

Centers and Institutes for the “Resource-Challenged” Catholic University

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Abstract

Founded in 2001, the Center for Religion and Public Discourse at Saint Xavier University, Chicago, illustrates how centers and institutes can express Catholic identity and serve the university community and society by providing opportunities for thoughtful and civil discourse. Although the Center does not currently support basic research or fund fellows or scholars in residence, all other activities and accomplishments of the Center differ only in scale from those of larger well-endowed institutes and centers. This article describes activities of the Center that even tuition-driven Catholic colleges and universities can adopt to express and enhance their Catholic identity and academic mission, thus making the Catholic intellectual tradition and Catholic social teaching accessible, understandable, and meaningful.

Can Catholic colleges and universities, especially tuition-driven institutions without large endowments, establish institutes and centers that mirror, albeit on a smaller scale, such prestigious organizations as the independent Brookings Institution, the Center for Economic Policy Studies at Princeton University, or the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University? If so, could such modest institutes and centers become significant expressions of the sponsoring institution's Catholic identity and service to society? The Center for Religion and Public Discourse at Saint Xavier University in Chicago provides an affirmative answer to these questions, showing that a mid-sized, tuition-driven Catholic university can enhance its Catholic identity and expand its service to society through a creatively led center.

This article traces the origin and growth of the Center for Religion and Public Discourse (CRPD) over its first decade (2001-2011), providing

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one model of what is possible for Catholic, tuition-driven colleges and universities when the originators of such an enterprise are able to work toward a larger goal by first taking smaller steps. This article describes not only the values and factors that gave rise to the Center but also some of the successes and challenges that come to Catholic universities that uphold the values of academic freedom, the free and open exchange of ideas, and the desire to faithfully represent the Catholic tradition and its teachings.

The Mission of Catholic Colleges and Universities

The importance of the Catholic scholarly tradition in the search for and promulgation of truth has been well articulated throughout the ages, most recently in Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*. Regarding the mission of Catholic colleges and universities, John Paul II writes:

The basic mission of a University is a continuous quest for truth through its research, and the preservation and communication of knowledge for the good of society. A Catholic University participates in this mission with its own specific characteristics and purposes.¹

Even as John Paul II clearly recognizes the primary function of a Catholic university as the scholarly pursuit, preservation, and communication of truth, he also alludes to the possible tensions that Catholic colleges and universities will experience as they try to uphold the value of searching for truth.

If need be, a Catholic University must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society.²

Without resolving this tension, and perhaps even exacerbating it, John Paul II specifically acknowledges the institutional autonomy of Catholic colleges and universities as well as the important role that academic freedom plays in the mission and identity of a Catholic scholarly community committed to academic rigor and critical thought.

¹ Pope John Paul II, "Ex corde Ecclesiae: On Catholic Universities," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae_en.html, Sec. 30.

² Ibid., Sec. 32.

The Church, accepting “the legitimate autonomy of human culture and especially of the sciences,” recognizes the academic freedom of scholars in each discipline in accordance with its own principles and proper methods, and within the confines of the truth and the common good.³

His support of academic freedom, however, is not unqualified. Specifically, John Paul II cautions that neither the rights of individuals nor the common good should be compromised in the exercise of academic freedom.

Every Catholic University, *as a university*, is an academic community which, in a rigorous and critical fashion, assists in the protection and advancement of human dignity and of a cultural heritage through research, teaching and various services offered to the local, national and international communities. It possesses that institutional autonomy necessary to perform its functions effectively and guarantees its members academic freedom, *so long as the rights of the individual person and of the community are preserved within the confines of the truth and the common good.* [Emphasis added.]⁴

This qualification opens the door to interpretation. Some believe this means that there should never be any limitations on the content or style of discourse at a Catholic university because suppressing open and free scholarship subverts the common good. Others conclude that a Catholic college or university cannot be authentically Catholic⁵ if it allows speakers, scholars, or teachers to voice positions or ideas that are clearly or even possibly opposed to Catholic teaching.

While this section of *Ex corde* is probably one of the most often quoted and debated, John Paul II does not shy away from open discussion of scholarly research in other, less frequently cited passages. Rather, in recognizing the valuable assistance that Catholic colleges and universities give to the Church and society when scholarly research and discourse address important social problems, John Paul II itemizes areas for potential scholarship and discourse that are often intrinsically controversial and replete with moral and ethical considerations.

Moreover, by offering the results of its scientific research, a Catholic University will be able to help the Church respond to the problems and needs of this age.... Included among its research activities, therefore, will be a study of *serious contemporary problems* in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature,

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., Sec. 12.

