

# BLOOD ON THE STREET

Biola University becomes  
ground zero in the pro-life debate  
over graphic abortion pictures

by ANGELA LU PHOTO BY GARY FONG/GENESIS

**Biola University** sits in La Mirada, Calif., a quiet city on the edge of Los Angeles County—but 15 minutes away, a Planned Parenthood center performs abortions, and 35 minutes away, Hollywood studios push out powerful and often graphic images to tell stories and evoke emotions.

Biola for the past four years has been the home of nursing student Diana Jimenez. She always considered herself pro-life, but after watching a video of an actual abortion earlier this year, she realized its horror and decided to do something about it.

Last spring, with her graduation and the end of the school year approaching, Jimenez worried that some Biola students could be aborting babies over the summer. She partnered with the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform (CBR) to set up a display on May 8 that included brochures, information on crisis pregnancy centers, and posters displaying enlarged photos of hands, feet, bodies, and faces of babies aborted in the first trimester.

Biola officials asked her to take it down, saying she didn't get the school's approval. Jimenez then met with Matthew Hooper, Biola's associate dean of students: He said Biola approves of her message but she could not show such graphic imagery in an open area of campus.

Jimenez felt her schoolmates needed to see the photos: On May 17 she carried a sign to the center of campus and held it up. Campus security told her to leave and threatened to arrest her and keep her from graduating: Jimenez captured some of that on video. Later, when Jimenez tried to get letters of recommendation from her professors, she found Biola nursing director Susan Elliott had told the nursing faculty not to write them for her.

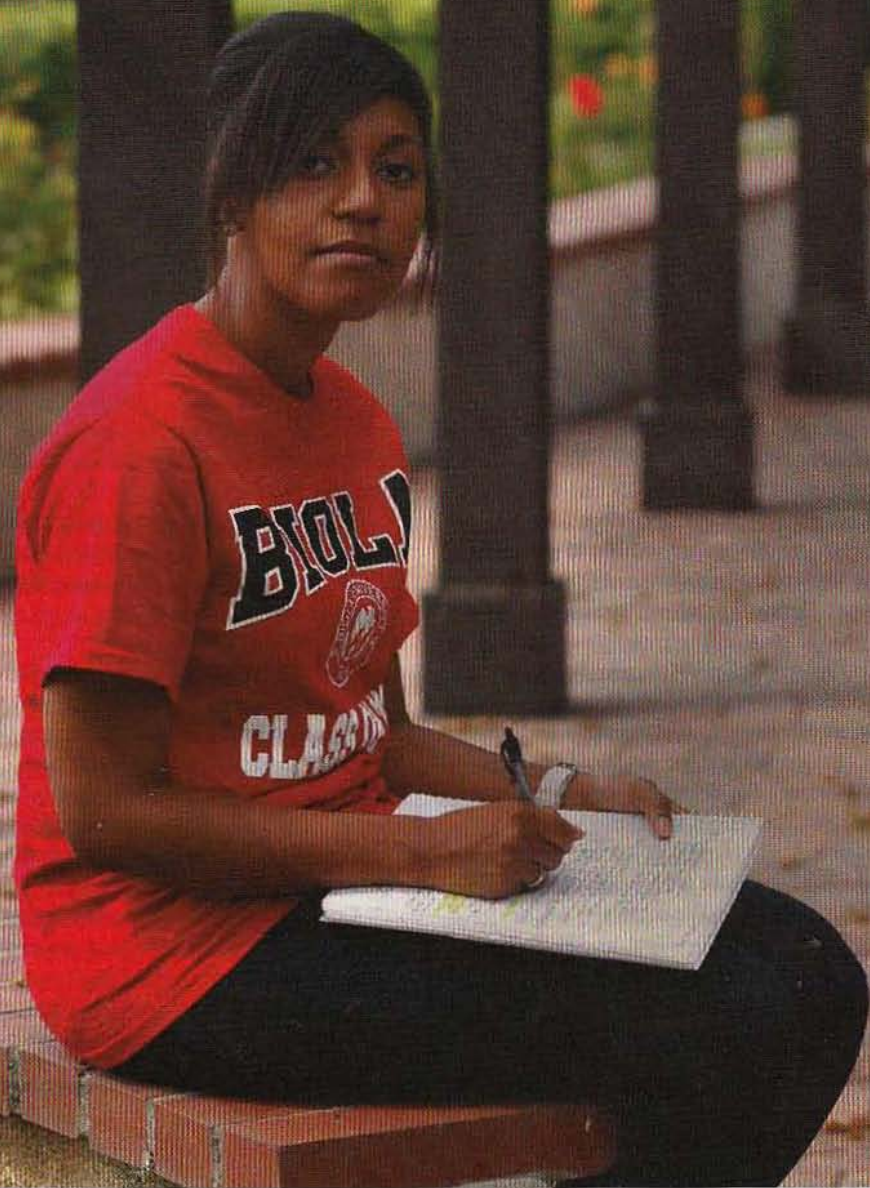
The bans on both signs and recommendations soon attracted attention around the country.

**Biola's response** to Jimenez is the latest instance of Christian colleges forbidding students from erecting graphic abortion displays. CBR head Gregg Cunningham says his group has shown the images at hundreds of secular public colleges—free speech laws allow that—but not at private Christian colleges.

Cunningham argues that graphic images are crucial in teaching students what abortion is. He escalated the Biola battle by juxtaposing a video of Biola's Campus Safety chief threatening Jimenez with a speech by Biola president Barry Corey on Christians standing for their convictions. The video, available on YouTube,

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garnered 12,000 views in its first week, dividing many pro-life bloggers and commenters into taking the side of either Biola or Jimenez.

