

# Special meeting with President and Provost

October 21, 2019

16 members of the Staff Council, along with invited guest Michelle Clements (VP of Human Resources), met with President Sundborg and Provost Martin to discuss Fr. Steve's decision to remove referrals to Planned Parenthood (PP) from the Seattle University website and the subsequent events.

This was the Staff Council's first meeting with Fr. Steve since the SUSC's first meeting in March 2019 when Fr. Steve first delivered the charge. This was the Staff Council's first meeting with Provost Martin.

## Remarks from President Sundborg and Provost Martin

Fr. Steve began with a recap of events thus far: earlier this fall, he was contacted by a national organization called Students for Life with a concern about a referral to Planned Parenthood on the Seattle University website, given the Catholic Church's stance on abortion and PP being a provider of abortion (among many other health services). Fr. Steve responded to their message, and instructed David Powers, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, to remove the referral from within the A&S website. (A similar set of events occurred in 2011, when there were 3 referrals to PP on the SU website, which Fr. Steve had removed.) After its removal, several articles were published in The Spectator, the student newspaper, about this issue sparking a lot of controversy and discussion across campus regarding Fr. Steve's decision.

Fr. Steve and Shane met with a group of faculty from Academic Assembly to hear faculty concerns about the decision. They planned to meet with members of the SGSU and College of

Arts and Sciences Faculty Staff Senate in the near future. Additionally, on Wednesday, October 16, students held a protest in the administration building. Fr. Steve cancelled his normal schedule and met with several small groups of students throughout the day to listen to their concerns; Shane Martin, Tim Leary, and Anne Moran sat in on some of the meetings with students as well.

One of the many things Fr. Steve heard from students is that this decision signaled to many that they were not welcomed or supported at Seattle U. So moving forward, Fr. Steve has three major concerns: 1) How do we counter-signal and show students that we care for them and their health and accessing the resources they need? 2) How do we underline our moral and academic freedom as students, staff and faculty? 3) How do we protect our identity as a Jesuit Catholic university?

Seattle U was founded as a Jesuit Catholic university, and as such we cannot officially endorse an organization that performs abortions, and Fr. Steve feels responsible for protecting our Catholic identity and status. Fr. Steve emphasized that all people are free to make their own moral choices and faculty and staff are free to advise students, and refer students to Planned Parenthood, if they feel compelled to do so.

A larger theme emerged throughout this conversation: Some staff, faculty, and students feel alienated and excluded because of the treatment of this situation. They are concerned that they do not belong at Seattle University.

It is important for the university that we clarify the expectations, responsibilities, and freedoms of faculty and staff. The university does not monitor or restrict faculty and staff for any professional (or personal affiliation) with Planned Parenthood. Fr. Steve and Provost Martin both

reiterated that while "academic freedom" technically applies to tenured faculty, that the concept generally applies to all faculty and staff.

Provost Martin gave some remarks about the important role of the Staff Council in the shared governance of the university, shared some thoughts on what we can learn from this situation and how we can respond as an academic institution. He stated that all of us at Seattle University should work together; using our system of shared governance, to discuss important questions including what it means to be a Catholic university in the face of a variety of complex issues.

### Questions and Concerns from Staff Council

- Defining “Freedom” for Staff in an Academic Setting
  - Provost Martin said this is an area for further study and developing new guidelines, policies and procedures as academic freedom primarily applies to faculty involved in research and scholarship, but he invited the Staff Council to partner in developing these new guidelines, policies.
- Addressing Power Dynamic between Faculty and Staff with regard to Academic Freedom
  - Staff, as at-will employees, do not have the same protections as faculty in terms of academic freedom. Staff are concerned, feel their jobs could be at risk, fear retaliation/termination, and would like clearer policies/guidelines and more protection for our jobs. Provost Martin gave reassurance that staff should feel safe to voice their own opinions and that Human Resources is a partner and support for all of us.
  - Provost Martin reiterated that Seattle U can do a better job articulating roles, responsibilities for faculty and staff and create clearer policies/guidelines on this.
  - Michelle Clements shared that HR is committed to being involved in any instances of termination and ensuring fair and equitable treatment.

- Concern raised that this appears to be censorship and that we need to create space for our students to be informed so that they can engage with complicated moral issues. How might we use creative means, such as a secured web page, to give students the information they need?
- Individuals named the need for greater clarity and thorough communication and Fr. Steve and Provost Martin agreed. The SU Staff Council looks forward to being a part of conversations and helping to develop guidelines and policies going forward.