Loyola Univ. organization works with LGBT community  
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The Catholic Church has not had a reputation for being the most accepting institution, but one LGBTQA-rights group has found an ally in a university run by Jesuit priests: Loyola University Chicago.

The Jesuit Catholic ideal, "cura personalis," calls for the care of the whole person. Many students are embodying this Jesuit ideal by considering sexual orientation a piece of the "whole person."

Advocate is Loyola's LGBTQA organization and, since 1990, students have been working to educate the campus and greater Chicago community on queer issues.

"Overall, it's a good environment," said Advocate President Mar Curran, 21. "Loyola is a very accepting community."

Current projects include gender-neutral bathrooms to make the campus more transgender-inclusive, and a queer resource center that would work dually as an office for the organization where sensitive subjects can be discussed privately.

"We try to create a safe space for Loyola students to come and feel like they can express who they are and be celebrated for their identity, whether they identify as queer or are allies," said Curran.

From safety coordinators to support groups, Advocate assists students with an array of issues, including those involved with mental health and coming out of the closet. In addition, it sponsors an annual Intercollegiate Coming Out Ball for student members and supporters of the Chicagoland LGBTQA community.

"As an organization that strives to give support and offer education and social networking to students of differing sexual orientations, Advocate can be a useful and important contributor to student life here at Loyola," said Michael J. Garanzini, S.J., president of the university.

After controversy over a proposed drag show last fall, the organization has been working closely with the campus Jesuits to maintain an open dialogue over the relationship between queer and religious issues.

"Regarding controversial programming that Advocate may sponsor, the real question for me is how does that programming contribute to the mission of the organization," said Garanzini. "And, given Advocate's unique role, how does that mission help non-GLBTQ students appreciate the worth and dignity of its members or any person whose sexuality is not part of the majority?"
Advocate hosted a panel in February where community members discussed how gender expression and queer identity play into living and working on Loyola's campus.

The group is also a founding member of the Queer Intercollegiate Alliance, a group of Chicagoland schools' queer groups that works toward community outreach.

To support or learn more about Advocate, visit the Advocate at Loyola University Chicago Facebook page.