

**TO:** V. Rev. Karl J. Kiser, S.J.

**FROM:** Rev. Dan C. McDonald, S.J. and Rita Dollard O'Malley

**DATE:** March 11, 2023

**SUBJECT:** Promises Made; Promises Kept. Annual Report on Mission and Identity at Xavier University (XU)

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### **Introductory Comments**

*Dr. Colleen Hanycz continues to bring a deep level of reflection, spirituality, and leadership to Xavier. What you have noted about Dr. Hanycz's leadership mirrors the experience of Dr. O'Malley and myself. More, her leadership style calls others to deeper reflection, manifest spirituality and the invitation to grow their own leadership as a collaborative endeavor for the future of Xavier. By her own words, "Xavier is where God wants me to be at this time".*

*We would characterize the visit this year as one of discovery, where Dr. Hanycz has proven that her **Promises Made** in public and private situations are the **Promises Kept**. She calls other leaders in the university to participate in their own promises made; promises kept.*

*It was also a year for teaching a possible model for discernment in common.*

### **Summary of the Visit**

Our visit took place between February 17 - 24 with the 17 - 19 given over to the Jesuit Community visit by Dan. This year we were invited to arrange the visit during the Xavier winter BOT meeting. The week also afforded us scheduling with various groups within Xavier. We were able to attend the Xavier Mission Committee of the BOT and during the visit McDonald was invited to attend the full Friday meeting of the BOT. (Rita had to leave on Thursday.) The time at Xavier was an experience of integration on many levels: the good functioning of the central administration, the ways the BOT is integrated into the concerns of the university and not just bottom line issues, the growing relationship between the Jesuit Community and the area Jesuit ministries, the new levels of cooperation between the various directors of the works and the rector of the Jesuit community, the integration which takes place through openness to new realities, and the growing integration of Ignatian discernment across the university. All of this requires cooperation and vision. Those two ingredients for success are alive at Xavier.

Notable is that the mission activities are clearly integrated into the DNA of Xavier. While this has been observed before this year but not shaded correctly in earlier reports it finally dawned on us that Debra Mooney continues to encourage and promote mission in new ways, but people do not lean on Debra for their appropriation of the mission. Rather, her invitations and those of the Mission and Identity office to discover and live the Xavier mission and identity have been encountered by individuals and integrated by each. Repeatedly in our meetings with groups, individuals easily accessed the mission through their own eyes and reflection. This is a mark of true integration where the individual self-appropriation is clear about how she or he understands and lives the mission. It also provides an understanding not unlike the mystical body where each brings one's gifts and these benefit the whole. This is clearly the result of being invited to consider the mission and to understand it as a personal invitation which has significant institutional effects. In fact, the individual appropriation becomes something also for others. That is, what has been personalized comes with an obligation to pass on the mission to others and to show others how one is invited to enlighten one's work and area of influence with the common mission and identity of Xavier. This embodies the essence of the Ignatian Educator of Distinction which is rightly understood as part of the matrix of mission integration at this institution.

As last year, the meetings with Board Chair Vince Capone, President Dr. Colleen Hanycz, Provost Dr. Rachel Chrastil, and CMO Dr. Debra Mooney were inspirational. This was tied directly to their working method of seeing what is needed, reflecting on best approaches, and acting with the proviso that if something needs revisiting that, too, is part of the cycle. The spirit of listening and paying attention to what people say is housed with informed responses. This continues to grow deep roots at Xavier.

**Discernment in Common:** The **New Approach to the Mission Conversations** this year provided an experience of Ignatian Conversations or Spiritual Conversations. In our minds this was quite successful. As you know, in preparation for this experimental experience this year at the six UMI universities, we voiced that there was a possible risk in this, but the reactions were uniformly positive, with some having a range of emotionally charged experiences. Such emotions as tears, smiles, serious focused reflections, positive affirmations of others and a desire to continue these as a resource in their own areas brought a sense of purpose and satisfaction to individuals. The Canadian model generated a swift sense of how the playing field was leveled and that in requiring people to speak and to listen with a control factor of time introduced, the bullies who sometimes dominate the conversations were removed from having a swollen voice.

The focus was on asking each group what sparked them or encouraged them about the mission of Xavier and posed the question how they might go deeper with mission

integration in their area. We were able to give feedback to each group based on what we heard, and this seemed to resonate with people. Having the time to be silent and reflect and speak with intentionality had positive results.

As with this exercise at the other UMI universities this academic year, what emerged was a very strong sense of how relational their work is, how impactful they can be when focused, and how reflection can bring positive ways of proceeding out of a group. Across the group discussions they discovered the importance of grasping opportunities, how support for each other for the mission can enhance work and relationships, how hope can emerge, how people desire to relate to those who are like-minded and how good it is to stand by those who believe in the mission. Further, there emerged the role of gratitude in their work, trusting all with their experience of the mission. There is the belief that authority must lead with the mission, there is a need to be explicit about the mission, recognition that the mission must be constantly engaged, and how integrity about the mission emerges when we focus.

