

## Presentation on “Seeking Integration and Wisdom: The Xavier Way”

Some Initial Thoughts by Rachel Chrastil, Ph.D.

The culture of encounter—in which we seek integration, wisdom, and ultimately the healing of a broken world—is not only the central message of this document, but it is also central to the process by which we created it.

Committee members came from a wide variety of backgrounds:

- Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, mainline Protestant, evangelical, and no faith tradition
- Three Catholic religious, including two members of the Society of Jesus
- Women and men
- Faculty and staff with a variety of responsibilities and concerns
- American-born and foreign-born, with deep commitments to communities abroad and here in Cincinnati
- Diversity of race and sexual orientation

Now, one of the benefits of having the group we have is that we challenge each other, we have moments of discomfort and difficulty. Early on, we realized that the central tension was the question of diversity. How can we be welcoming of diverse people without falling into superficial relativism or lazy pluralism? How can we maintain a strong Catholic identity without alienating students, faculty and staff who do not share in the Catholic tradition?

We were wrestling in microcosm with the very questions that we encounter as an institution. How did we respond?

First, committee members are not reduced to their identities—they have a commitment to Xavier (most have been here about 7-15 years) and to the Jesuit method of proceeding, in which reflection and discernment are critical.

Second, we consulted a wide range of texts, primarily coming from the Jesuit Catholic tradition; the language of the culture of encounter is not our invention, but something that we see as integral to the Jesuit Catholic tradition and affirmed in many documents:

- Pope Francis—most recently in his interview published last week, but also in a number of his speeches
- Vatican II
- Cardinal Newman
- Jesuit leaders including Fr. Nicolas, Fr. Kolvenbach, Jesuit General Congregations 32 forward, *Some Characteristics* document produced by the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities just this past December
- The work of Xavier’s Discernment Groups, who have helped us to articulate our mission and the gifts of our Ignatian heritage

We realized early on that we did not want to simply repeat the work of the Discernment Groups, or create a superficial bullet list of Jesuit Catholic characteristics, nor did we

want to draft a formal contract, nor did we want to write a manifesto of demands or commandments.

Instead we aimed to create a document offering reflection on the Xavier Way as we further the Jesuit Catholic tradition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We wanted to provide intellectual and historical grounding *and* practical, empowering guidance for discernment for those times when, as individuals or as an institution, we are faced with difficult questions. We recognized that we could not provide specific answers for every difficulty; instead, we hoped to model the Jesuit methods of careful reflection and discernment, the embrace of creative tensions. In all this, we strove for a tone that was aspirational and hopeful while remaining realistic.

For many of us, it has been a unique process. We work through a process of consensus—epitomized by the fact that we never appointed a committee chair. Although drafting the text and then successive stages of editing has usually fallen to one person or another (and mostly to Chris Pramuk), the committee has gone over the document line by line, and sometimes word by word. Contributions in terms of ideas and process emerge organically. And, we remain collegial even when we disagree. The sheer competence and wisdom and commitment of committee members has made this one of the best experiences I have had in committee work.

Our response is in the document:

We affirm that “diversity” is not a pretext for remaining in one’s comfort zone, safe within one’s unexamined assumptions. For us diversity means that all are welcome to the table and all must prepare to be challenged and transformed by the encounter with one another.

How we got there and where we go from here is what the document is about.

We found that one of the gifts we as a Jesuit Catholic university give to our culture and society is to open these kinds of spaces for wrestling with difficulty.