



## ALUMNAE CLASH WITH TRINITY PRESIDENT

### ANGERED BY CHANGES AT SCHOOL, GRADUATES FIGHT FOR STRONGER VOICE

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The customary role of alumni as school boosters has been turned on its ear at Trinity College, where administration officials and graduates have been dueling over the status of the Alumnae Association and the future of the school. The conflict has developed as the 98-year-old Catholic women's college in Northeast Washington is seeing substantial change under President Patricia McGuire.

The president and her supporters say the conflict's crux lies with conservative alumnae resistant to vital efforts to modernize the school. McGuire's critics say they are not fuddy-duddies but concerned graduates who believe she is wrecking Trinity's traditional character and is out to control an association that was working well.

The struggle is part of a broader trend at many colleges and universities across the country, where graduates are demanding a more vocal role in the affairs of their alma maters, sometimes using their considerable financial support as leverage. "Alums collectively give \$2.9 billion a year to American colleges and universities, and yet when they have an issue they want to discuss, they feel closed out," said Jerry L. Martin, president of the newly formed **National Alumni Forum**, based in Washington.

"The message they get is that they should send their money but keep their ideas to themselves," he said. "Part of what is going on is that alumni are beginning to learn that to be a good alumnus isn't to give blind loyalty to the college administration."

An alumni group at Dartmouth College, for example, is suing the school for full voting rights on the Board of Trustees. Yale University recently was forced to return a \$20 million

gift from an alumnus after failure to implement a program the way the donor had wanted.

The trouble at Trinity began in 1992, when administration officials told the independently run Alumnae Association, which operated on about \$160,000 a year supplied by the college, that it had to be more accountable to Trinity.

According to administration officials, their desire to change the 85-year-old association was in line with other reforms McGuire instituted after becoming president in 1989, when the school, like many women's colleges, was foundering.

The changes included making the curriculum more interdisciplinary, gender-based and focused on leadership skills; promoting Trinity's Weekend College, where half of the 1,400 students are enrolled; and reaching out to a more racially and religiously diverse student body. She also retired Trinity's debt.

"The Alumnae Association was formed at a time when such organizations were wonderful but peripheral functions of their colleges," McGuire said. "It has now moved to being a central function, which means we need to rethink the association's relationship with the college."

But to many alumnae, McGuire was staging a coup for no good reason and was trying to suppress their right to dissent.

"We say, Hey, it's not broken; it doesn't need to be fixed,' " said Kathleen Doyle Field, a 1968 graduate and head of the Trinity Alumnae Action Committee, a group that is separate from the association. "This is really something we won't buy into."

After three years of fruitless negotiations, the Alumnae Association alerted its members to the problem last fall, prompting some alumnae -- who collectively account for up to 90 percent of Trinity's annual donations -- to rethink their financial support.

Though Trinity officials said alumnae donations are \$84,000 higher now than they were at the same time last year, they concede that some graduates are withholding contributions until the issue is resolved. Numerous other graduates said they are placing restrictions on donations.

The college has taken steps that many alumnae viewed as retaliatory. They included booting the association out of its long-held office on campus and taking control of its budget, alumnae leaders said.

In February, the Board of Trustees, which supports McGuire, revoked the Alumnae Association's right to elect two representatives to the body. Instead, one-third of the

board will be alumnae selected by the board.

And early this month, the college oversaw an alumnae reunion weekend, a job traditionally held by the association, which will conduct talks with administration officials this month in an effort to resolve the status of the organization.

Meanwhile, the Action Committee has adopted a broader anti-McGuire platform and has called for her resignation. Among its complaints are that she has diluted the Catholic nature of the school, where 60 percent of the students are now non-Catholic; concentrated too much on the Weekend College; and steered Trinity away from its liberal arts base. For example, most students in May's graduating class received degrees in business or other professional fields, not liberal arts. McGuire said Trinity must adapt to changing times even while maintaining its original mission: educating the poor.

Others aren't so sure. "I think it's taking on a different character, adapting to contemporary society," said Margaret Mary Missar, who recently co-chaired a 40th reunion dinner. "I'm not sure that's necessarily good, considering the condition of contemporary society.

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