Sustainability and the Mission – CAPSTONE

Tara Koch 2/26/25

We are Coordinators, Directors, Professors, Specialists, Assistant Directors, Administrative Assistants, Associate Directors and Managers who gathered to form the first cohort of the ***Sustainability and the Mission*** group with Mission and Identity. I joined this group for fellowship opportunity and to learn how the Xavier community was participating in sustainability practices to form a better world. For one hour each week, for 6 months, we have gathered not only to learn about sustainability at Xavier, but about each other. I have truly appreciated getting to know this amazing group of people, who I otherwise may never have crossed paths with. We have shared details of our childhood, our fears, our hopes and dreams, and how we would like to make a change in this world, one plastic bottle at a time! We have all grown together, created a safe space to allow ourselves to be vulnerable, to put down our walls, and to make time to see and appreciate “God in the details.”

One of my first touchpoints with Laudato Si’ was from the Manresa new employee lunches in my first weeks working at Xavier. It has been both heartwarming and concerning, to read each chapter and to discuss our interpretation. I learned that Sustainability can be traced back to Ignatius, with Eco-spirituality and “God in all things.” Everything we see around us is a gift, and a connection between people, God and nature...that God’s love for us is shown in nature and it is ongoing! I mentioned about how some aspects of Laudato Si’ were concerning...pollution and climate change, how the poor are affected more, the loss of forests and bio-diversity. Nature inspires our sprit and we need to take care of it! We discussed how advances in technology are both good and bad, with advantages that we can rejoice in and disadvantages when man doesn’t use the power as he should.

Another aspect of this group that I truly enjoyed was exploring our campus, and learning about Xavier’s Sustainability practices. I always told Tim, "I love a good field trip!" Our experiences as part of this group were unique opportunities for growth and understanding. Our first meeting was in the Nexus Garden, where we learned about the humble ways that Xavier is helping the community with the shared vegetable gardens and we saw the composting area in the back. It was incredible to learn about all the initiatives and food grown in the Nexus Garden that is donated to local food pantries each year!

Our education of Xavier Sustainability initiatives continued as we visited the Physical Plant and saw the complex system of pipes that heat and cool our campus, to sitting inside the Our Lady of Peace Chapel and learning about the geothermal heat pumps that are used. Nature and technology are interconnected and we need to be mindful of how we use our resources! We visited the Fr. Graham Legacy Labyrinth and learned the way to “pray the path” to reflect. We were challenged to continue to ask yourself, “Where is the more universal good?”

I learned about our tree campus and how every tree, plant and flower is intentional, and specifically chosen, to serve a purpose for our environment. We had area experts in our group who were able to lend perspective each week, depending on our topic...horticulturists, employees who have been here for 20, 30, 40 years...and newer folks, like myself, who shared appreciation for what has been done over the years to make Xavier sustainable and a rewarding place to be a part of.

Each meeting, we shared how “God is in the details,” and how Xavier has made conscious efforts to ensure our students and staff have a spiritual and intentional purpose, with the symbols that we see on campus as a reminder. The Saint Francis statue welcomes us along Saint Francis Xavier Way, the statue of Mother Theresa placed at WCB (so all who pass by her will remember her work with the poor), the green spaces on campus that allow us to not feel like we are living in a concrete world, and the creation of intentional nature, such as the Living Green Space above the cafeteria.

I joined this group to meet new people and to learn what Xavier is doing as their part to make our environment sustainable. After these six months together, I have received so much more than my initial intent… I have gained new comrades, a shared and unique fellowship, new perspectives, and thought- provoking interpretation of Laudato Si’ and Laudate Deum.

God is in the details...on our campus, in nature, in our students and in each of us. Together, we can make this a better world, starting with one change in each of us. Pope Francis noted that human life is grounded in 3 related relationships: God, our neighbor, and with the Earth. It is also our job to maintain these relationships for Sustainability in our world.

Thank you to Tim and Joe for creating this group...I loved every minute of it!

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