

March 28, 2017

Dear Fr. Joseph M. McShane, S.J.,

As U.S. Catholic academics, clergy, and religious, we are seriously troubled by the refusal [made on December 22nd, 2016] by Dean Eldredge to recognize the Fordham campus chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). We strongly urge you to reconsider your decision to deny the chapter as this is inconsistent with the values of the Gospel as well as both the spirit and practice of Catholic social teaching.

Jesus clearly reaches out to those on the margins and those being unjustly treated by any social, religious, or political groups. Jesus creates conditions for these voices to be heard. Notably, Jesus even takes considerable social and physical risks to do this, even to the point of offering his very life. Catholic social teaching develops this mission for our times and has clearly highlighted the preference for the poor and marginalized, solidarity, human rights, and the common good of all.

In addition, Pope Francis and the Vatican have supported lifting up the voices of Palestinians by recognizing Palestine as a state. The U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops has also worked tirelessly to create space for Palestinian voices, while affirming the legitimate needs of Israel. They have spoken out for Palestinian Christians, for those suffering in Gaza, against settlements, and for the programs of Catholic Relief Services in Palestinian territories.¹ The U.S. Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), serving the leaders of U.S. Catholic men's religious institutes, has also worked hard on this issue. Based on the testimony and request from Palestinian Christian religious leaders, CMSM has even challenged those profiting from illegal settlements by endorsing the boycott of such companies.

Yet, Dean Eldredge's email denying the campus chapter stated: "While students are encouraged to promote diverse political points of view, and we encourage conversation and debate on all topics, I cannot support an organization whose sole purpose is advocating political goals of a specific group, and against a specific country, when these goals clearly conflict with and run contrary to the mission and values of the University." As explained above, such denial by a Catholic university seems inconsistent with the mission and values of Jesus and Catholic social teaching. Further, many Catholic academic institutions have permitted Palestinian solidarity groups.² Such groups are resisting an illegal occupation, rather than being against a country.

Others have raised concerns that such denial may not only violate First Amendment principles, the non-discriminatory academic principles to which Fordham claims to uphold but also a violation the Civil Rights Act of 1964.³ Although we are not experts on these issues, we do encourage serious attention to such concerns.

¹ A recent statement from a collection of Catholic Bishops: <http://catholicnews.org.uk/hlc-final-communique-2017>

² Benedictine University, Boston College, DePaul University, Georgetown University, Lewis University, Loyola University – Chicago, Loyola University - New Orleans, Marquette University, Manhattan College, Saint Xavier University, Santa Clara University, Seton Hall University, Saint Joseph's College, University of Dayton

³ Fordham University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, age, sex, gender, national origin, marital or parental status, sexual orientation, citizenship status, veteran status, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic predisposition, carrier status, or any other basis prohibited by law. This policy is strictly enforced by the University, and alleged violations receive prompt attention and appropriate corrective action. The University will take steps to prevent discrimination and harassment, to prevent the recurrence of discrimination and harassment, to prevent retaliation for bringing a claim or assisting in an investigation, and will take appropriate action to remedy the effects of discrimination and harassment.

Overall, we are deeply alarmed by the unjustly censored and isolating message this decision sends to Fordham students and the broader community. We call on the administration and other staff members of Fordham University to recommit and uphold the mission and values of our Catholic tradition by granting the SJP club status with Fordham University.

Respectfully,

Drew Christianson, S.J.
Georgetown University
School of Foreign Service
Distinguished Professor of Ethics and Global Human Development

William O'Neill, S.J.
Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara
Associate Professor of Ethics

Fr. Ray Kemp
Georgetown University
President's Office
Professor of Theology

Eli McCarthy
Georgetown University
Justice and Peace Studies

Erin Brigham
University of San Francisco
Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought

John Sniegocki
Xavier University
Associate Professor of Christian Ethics
Director of Justice and Peace Studies

Terrance Rynne
Marquette University
Peace Studies

Alex Mikulich
Loyola University
Jesuit Social Research Institute

MT Davila
Andover Newton Theological School
Associate Professor of Christian Ethics

William Collinge
Mount St. Mary's University
Theology and Philosophy

Kathryn Schetlick
University of Virginia

David McBriar, OFM
Franciscan Friar
Siena College

Fr. Jacek Orzechowski, OFM
Chair of JPIC Directorate
Franciscan Friars of Holy Name Province

Fr. John Morris, OP
Promoter, Justice and Peace
Western Dominican Province

Fr. Edgardo Jara Araya, OFM
St. Camillus Parish
Archdiocese of Washington DC

Fr. Erick López, OFM
St. Camillus Parish
Archdiocese of Washington DC

Joseph Rozansky, OFM
Formation Director
Holy Name OFM Province

Cecelia Lavan, OP
Social Justice Coordinator
Dominican Sisters

Joan Agro, OP
Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, NY

Jo-Anne Faillace OP
Dominican Sisters

Patricia Chaffee, OP, PhD
Racine Dominicans

Sr. Marcia Simms, SSS

Jim Rauner, Deacon
Immaculate Conception Parish
Diocese of Kalamazoo

Fr. John Sullivan
New York

David Dombrowiak
Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre

Dorothy Maxwell
Dominican College

Beryl Herdt
Allied Health
Dominican College