

CAMPUS LIFE

SCOTUS ruling makes Catholic college LGBT group hopeful for future

By Cathryn Asip June 30, 2015 2:45 pm

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The crowd reacts as the ruling on same-sex marriage was announced outside of the Supreme Court in Washington, Friday June 26, 2015. The Supreme Court declared Friday that same-sex couples have a right to marry anywhere in the US. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)

Last week's Supreme Court decision on marriage equality sent largely celebratory shockwaves through the nation's capital. But pockets of Washington's population have been rattled by the decision, including the District's Catholic colleges and universities, which are still struggling to find

a place in an evolving city and a divided Catholic Church.

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The Catholic University of America (CUA), most notably, has wrestled with its support of the LGBT community for decades. The university has recognized an LGBT group dating as far back as the 1980s but later [disbanded](#) the organization, according to student Stephen Morris.

Morris serves as the co-director of [CUAllies](#), an unofficial organization supporting the campus's LGBT community. CUAllies has been making waves since its inception in 2009 when the university denied the group's application to be an official student club. Catholic's official spokesman Victor Nakas told the [Washington Post](#) that officially recognizing the group would be supporting advocacy work against the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church remains officially opposed to same-sex marriage. In a [statement](#) immediately following the SCOTUS decision, Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, who is president of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB), called the decision "a tragic error that harms the common good and most vulnerable among us, especially children." The USCCB is headquartered in Washington, D.C., just steps away from CUA's campus.

As an openly gay CUA student, Morris credits his coming out to the tremendous support of his peers and the mental healthcare services available at CUA. But he says he feels disappointed in the administration's reticence to acknowledge and support its gay students, as evidenced by its treatment of CUAllies.

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The decision of CUA President John Garvey and others to rebuff the group's repeated attempts at legitimacy is "both a blatant display of discrimination and in contradiction with the purpose of a university, a place which is supposed to be a center of growth, learning and discussion," Morris says. "We find both of these offenses all the more egregious considering our location in our nation's capital."

But Morris says CUAllies finds solace in the strides being made at the national and university level.

On the other side of town, Georgetown University — the nation's [oldest Catholic university](#) — has taken a vastly different approach to its LGBT community. Georgetown's LGBT Resource Center is an influential force on campus and hosts a variety of [campus-wide events](#), including Coming Out Month, Gender Liberation Week and a variety of guest lectures and discussions. The Center was founded in August 2008 — one year before the establishment of CUAllies.

Georgetown distinguishes the Center's on-campus presence as part of its mission as a Catholic

and Jesuit university. On the Center's website, Rev. Kevin O'Brien, executive director of campus ministry, [wrote the following statement](#): "In the Jesuit tradition of *cura personalis*, we are committed to caring for the whole person – mind, body, and spirit."

Father O'Brien said the Center's mission is to help students navigate and reconcile their faith with their sexual orientation.

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The disparity in attitudes between these two District colleges mirrors attitudes within the broader Catholic community. Despite the Church's official stance on same-sex marriage, roughly six in 10 Catholics in the U.S. support marriage equality, according to a [June 2015 poll by the Pew Research Center](#).

CUAllies remains hopeful that its efforts will one day be recognized by CUA and the Catholic community at large.

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