

Dear Members of the DePaul University Community,

I am writing from France, where Fr. Udovic and I are leading a mission trip to introduce our trustees to the life and legacy of St. Vincent de Paul. Because today is a free day, a number of us are spending the day in Normandy, touring the museum, walking the famous beaches of the D-Day landings and standing silent before the rows and rows of graves honoring the men and women who gave their lives so others might live in freedom.

I tell you this because I awoke this morning to the reports and online videos of yesterday's speech by Milo Yiannopoulos and the accompanying protest. I was sorry to see it.

Mr. Yiannopoulos and I share very few opinions. He argues that there is no wage gap for women, a difficult position to maintain in light of government data. As a gay man, he has claimed that sexual preference is entirely a choice, something few if any LGBTQ individuals would claim as their own experience. He claims that white men have fewer privileges than women or people of color, whom he believes are unfairly privileged in modern society — a statement that is immediately suspect when white men continue to occupy the vast majority of top positions in nearly every major industry.

Generally, I do not respond to speakers of Mr. Yiannopoulos' ilk, as I believe they are more entertainers and self-serving provocateurs than the public intellectuals they purport to be. Their shtick is to shock and incite a strong emotional response they can then use to discredit the moral high ground claimed by their opponents. This is unworthy of university discourse, but not unfamiliar across American higher education. There will always be speakers who exploit the differences within our human community to their own benefit, blissfully unconcerned with the damage they leave behind.

Now that our speaker has moved on to UC Santa Barbara and UCLA, we at DePaul have some reflecting and sorting out to do. Student Affairs will be inviting the organizers of both the event and the protest — as well as any others who wish — to meet with them for this purpose. I've asked them to reflect on how future events should be staffed so that they proceed without interruption; how protests are to be more effectively assisted and enabled; and how the underlying differences around race, gender and orientation that were made evident in yesterday's events can be explored in depth in the coming academic year.

As this proceeds, I wish to make a few matters crystal clear.

- Yesterday's speaker was invited to speak at DePaul, and those who interrupted the speech were wrong to do so. Universities welcome speakers, give their ideas a respectful hearing, and then respond with additional speech countering the ideas. I was ashamed for DePaul University when

I saw a student rip the microphone from the hands of the conference moderator and wave it in the face of our speaker.

- I was alarmed when I watched individual students on both sides intentionally provoking the others with inflammatory language, but I was proud when I saw students — many students — working to calm each other, and at times, even hold people back from hasty decisions. Many of our students understood that protests only work when people conduct themselves honorably. I wish to thank all of them for self-monitoring the crowd's behavior. The experience could have been a far worse experience had they not done so.
- I wish to thank our Student Affairs staff, Public Safety team, Student Center employees, Chicago police and temporary contract safety personnel. They were thrust into an unexpected and challenging situation that we must examine for hard learned lessons. I am grateful that the situation was calmed and dispersed without serious injury to anyone's person. I know the staff, too, are reflecting on these events and what might be learned for the future.
- On behalf of the university, I apologize to the DePaul College Republicans. They deserved an opportunity to hear their speaker uninterrupted, and were denied it.

Here in Normandy, I expected to be moved by the generosity of those who gave their lives on the beaches early on June 6, 1944. I did not expect, however, to be shocked when I realized that most of the soldiers were the same ages as our students today. The rows on rows of white crosses in the American cemetery speak to the selflessness of the human spirit at early adulthood to lay down their lives for a better world.

I realize that many of yesterday's protesters hold similarly noble goals for a more inclusive world for those traditionally held aside by our society. I realize also that these young soldiers died for *all* the freedoms enshrined in our Bill of Rights, including freedom of speech and assembly. We honor their sacrifice best if we, too, remember and honor all the rights of human freedom, even as we fight for more freedom and justice for all.

God bless you.

Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, C.M.
President