News



Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Florida, delivers a speech on "Human Dignity and the Purpose of Capitalism" Nov. 5, 2019, at The Catholic University of America in Washington. (CNS/The Catholic University of America/Patrick G. Ryan)

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The Los Angeles Dodgers disinvited the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence — a nonprofit that uses drag, fundraising and religious imagery in its social advocacy — from the team's upcoming Pride Night celebration after pushback from Catholic groups accusing the organization of degrading their faith.

"Given the strong feelings of people who have been offended by the sisters' inclusion in our evening, and in an effort not to distract from the great benefits that we have seen over the years of Pride Night, we are deciding to remove them from this year's group of honorees," the Dodgers said in a statement on May 17.

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, described on their website as a "leading-edge Order of queer and trans nuns," was founded in 1979 in San Francisco after three men went out into the streets on Easter weekend wearing the traditional habits of nuns. They emerged as a charity organization when one of their early events at Metropolitan Community Church raised $1,500 for gay Cuban refugees in 1980.

They were among the first to act when the AIDS epidemic hit San Francisco in the early 1980s, distributing pamphlets that coined the term "safe sex" and visiting bathhouses to promote condom use, according to the San Francisco Chronicle.

Regarded as "nuns for the gay community," the Sisters are not Catholic nuns, nor officially affiliated with any specific religious organization.

The organization's LA chapter was scheduled to receive a Community Hero Award during the team's Pride Night on June 16 in honor of the group's efforts promoting human rights, diversity and spiritual enlightenment.

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Among those who took offense were Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida and members of Catholic Vote, who submitted letters to the Dodgers organization and to Major League Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles on Twitter shared a Catholic League statement condemning the Dodgers.

In his May 15 letter, Rubio criticized Manfred for allowing the team to honor the group, which he said "mocks Christians through diabolical parodies of our faith."

Rubio tied baseball "to our nation's values, at the heart of which is faith in God."

"It would be an outrage and a tragedy if the MLB, in pursuit of modern, secular, and indeed anti-religious 'values,' rebuked that faith and the millions of believing fans who cherish the sport," Rubio said.

Sister Roma, one of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence's most visible members, said those who are criticizing the organization as "blasphemous" and "sacrilegious" don't understand their mission and "don't really take the time to get to know who we are."

"We feed the hungry, we work with people who are unhoused, we support LGBTQ and trans youth, we support queer art," Roma told Religion News Service. "The reason that we really manifest is to shed light on the hypocrisy of all organized religion, and the way that people interpret the teachings, the word, and use it as a weapon to justify their own homophobia, their own transphobia, their own hate."

The LA chapter of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence issued a statement on Wednesday afternoon, expressing sadness over the Dodgers succumbing "to pressure from persons outside of the State of California and outside of our community."

"We are disappointed they have chosen to un-ally themselves with us in our ongoing service to the public, many of whom enjoy the Dodgers's heroic efforts in sports," the statement read.

The Sisters challenged language used by groups such as Catholic Vote and Catholic League, which described the organization as a "hate group" and criticized the Dodgers for "rewarding hate speech." The Catholic groups lambasted the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence's recent Easter event that featured "Foxy Mary and Hunky Jesus" contests. Catholic League referred to the Sisters as "bigots" and took offense to a "Condom Savior Mass" event.

The Sisters in the statement noted that they are a charity organization of human rights activists who are "both silly and serious" and whose mission is "to uplift our community and all marginalized groups, especially the ones ignored by larger organizations, spiritually oriented or otherwise."

"We are queer nuns serving our people just as nuns of other cultures serve theirs. We are not solely male; our membership includes all genders, religions, and romantic affiliations. Though we both serve the transgender community and have transgender members, we are not an exclusively trans organization. We unequivocally support the rights of transgender people," their statement read.

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