⁵ See, for example, the view of the Cardinal Newman Society, <http://www.cardinalnewmansociety.org/AboutUs/tabid/53/Default.aspx>.

the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level. University research will seek to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions.⁶

This suggests that Catholic colleges and universities are especially well-suited to address serious contemporary social problems precisely because they are free to also consider morality, ethics, spirituality, religion, and justice in their scholarship. Furthermore, this implies that the Church relies on scholars in Catholic colleges and universities both to conduct this type of research and public discourse and to provide a moral context for it. Such reliance requires that the results of this research be publicly communicated and discussed if the Church is to respond effectively to the “problems and needs of this age.”⁷

If it is the responsibility of every University to search for such meaning, a Catholic University is called in a particular way to respond to this need: its Christian inspiration enables it to include the moral, spiritual, and religious dimension in its research, and to evaluate the attainments of science and technology in the perspective of the totality of the human person.⁸

The ten-year history of the Center for Religion and Public Discourse (CRPD) well illustrates some of the challenges and contributions that flow from efforts to uphold the value of an open search for truth while providing a moral and ethical context for discussion and debate. Beyond illustrating these challenges and contributions, however, this article recounts how a tuition-driven Catholic university can actually enhance its Catholic identity by promoting the very type of scholarship and discourse that John Paul II believes is essential to a Church that seeks to respond to the problems and needs of its time.

Foundational Elements For the CRPD

The CRPD began in 2001 with support from the university president, one full-time founding director,⁹ and an office, but with no endowment

⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde*, Sec. 32; emphasis in original.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Sec. 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Sec. 7.

⁹ Founding director Susan M. Sanders, R.S.M., was an associate professor of public policy at DePaul University when former DePaul colleague and then Saint Xavier University President Richard A. Yanikoski invited her to Saint Xavier University. Knowing

and only a \$4,000 annual operating budget.¹⁰ With ambitious dreams but realistic expectations, the founding director patiently persisted, developing the Center into a vital contributor to the University and its surrounding community. The University's religious heritage and identity as a Catholic institution was a consistent focus of the Center; indeed, one of the first things that the founder of any such center or institute must do is to define its mission in relation to the mission of its sponsoring college or university.

The mission of the Center for Religion and Public Discourse, then, is to advance "thoughtful and respectful discussion and scholarship in areas where considerations of economics, politics, science, and the arts can be informed by ethical, spiritual, and religious perspectives." By promoting discourse through the provision of an intellectual "free zone" where timely and sometimes controversial issues can be publicly presented and debated with candor and civility,¹¹ the Center aligns its mission with and provides specific opportunities to realize Saint Xavier University's mission. That is, it provides the opportunity "to educate men and women to search for truth, to think critically, to communicate effectively, and to serve wisely and compassionately in support of human dignity and the common good."¹²

In keeping with its mission, the two key goals of the CRPD are to enhance Saint Xavier University's Catholic identity, internally and externally, and to make the University more visible and respected as a meeting place for reasoned consideration of issues that can and should be informed by religious, moral, and ethical perspectives.

In addition to a mission that establishes a center's goals, to be successful, every new undertaking requires both finances and talented

her reputation for exceptional scholarship and teaching, her strength in networking, and her doctoral preparation in public policy, Dr. Yanikoski asked her to "do something" that would enhance and make more visible the University's Catholic identity. Dr. Sanders suggested founding a center to promote civil discourse about ideas that would be informed by Catholic teaching, values and ethics. That idea became the Center for Religion and Public Discourse.

¹⁰ The \$4,000 operating budget covered postage, printing, stationery, refreshments at advisory committee meetings, and sometimes a small speaker's honorarium. In its personnel budget, the University provided a stipend salary for the founding director. Dr. Sanders was also a professor of public policy and occasionally taught a course, but was not required to do so.

¹¹ Saint Xavier University Center for Religion and Public Discourse, <http://www.sxu.edu/administrative/CRPD/default.asp>.

¹² Saint Xavier University Mission Statement, 2005.

people to move the project from conception to reality. Successful development of a center like the CRPD requires a high level administrative champion (such as the president) and a founding director with multiple connections to the local civic, religious, political, business, and artistic communities—as well as both the time and the personal and political capital to connect members of those varied communities to the university community. Moreover, the founder of such a center or institute needs the acumen and judgment to engage others, to defuse fears or hostility, and to traverse the political minefields typically associated with hosting speakers and programs at Catholic colleges and universities.

Engaging Others

At Saint Xavier University, the CRPD began with strong support from the University president. That support was both organizational—funding for a full-time director's position along with office space was provided—and personal—the founding director was given free reign to bring the Center into being. The president also announced the establishment of the Center to internal and external constituents and introduced the director to members of the University community and to external donors and potential supporters. The founding director, in turn, kept an open line of communication with the president, directly reporting on the Center's activities, and helped to identify and cultivate prospective donors and trustees who were interested in the University but especially in the work of the CRPD. Thus, the director served as an additional emissary and fundraiser for the University in the external community.

