations of Grinnell College, Whitman College, Middlebury College, Ball State University, and Williams College--and any other college or university that may be contemplating similar actions--to practice in earnest the tolerance and diversity they like to preach.

In particular, we urge the public officials of the state of Indiana to hold Ball State University accountable for its miscreant behavior and to use appropriate constitutional or legislative means to conform that public university's policies to the will of the tax-paying citizens of Indiana.

As for the four liberal arts colleges, as private institutions of higher learning they may be constrained by neither the principles of U.S. Constitutional law nor the citizens and legislatures in their home states. But those institutions are still legally and morally bound to abide by their own published guarantees to students and parents alike to protect the religious freedom and freedom of association of all of their students--not only those who may be deemed politically or religiously "correct." Any violation of those guarantees is a breach of promise, certainly in contravention of the biblical concepts of justice and righteousness, and perhaps even subject to legal action.

It is, however, ultimately a matter of honor for all five of these citadels of academe, following the example of Tufts University, to right a wrong that they have perpetrated by restoring the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship to its proper, fully recognized, and fully-funded place among the panoply of diverse student religious organizations on their respective campuses. The administration of each institution also ought to pledge in an official announcement that neither the IVCF nor any other student religious organization will have to endure such witch-hunts in the future.

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