Cunningham, pointing to social reforms such as slavery, child labor, and the civil rights movement, says public opinion changes only after people see images depicting the reality of the injustices. He says Christians have been overly concerned with not offending people, and he says schools like Biola help “Planned Parenthood hide the horror of abortion. ... We’re losing ground until Christian colleges are willing to get serious and provide systematic leadership in defense of life.” CBR similarly attacked Liberty University administrators in 2011 after they banned graphic photos on their campus.

The Biola administration says its pro-life commitment permeates all aspects of the school. In a document entitled “In Word and Deed” the school pointed to its Doctrinal Statement: “The Bible is clear in its teaching on the sanctity of life. Life begins at conception. We abhor the destruction of innocent human life through abortion on demand, infanticide or euthanasia as unbiblical and contrary to God’s will.” The document also lists services Biola offers students with unplanned pregnancies, lectures and chapel talks on the sanctity of life, its support of students engaged in pro-life work, and the school’s lawsuit against Obamacare’s contraceptive mandate.

Biola’s administration allows students to show graphic images in spaces that give others the opportunity to refrain

from viewing, such as in classrooms. Administrators say people of different ages and experiences traverse the central area of campus. They do not want bloody pictures thrust into the faces of children visiting the campus and women healing from past abortions: “The public displaying of very graphic, disturbing images—for whatever purpose, even one so in line with Biola’s heart—is not an appropriate venue of student expression on our campus.”

Jimenez says when she had previously invited Cunningham to give a talk, only four students came. She says she needed to stand out in the middle of campus to get the message to the largest number of students.

**Pro-life leaders** have long debated the appropriateness and effectiveness of graphic imagery, with crisis pregnancy centers largely refraining from using them: The centers emphasize compassion, not horror. Jhaneth Gomez, client services manager at Open Arms Pregnancy Center in Northridge, Calif., said the pregnant women who come in are already so scared and overwhelmed that abortion photos add more stress rather than helping them make an informed decision.

Gomez says it’s better to tell a pregnant woman “about the changes in her baby’s body so we can make her conscious of how the baby is developing.” Giving women ultrasounds shows them the baby growing inside “so they see that abortion erases that life.” She also doesn’t like using the photos

because she believes that disrespects aborted babies: "I don't know who that baby is, and it's not respecting the baby's life to show it everywhere. That baby is a human and deserves a proper burial."

Others defend the use of bloody images. Brian Godawa, screenwriter of *To End All Wars* and a member of Biola's Studio Task Force, says "the most powerful way to get truth out is through pictures. ... People should be shocked into the reality of the situation."

CBR cites a website commenter with the screen name "Precious Life" who said she's a 20-year-old Biola student and was on the way to a Planned Parenthood abortion appointment until she saw Jimenez's sign: That "made me realize there is a human life in my womb. ... I went to my

Gruber says his signs upset some but informed others. When he heard that Jimenez was facing official opposition at Biola he accompanied her to the campus with a CBR staffer. They planned to hold up signs, but he said campus security pulled over their car and told the two non-Biola students to leave, saying they were trespassing on private property even though they had visitors' passes.

Jimenez then went on to confront campus security alone with her sign. She said the question for her was, "To what extent do I obey authority and disobey God's calling?" Gruber says he was surprised that Biola made her leave and the nursing director issued a no-recommendation order: "Westmont is typically more liberal-leaning, whereas Biola is known for being more conservative and even has a pro-life stance, yet obviously the way they treated Diana was different."

La Verne Tolbert, a former Planned Parenthood board member and now a leading pro-life advocate, says CBR is treating Biola unfairly. Tolbert presented two pro-life talks at Biola in February and March, and notes that when she initially

planned on showing a graphic abortion video, Biola did not stop her. In the end she decided to show a different video. She opposes CBR's tough criticism of Biola's administration: "Why not attack Planned Parenthood? Aren't they celebrating that Christians are biting and devouring one another?"

Jimenez told WORLD on June 11, "I don't want people to believe that Biola's not a Christian school, but they're not doing enough. My biggest hope is that Biola would remove the restriction" on recommendations. On June 13, Dean



dorm room got on my knees and asked that I would have the strength to be my babies [sic] mom."

WORLD has not been able to verify that story, but Cunningham says CBR's photos have saved the lives of five babies.

**For some, the main issue** isn't the debate over the photos but how Biola responded to Jimenez's actions. Last fall at Westmont College, which doesn't take a position on abortion, student Seth Gruber stood on the school lawn holding signs showing bloody pictures along with Scripture. For three years Gruber, who also worked at CBR, wanted to exhibit abortion photos on his campus, but school administrators said no. When he finally took individual action, school officials tried for two hours to get him to walk away, but in the end conceded he had the right to exercise free speech. Gruber came back with signs twice more that week, then once a week for the five weeks after that.

**STANDOFF:** Cunningham (left); Biola University.

Walter Stangl wrote to Jimenez, "I have decided to rule in favor of your appeal. ... I have therefore directed Dr. Elliott to communicate to each of the Nursing Department faculty that her request is no longer in effect, and to clarify that each faculty member may write letters of recommendation for you as they feel is appropriate."

Late in June the Biola campus was peaceful. A few students in summer session walked along the school's tree-lined walkway, while others filmed a promotional piece under the school's iconic bell tower. But when the fall semester begins on August 28, CBR is planning to greet returning students with large abortion posters at every campus entrance, along with aerial images pulled by planes flying over the university. Cunningham's goal is for Christian schools to be radically pro-life, with programs and majors devoted to training activists: "It's not going to happen until some china gets broken. We don't wish it to be that way, but some china will get broken." ●