

A Catholic university is hosting a fundraiser for Planned Parenthood. Yes, you read that right

Even today, the news makes you say, “Wait, what?!” One of Loyola Marymount University’s student groups will be hosting a fundraiser for Planned Parenthood on Friday, Nov. 5 with the university’s official approval – not sponsorship, but approval, since the group – LMU Women in Politics – will be holding it in one of the university’s dining rooms. The university isn’t approving an academic debate, the group RenewLMU argues, but giving “an in-kind donation to the nation’s largest abortion provider.” RenewLMU describes itself as “an alliance to strengthen LMU’s Catholic identity.”

Loyola Marymount is a Jesuit university in Los Angeles that teaches almost 10,000 students. In [an open letter](#) to the university’s president, Dr. Timothy Law Snyder, the group pointed to Planned Parenthood’s recent history, including the gruesome sale of fetal body parts, and to Pope Francis’ thorough rejection of abortion. Heading off the usual Catholic excuse for supporting Planned Parenthood, the letter hopes Snyder will “see through rationalizations that ‘Planned Parenthood does more than just abortions.’ The mafia also produces olive oil.”

Written by a graduate with three degrees from the university, the letter suggests the sponsors pick a better group to support. Samantha Stephenson argues for “one that more effectively supports women’s dignity and whose primary purposes are not at odds with the Catholic Church” and “affirms rather than undermines the dignity of women.”

Stephenson, who hosts the bioethics podcast "Brave New Us," is writing a book for OSV titled "Reclaiming Motherhood: Faith and Bioethics in a Culture of Confusion" that is scheduled to be published in the fall of 2022. Studying at LMU, she said in an interview with LiveAction.org, "I grew deeply in my understanding of social justice, in my awareness of issues surrounding homelessness and immigration, and I consider these to fall under the umbrella of pro-life: of affirming the dignity of each and every human being, no matter the situation."

Why would a Catholic university do this? It either accepts legal abortion as a tolerable practice, if not a good, or it finds itself in a tricky situation in which someone will object to whatever it does. I'm guessing the second.

I suspect that, as often happens in large institutions, one group decided to do something those in charge may or may not agree with, and the intermediate authorities approved it. When someone notices and protests to the people at the top, they see that the internal costs of stopping it will be high. The safest thing is just to let it go and not respond to the protesters. The controversy will die out and it won't hurt the institution's finances or reputation. If it alienates anyone, they're probably alienated already. The harm it will do to the institution's identity will be invisible.

In response to my query, the university provided a two-paragraph response. (They did not put it on their website or on social media.) "LMU remains committed to its Catholic, Jesuit and Marymount heritage, values and intellectual traditions, taking its fundamental inspiration from the founding orders that enliven its threefold mission," it begins. It appeals to *Ex Corde Ecclesiae's* belief in the unity of truth and Pope Francis' belief that Catholic universities must "enter bravely into the current culture and open dialogue" to explain its commitment to "freedom of expression, inquiry and speech."

The university encourages students to create student organizations, it continues in the second paragraph, that “enrich our educational environment and foster dialogue that often invites varying or opposing viewpoints.” The university explains that “the events, actions or positions of student organizations, including Women in Politics, are not endorsed by the university. The fundraiser being hosted by Women in Politics is not a university-sponsored event. However, the existence of these student organizations and their activities are living examples that LMU embraces its mission, commitments and the complexities of free and honest discourse.”

Yes to the first paragraph, but no to the second in relation to the question at hand. The university’s not just encouraging “free and honest discourse.” It’s allowing students to raise money to abort children. In the terms of Catholic moral teaching, the university is materially cooperating in funding abortions – at a distance, of course, through intermediaries. But giving permission to the student group to use the university’s facilities leads directly to the provision of abortions.

The university itself would make this distinction. As Stephenson says in the interview, “If this were a fundraiser for the KKK, for anti-immigration policies, for a group that intentionally marginalized the homeless, there would be no place for it on LMU’s campus. It simply wouldn’t be tolerated.”

Suppose some student group with the innocuous name The History and Heritage Society secured a dining hall for a banquet to be addressed by a white “identitarian.” His racism is no more opposed to Catholic social teaching than Planned Parenthood’s abortion of children. I will give you any odds that the university would revoke the permission right away, as it should. Their official statement would read much differently.

Catholic universities are human institutions, challenged by

and sometimes formed by the world. They serve conflicting constituencies. Most of their conflicts can be handled through discussion and argument, but not all. It's a very difficult thing to do, to run a university engaging the world in the way Francis describes without becoming worldly or retreating into a kind of Catholic fortress. The second keeps the university safe, but at the cost of giving its student a incomplete education.

So I'm not unsympathetic to Loyola Marymount's problem here. But still, the university shouldn't aid students in raising money for Planned Parenthood. That's not encouraging dialogue, it's encouraging abortion.

David Mills writes from Pennsylvania.