

Campus Alignment with Catholic Teachings: Responses and Reactions

By: Gracelyn Giese

On Wednesday, Sept. 18, St. Norbert College Students received an email titled “An Update on St. Norbert College’s Alignment with Catholic Teachings.” To the surprise of many students, the college shared that they will be changing current policies to better align with policies outlined in “Dignitas Infinitas.”

The email, sent from Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. Joe Webb, informed students that “This spring, the Catholic Church released Dignitas Infinita, a document that clarifies how the church views the relationship between sex and gender, recognizing two sexes. In response, St. Norbert College is updating its language, while maintaining our steadfast commitment to supporting every community member.”

Giving a deeper insight into Dignitas Infinitas, Reverend Matthew Dougherty explained that “Dignitas Infinita is a declaration of the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith, the doctrine office of the Vatican. It is a teaching document that articulates and clarifies the Catholic Church's teaching on human dignity. Among other things, Dignitas Infinita clarified the Church's teachings on the relationship between sex and gender, recognizing two sexes. The declaration was approved by Pope Francis on March 25, 2024.”

The decision to closely follow the new statement on sex and gender came from the Norbertines of the St. Norbert Abbey as well as the executive committee of the Board of Trustees. Students will be seeing their changes in “language around gender expression and gender identity in policies, signage, and the website.”

Still, Reverend Matthew noted “Inclusivity is one of our college’s core values; it is at the heart of who we are. Our Catholic and Norbertine values remind us to love one another. This alignment in no way changes the college’s ongoing commitment to creating a safe and supportive community where every individual is deeply respected. If any member of our community

experiences bigotry or hatred, we encourage them to report it through the appropriate channels, such as the Title IX Office or Student Inclusion and Belonging.”

However, Assistant Professor of Theology and Religious Studies Dr. Craig Ford had a different outlook on the situation. He stated that the changes St. Norbert is making are elective and not all Catholic colleges are responding the same way. He shared that, “Reading of the document is selective,” and that “none of the affront to human dignity are being responded to.”

Dr. Ford also spoke on behalf of the students who are most at risk from the changes: individuals who identify as nonbinary or transgender. “There may be higher rates of suicide [or] depression among an already vulnerable population struggling with these issues. Transgender and nonbinary people are owed an explanation for their mental wellbeing as an interpretation of the document.”

Also voicing concern for students, the Progressive Student Union posted a statement on Thursday, Sept. 19, to their Instagram page @sncprogressives. They stated, “Let us be clear: as a group and as students, we are disgusted. The removal of inclusive language is a step backwards. As an organization dedicated to promoting progressive policies, this decision from the college administration could not be more misaligned with our ideals and the Norbertine values of radical hospitality.”

Students, faculty and staff alike all hold strong opinions on the changes outlined in Dignitas Infinitas, and the “St. Norbert Times” will continue to cover these developments as they progress.