



# WE LEAD THE WAY A LACK OF LOVE FOR AFFINITY GROUPS

## School's policy on affinity groups leaves students feeling isolated

Trinity Prep is a school that prides itself on its diversity and inclusion. Yet, for some students, this feeling of acceptance and respect simply isn't felt. If the social media crisis last spring was any indication, Trinity's treatment of minorities has been called into question as of late, and the school's new policy on affinity groups has served to reinvigorate this long-standing issue.

Last May, senior Gabriel Steinberg went to student council with the idea of forming a Jewish Student Union (JSU) on campus. The club is part of a national organization and would aim to educate students on Jewish culture and traditions. After an overwhelming vote in his favor, Steinberg's idea was approved, and he immediately began making preparations for the upcoming year. He recruited advisors, formed a board of his peers, contacted local JSU representatives and even scheduled events for his club to enjoy.

However, in early August, administration told Steinberg that his club had been reevaluated, and since it was deemed an "affinity group" and catered towards only a select group of students, it would not be allowed on campus in the fall. The school used the same reasoning to prevent the formation of a Gay-Straight-Alliance (GSA), while groups like FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes) were still allowed and encouraged.

According to the students who petitioned for these clubs, the school has cited a desire to improve inclusivity and curb divisiveness as a justification for its actions. Yet the school's arbitrary decision-making as to what is designat-

ed an affinity group has had the opposite effect — facilitating exclusion and leaving many students feeling like their voices aren't heard.

"Some students need affinity groups as a safe space ... to express a part of their identity freely and without judgment," Steinberg said.

By not allowing these groups, it can leave students feeling like they can't express themselves; like they're alone. It's the complete opposite of inclusivity and comes in stark contrast with the many of the school's objectives.

As part of its Strategic Plan, Trinity writes that its mission is "to become increasingly attractive, inclusive, and welcoming to a diverse group of faculty and students while cultivating relationships throughout the community." If that's the case, then what better way to do this than through these affinity groups? They aren't exclusive. Anyone and everyone is welcome to join. What's more, they actively unify our school community by facilitating relationships between those who are a part of these minority groups and those who aren't.

Though it is an Episcopal school, Trinity has a stated goal of "embracing people of all faith and no faith." Then what sense does it make to encourage a group of one faith and not another? Just because the beliefs or practices of these affinity groups don't represent a majority, doesn't mean their presence is exclusive. If anything, they promote inclusivity by embracing

people who feel their presence is overlooked otherwise. For the school to argue otherwise is simply nonsensical.

To be fair, Trinity has shown a willingness to work with Steinberg and has continued an open dialogue over the existence of his club and those like it. With the new "Saints in Conversation," the school hopes to extend this dialogue to a wider audience. Upper School Dean Kelly Aull has con-

firmed that affinity groups are a topic that will be discussed in the near future.

The school's conversation with Steinberg, in particular, has resulted in the rebranding of his Jewish Student Union into a MultiFaith Club, which the school hopes is more open to students of all backgrounds. Steinberg says he has received positive feedback from many students, including some recent graduates, on this idea. However, as Steinberg laments, the school's reaction to his JSU club still hurts.

"While MultiFaith is a great initiative and effort to unify the religious backgrounds of our student body, the initial rejection of JSU is upsetting and unexpected," Steinberg said.

As we are all constantly reminded, Trinity Prep is a family. Though we come from a variety of backgrounds, we all share this home away from home for the better part of our middle school and high school careers. So, if anyone doesn't feel welcome, regardless of the intentions, there is a clear issue. As such, Trinity needs to make conscious changes if we're to become a family that is inclusive to all, and this starts with its treatment of affinity groups.

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*The lead editorial expresses the opinion of the Trinity Voice editorial staff. Please send comments to [voice@trinityprep.org](mailto:voice@trinityprep.org)*