It is hard to give a sense of how significant these experiences were for us. Each group became more connected with each other, and strangers saw the depth of mission experiences and the emergent desires which exist when they intentionally listen to others. People expressed institutional hope, institutional faith, and a deep sense of the care which charity demands when people provide deeper revelations through communication at this level. We will elaborate on some of the specifics of this later in this document.

**Mission Committee of the BOT:** The invitation to meet with the Mission Committee of the BOT was an opportunity to outline and report on international, national, UMI Province and AJCU initiatives in higher education. It was also an invitation to invite the BOT members of this committee to experience what we asked groups at Xavier to engage; the Ignatian Conversation/Discerning Conversation. The group was very attuned to the ways silence and the Ignatian Moments which are practiced regularly by this group allowed them to engage this invitation with freedom. Their comments during each round were deep and heart-felt.

**Student Experience:** We know you have a special interest in what students think and experience about our institutions. Often we don't know what the experience is like until years after they graduate, and we receive the reflections based on their maturity. At Xavier, the BOT takes the time once a year to have an evening meal with students (called the Trustee & Student Dinner) during which each table reflects on a series of questions from which themes evolve. Below is the document generated on the themes of this year.

**XAVIER UNIVERSITY**  
**Trustee & Student Dinner Themes from Cohort Conversations**  
**02-23-23**

**What experiences have helped you feel that you belong at Xavier?**

- Being a part of a caring environment with faculty and staff who exhibit strong personal support through life's challenges.
- Manresa generated friendships and fostered relationships with upper-class students.
- Smooth Transitions programming which is critical for students of color and first-generation students.
- RAs who create a welcoming community that feels like home.
- Club Day, student clubs, and organizations that help students get connected.
- Center for Faith and Justice programs that provide space for inclusive belonging.
- Center for Diversity and Inclusion programs that provide important affinity spaces.
- Academic cohort programs.
- Small community feel in and outside of the classroom.
- Basketball energizes the community and supports social experience.
- "The core teaches you to think; helps open your mind to things you might not otherwise be forced to grapple with."

**Have you had experiences that have gotten in the way of your feeling at home at Xavier?**

- Difficult roommate situations.
- Desire for more communication after campus incidents.
- Need for increased access to counseling services.
- Safety concerns: more parking lot lighting and blue light phones.
- Challenges with disability accommodations.
- Difficulty building community for students of color and international students.
- Lack of support for grad students - particularly around community building.
- Limited options for leaving campus (lack of destinations and lack of transportation).

**What makes Xavier special when it's at its best?**

- Our Jesuit values and the way we demonstrate them.
- Student engagement centers including, but not limited to: Center for Faith and Justice, Center for Diversity and Inclusion, Center for International Education and TRIO.
- Small community allows for feelings of connection and belonging.

- Faculty and staff who demonstrate that they care and want to develop relationships with students.
- Basketball contributes significantly to campus culture.
- Being in Cincinnati offers great opportunities.

**How might Xavier be even better?**

- Increase access to student mental health resources.
- Encourage all faculty to be responsive to student needs.
- Review and revise Goa.
- Improve student accountability for vandalism in the Residence Halls.
- Increase Experiential learning opportunities.
- Enhance support for marginalized groups.
- Support more near-campus amenities and transportation (potentially a bicycle program).
- Offer more large-scale campus events.
- Improve food options and late night.
- Provide basketball tickets for grad students.

**Based on your experiences, would you recommend Xavier to a friend or family member?**

- YES! was the overwhelming response from all 14 tables.
- Two tables noted a "maybe" response - related to students who might want a more dynamic near-campus environment.

**Other - please feel free to discuss other issues regarding your Xavier student experience. (Issues not captured above)**

- Why did you choose Xavier?
  - Small campus
  - Strong reputation
  - High medical school acceptance rates
  - PPP program/cohort model
  - Alumni connections
- Football
  - Discussed at 4-5 tables with mixed reviews - more concerns than enthusiasm.

- Greek Life
  - Discussed at 2 tables - strong negative reaction due to perceived exclusionary implications.

This provides a good overview of what students think about their experience at Xavier. In the future, it might be good to add some questions about Xavier's mission and identity. The students speak to such items as the Jesuit values, community, faith and justice. It would be interesting to take a deeper dive into some of these areas since they are highlighting some of the apostolic preferences of the Society of Jesus in their comments.

