The Xavier Way for Dialogue

A Shared Vision to Strengthen Our Community

Our social context leaves many people feeling anxious and isolated. Social divisions make it harder to forge meaningful connections across differences. We might be tempted to think that kindness means keeping silent and avoiding disagreement. The decline of civility and the rise of “cancel culture” can make us question our worth and sense of belonging. However, our university community requires that we support one another, learn from each other, and hold each other accountable to respectful, honest, inclusive, and empowering conversations. The “Take It On 2020” project aims to seek difference, encourage engagement, and explore common ground to overcome obstacles that keep us from greater understanding and collaboration. Xavier University is a community comprised of students, faculty, and staff who represent a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives. Together, we seek to foster a culture of encounter, integration, and wisdom in building a community where everyone is valued. Community requires clear and effective communication; community is the realization of our ability to participate in speaking the truth of our experience and receiving the truth from and with others. In reaching toward this goal, we intend to implement the following ten norms as shared commitments for deepening and broadening the bonds of our campus community.

1. Hope: to seek out different perspectives and explore common ground is ultimately a practice of hope. Conversation gives expression to our interdependence, the way that our lives are enriched in sharing life together. Dialogue is generative because it creates something new: a shared understanding, a connection, and perhaps a commitment. It also gives us access to other ways of seeing the world and ourselves. If we frame these endeavors in the spirit of reconciliation, then conversation becomes a pathway to peacemaking, to solidarity and kinship, toward the Magis that orients our vision and values to the greater good.

2. Courage: the word ‘courage’ implies sharing one’s whole heart. Courage involves strength to endure uncomfortable situations and a degree of vulnerability in being authentic as a whole person. Courage means taking some risks and exercising bravery in sharing our own experience and being open to the experiences of others. We are called to grow in our willingness to move out of our comfort zone to better understand and appreciate other members of our community.

3. Respect: the foundation for our community rests on the inherent dignity of the human person. Respect—urging us beyond civility or kindness—means promoting the value of every person, advancing their corresponding rights, and delivering on our shared duties to the common good. In seeking inclusive respect, we avoid expressions of contempt for anyone (and ad hominem attacks), or any expression that contributes to silence, stigma, or shame. Our commitment to respect for all is to empower each person to speak for themselves and develop their own voice.

4. Trust: it is incumbent on all of us to create conditions for safety and confidence on our campus. We also need to pay attention to the context for having meaningful conversations so that people feel they have the resources to share in an authentic and perhaps even vulnerable manner. Working to build and sustain these conditions means trying to remedy unjust inequalities in status, privilege, and power between members of our community. Building trust means deepening relationships, essential for building and sustaining a strong community.
5. Self-knowledge: in speaking from our personal experience we can share what we think and feel, want and need, hope and fear. Conversation is an opportunity to express and learn the truth about who we are, what we believe, and why that’s the case. It is also important to acknowledge our perspective and experience are limited and unfolding. In being open to growth, we can cultivate a wider, deeper, and more complex grasp of truth in conversation with others.

6. Honesty: it is important to be intentional with our words, to mean what we say and say what we mean. When we are genuine with others, it helps to create the conditions for others to reciprocate in being genuine with us. Honesty is the foundation for relationships rooted in mutual respect, concern, and responsibility. There is a difference between being honest and being blunt; a good rule of thumb before speaking is to answer: is it true? is it kind? is it necessary?

7. Curiosity: invoking *cura personalis* (care for the whole person), care and curiosity share the same root. One way that we show care for others is by being curious about their thoughts and feelings, desires and needs. When we are present to others and listen attentively to them, we demonstrate that they matter and they belong. Curiosity helps us to explore difference and appreciate it; we should not fear or avoid disagreement. If you don’t know, ask.

8. Compassion: we do not know what burdens other people carry, and just because they carry it well does not mean that it is not heavy. Compassion desires to alleviate suffering. Compassion for self and others is essential for healing the wounds that divide us. Compassion also involves a certain level of accountability: we should consider the impact our words may have on others.

9. Generosity: if we are to participate in honest and meaningful conversation across differences, then we need to presume good intent from those involved. Generosity should be extended to ourselves, so that we give ourselves enough margin for error to get things wrong sometimes. We should also practice giving others the benefit of the doubt and a favorable interpretation of their words and actions. If confused about a person’s intention, seek clarification. Instead of accusing someone of error or malice, ask: “Can you help me understand...?”

10. Reflection and Discernment: in our efforts to foster a culture of encounter, integration, and wisdom, reflection and discernment help us to learn from our experiences so that we can embrace what is fruitful and revise what is flawed. Reflection and discernment help us to take note of our thoughts, feelings, desires, and needs in the process of coming together so we can thoughtfully and intentionally proceed in a way that promotes freedom and support, mutual respect and responsibility, as well as the conditions for all members of the Xavier community to participate fully and to flourish. Reflection and discernment help us evaluate our progress, reexamine our goals, and recalibrate our strategies as a shared commitment to build a more robust community.

These norms outline a call to action—a responsibility on all our shoulders—so we can live into the shared vision of the campus community we describe when we say:

*We are Xavier Musketeers.*

*We are unique individuals who come together in the spirit of St. Ignatius,*

*to learn together, to serve together*

*and we will succeed in changing the world together.*

*We act with integrity, justice and generosity.*

*All for one and one for all.*