

# University returns to single-sex dorms to curb drinking, ‘hooking up’

WASHINGTON – John Garvey, president of The Catholic University of America in Washington, announced June 13 that the university would be taking a stand against binge drinking and the “culture of hooking up” by phasing out coed dorms.

He likened the move to a “slightly old-fashioned remedy” to combat what he described as the “two most serious ethical challenges college students face.”

The shift will begin with next year’s freshmen, who will be assigned to single-sex residence halls.

Garvey made the announcement public in an op-ed piece in *The Wall St. Journal* where he said the transition will “probably cost more money” and will involve architectural adjustments as well as a change in the ratio of students admitted each year. “But our students will be better off,” he wrote.

The university president, who has been at the school’s helm since last July, also said he knew his proposal was countercultural, citing the fact that more than 90 percent of all college housing is currently coed.

Garvey said his decision is supported by recent studies. He noted that according to some studies, students in coed housing are more likely than students in single-sex residences to consume excessive amounts of alcohol, known as binge drinking, and have permissive sexual attitudes or casual sexual relationships referred to as “hooking up.”

Garvey specifically cited Christopher Kaczor, a philosophy professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, for pointing out the data from these studies.

In a May 11 article, “Rethinking Single-Sex Dorms” in *First Things* magazine, published by the Institute on Religion and Public Life, Kaczor argued that “by

reducing levels of binge drinking and participation in the hookup culture, universities committed to the academic and ethical growth of students can better fulfill their mission. The time has come to stop bemoaning campus culture and to take concrete steps to improve the situation.”

At many U.S. colleges, coed dorms appeared in the late 1960s or early 1970s. In the past decade, coed dorm rooms have been an option at some universities. According to the news website Inside Higher Ed, the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International was not aware of another college or university that had changed from coed housing back to single-sex dorms.

In the coed dorms at Catholic University, men and women reside on separate floors.

A handful of U.S. Catholic colleges offer only single-sex dorms, including Belmont Abbey in Belmont, N.C.; Ave Maria University in Ave Maria, Fla.; Christendom College in Front Royal, Va.; Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio; John Paul the Great Catholic University in San Diego; and the University of Dallas.

Garvey, who spoke to Catholic News Service by phone June 15 while he was in San Francisco, said he was surprised that there had been so much reaction, primarily positive, to his decision. “I think it touched a cultural nerve,” he added.

He said the decision came about after a lot of discussion, meetings and campus workshops focusing on developing student virtue.

The conversation about challenges today’s students face started many years ago at the Garvey home since he and his wife, Jeanne, have put five their children through college.

He also said he initiated the possibility of single-sex dorms when he was interviewed last year by the university’s board of trustees.

Regina Conley, a rising junior at Catholic University and editor of the student newspaper The Tower, told CNS by phone in Raleigh, N.C., that the announcement was generating a lot of student conversation through Facebook and Twitter.

The overall reaction of Catholic University students seems mixed, she said, with girls

more in favor of it and guys against it. Since it doesn't affect current students, she pointed out that the reaction might be somewhat more subdued.

Conley called the decision a "great move" because it "sets the school apart." She wasn't sure if it would impact binge drinking or premarital sex since that can also take place off campus, but she said the decision emphasizes "even subtly" that students who choose to go to Catholic University are "called to a higher standard and to respect boundaries."

"It's a good move by Garvey. He'll see good results," she added.