**Important Initiatives:** Other important initiatives are the booklets Xavier has produced and the offer of opportunities for the Xavier community. Of particular interest are:

1. The outline of the **Strategic Plan** highlighted by the four Cura driving ideas. (Cura Personalis, Cura Apostolica, Cura Studiorum and Cura Propria). It is worth reflecting on the elaboration of each of these in the Appendix.
2. **Jesuit Education at Xavier.** This is a significant move forward for an AJCU school. It carefully outlines what is important in a Jesuit educational approach at Xavier and can be an added link to every syllabus in every class. It is noteworthy that each school can replace the frontispiece with that of the dean of each area. This makes the work usable and accessible to all.
3. **The Gift of Ignatian Communal Discernment.** While we gave you a copy of this in the Fall, we are including this as a way to encourage the other Jesuit universities to adopt this or something similar for their BOT. With encouragement from the office of Mission and Identity, other areas of the institution are encouraged to create a like document which would function in their discernment.
4. **Catholic Life at Xavier University.** Arguable one of the most clever booklets, this provides a broad understanding of how Catholic Identity is experienced in the Curriculum, student life, faculty and staff and community programs. It also carries foci on regional, national, and international resources, and the Xavier Jesuit Academy.
5. **So You Speak Laudato Si?** This follows the Traub work Do you Speak Ignatian. This 2-page document focuses on the relationship between God, humans and the Earth. It puts the main points of Laudato Si into familiar language and digestible ideas.
6. **Martin Luther King Jr. Spirit Celebration.** A collaborative event which took place in Bellarmine Cahpel. Cf. Appendix.
7. **Global Celebration to Honor 10 years of Pope Francis' Papacy.** This was a global invitation (including international times to join) for this event. It took

place on March 1, 2023 at both a morning and afternoon experience. Cf.  
**XAVIER.EDU/POPE**

8. **An Invocation of Our Ignatian Gifts.** This will add the four curas to the campus tapestry which represented the Ignatian Gifts. As with the first iteration, this one calls on all to participate and include their cloth for the developing wall hanging.

**Strategic Plan:** The presentation of the Strategic Plan by Dr. Hanycz was an opportunity to experience not only the culmination of the hard work which generated this plan, but it was exciting to experience a plan that is not completed but being built on the four pillars of the plan. There is a lot of discovery ahead; breakthroughs which will engage the whole institution.

**Osteopathic Medical School Proposal:** The biggest initiative facing the BOT is that of a proposal for an osteopathic medical school. What struck me about the presentations was the element of thoroughness with which this was presented at the BOT meeting. Stay tuned. It is an opportunity to base the mission of this school on the Gospel of Luke.

**Closing Comment on the First MPE Priorities:** Finally, the Priorities of the first MPE by Xavier have been reached and expanded upon. The thorough presentation of the ways Xavier accomplished its engagement with the priorities was well documented last year. What has continued is the Xavier Way – constant revisiting of what has been accomplished and movement forward and expanded based on what has been accomplished.

### **Visit Agenda:**

#### **Individual Visits**

Vince Caponi  
Colleen Hanycz  
Rachel Chrastil  
Debra Mooney

**Mission and Identity Office Team.** The soon to be Division of Mission and Ministry spent time discussing what drives them. That is, creativity and imagination are at the front of their self-identity. This year some of the new initiatives coming out of their focus are podcasts and the faculty retreat. They are not afraid to take risks and there is a willingness to change. These are enthusiastic practices for this area.

They see two challenges at the moment:

1. Embedding the mission in professors and staff who work remotely. How to onboard these 30 with the mission is key right now.
2. How will we learn from the new structure of our present department with the Dorothy Day Center for Faith and Justice? What will we learn and how will we support.

**Some themes which emerged from the Ignatian Conversations.** This does not do justice to the significant ways people understood the mission, but these were some of the regularly recurring themes:

- Education and faith.
- Caring for the whole person.
- Aspirational thrust of mission that is inclusive.
- A formation which lives.
- The intentionality of the mission.
- The mission unifies us.
- Our culture brings hope because our service is for others.
- The students focused on care for them, they loved being noticed and they got to their real desire for conversations about how diversity can be better experienced. They understood how this happens through the culture of welcome at Xavier.
- Discovery of the Ignatian gifts.
- Going beyond 'me' to the community.
- Evolving of vocational discernment.
- Being the front door for the mission to all who come to and pass through Xavier.
- Mission comes to intentional respect for each other; this is what makes the difference.
- Inspiration comes from seeing each other live the mission.
- Stewardship of the mission is important.
- The invitation to develop the mission.
- Care for the whole person means that we must care for others as we have been cared for. Consequences for curas.

## Suggestions

*Xavier's, Mission continues to be secure and there is a growing interest in articulating the universal **Catholic** nature of Xavier's Jesuit Catholic identity. In addition, 'Belonging' in the theological perspective of Pope Francis is also a deepening sense at Xavier through hospitality, companionship, care for each other and the students with intentionality.*

While the use of Catholic has a new foothold at Xavier, some wonder if that will make others feel excluded. While Xavier does a lot to make sure people are included, perhaps some thought can be given to explaining what Catholic means at Xavier. That means beyond using the word. As an academic institution it means something different from what it might mean at a parish, a grade school, secondary school, etc. As the next step in self-understanding, conversations given over to what Catholic identity means will give direction and purpose to an academic institution of higher learning in the Catholic idiom.

Xavier has already set several goals for itself with the proposed medical school and the joining of mission and ministry. Regarding the medical school, it might be a wonderful opportunity to base this enterprise on the Gospel of Luke where the physician Luke articulates what care for the hurt and wounded means.

Regarding the new Mission and Ministry Department, we can only suggest that they follow their way of creating identity at Xavier. This area is in really good hands.