

Vandals Deface Display of Crosses at University

An art student desecrated a **pro-life** student club's display of crosses by draping them with condoms and calling it an act of art.

The incident occurred at Western Kentucky University (WKU).

The Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) sent the president of WKU a letter about the incident. The letter explains that university officials, including the student's teacher, were either aware that the vandalism was going to occur, did nothing to stop it or even condoned the student's actions.

"Vandalism is vandalism. Calling it 'art' or 'free speech' doesn't change that," says ADF Litigation Staff Counsel Travis Barham. "The First Amendment does not allow one student to hijack another group's display, and university officials shouldn't turn a blind eye to any kind of vandalism, let alone support it. The pro-life club was exercising the freedoms that the **First Amendment** actually protects, and WKU officials are obligated to protect those freedoms, not passively allow them to be violated."

Here's the backstory: Hilltoppers for Life, with the permission of university officials, erected about 3,700 crosses in an old football stadium on the WKU campus to commemorate the number of lives lost to abortion every day in the United States.

On the morning of April 20, Elaina Smith, a WKU art student, began placing condoms on each of the crosses. When members of Hilltoppers for Life confronted her and asked her to stop, she refused. Later, she claimed that she was "completing an approved art project" by desecrating the display.

When campus security officers finally arrived, they did not take any action against her. Later, Smith's teacher, Kristina Arnold, reportedly told reporters that she did not disapprove of the student's proposed vandalism, which demonstrates she was at least aware of the plan and did nothing to stop it. Smith has refused to apologize for desecrating the display.

The ADF letter asks WKU officials to take several actions to ensure that pro-life speech is fully protected, including conduct a full and thorough investigation into the incident, instruct Smith to apologize publicly to Hilltoppers for Life, provide assurance that she will not receive academic credit for her vandalism and discipline her under the Student Code of Conduct for her destructive actions. The letter also asks that disciplinary action be taken against the student's art teacher for facilitating the vandalism.

"We hope that WKU will demonstrate its commitment to free speech by making sure that Hilltoppers for Life can hold future displays without fear of further vandalism," says Barham. "But we will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the constitutionally protected rights of these pro-life students will not be violated again."