Aware of both the need to connect to that external community and the paucity of funds for Center programs, CRPD's founding director created an Advisory Board to help address these realities. Advisory Board members were recruited to generate ideas and to identify connections to potential speakers; they also assisted with raising money. Through their connections, these advisors made it possible to secure speakers at modest or foregone honoraria. Thus, the Center for Religion and Public Discourse has been able to provide speakers of some renown who offered pertinent and worthwhile observations to the University community and its external constituents. The work of the Advisory Board shows that significant collaboration with others—within and beyond the sponsoring institution—is vital for success of the center.

Defusing Fears or Hostility

Because of its small budget and the desire to bring attention to the Center for Religion and Public Discourse with an immediate success, the founding director spent considerable time asking people what they might expect from the just-announced Center. Staff members were generally welcoming, but several faculty members were initially suspicious that the Center would try to make the University more Catholic in ways with which they were not comfortable. Were baptismal and doctrinal litmus tests about to be instituted? Was academic freedom in jeopardy? Were faculty and staff about to be required to attend religious services? And while few at the University had even read *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, the publicity and foment around it provided a fertile context for growing suspicions about the Center and what its director intended it to accomplish.

Alert to the potentially paralyzing impact of such attitudes, the director enlisted the aid of several senior faculty members to help allay the fears of their faculty colleagues. Through small dinner and coffee meetings with opinion leaders throughout the University, these faculty members disabused many—though not all—faculty about any hidden antiacademic freedom agenda they were tempted to attach to the creation of the CRPD.

Given these conversations and previous experience with implementing a new and not yet understood project, the founding director adopted a long-term strategy of beginning with an indirect approach to Catholic identity for internal audiences and gradually developing readiness for and interest in direct presentations and considerations of Catholic identity for both internal and external audiences. Initial, small numbers of participants in CRPD programs were seen as stepping stones to larger attendance. Local speakers were valued while hopes of also engaging national figures grew. Both small and substantial donations as well as major grants augmented modest funds and furthered the growth of the Center's programs.

Traversing Political Minefields

However laudable the Center's goals of enhancing Catholic identity and promoting civil discourse informed by religious and ethical perspectives may be, implementing them can be a challenge. Diverse, though not divergent, understandings of what being a Catholic college or university entails are themselves in need of thoughtful and civil discourse. Two Saint Xavier University documents—its Philosophy Statement and its

Vision of Its Catholic and Mercy Identity—ground the work of the CRPD by reiterating the importance of engaging the community, and especially students, in thoughtful discourse about diverse viewpoints.

“In all programs of study, the University encourages the examination of fundamental questions of human concern, respectful dialogue in the context of diverse points of view and experience, and the search for truth and justice.”¹³ And again:

As a Catholic university, Saint Xavier University challenges all the members of its community to search for truth, especially religious truth, and to engage in a dialogue between faith and reason that ultimately leads toward the contemplation of God’s creation and social action for the common good. This search for truth demands careful observation, critical analysis, vigorous debate, personal and communal theological reflection, and ethical and engaged decision-making leading toward a life that respects both the inherent dignity of another and the worth of all creation....Respecting academic freedom, the University strives to be a place where the vigorous discussion of ideas can occur, especially as they relate to its mission as a Catholic university. In the spirit of respectful and critical discourse, the University welcomes the breadth of the Catholic tradition as well as the voices of other religious and nonreligious communities.¹⁴

In addition to diverse stances on what being a Catholic university entails, merely proposing to delve into the ethical or religious dimensions of contemporary issues can spark controversy about the validity of such an inquiry, and reveal a range of opinions about the possible or appropriate connections. Further, public or political figures who are known to support prochoice positions, and theologians or other scholars whose research explores dimensions of human sexuality and gender are often targets for protests, even if the topics they have been engaged to address have no connection to such issues.

Occasionally, persons external to a university’s affairs or even some supporters of a center’s sponsoring university will castigate the institution for sponsoring speakers whose message seems harmful or unfaithful to its Catholic identity. The CRPD, for example, has been the object of protests, not only from members of the general public but also, in one instance, from a University trustee who led others in picketing the speech of a former Illinois governor: the trustee objected to giving the former governor any forum to speak about any topic at all because of his prochoice

¹³ Saint Xavier University Statement of Philosophy, 2006, http://www.sxu.edu/Administrative/Mission/philosophy_statement.asp.

¹⁴ Vision of the University’s Catholic and Mercy Identity, 2008. http://www.sxu.edu/Administrative/Mission/catholic_identity_vision.asp.

position. The issue was subsequently brought to the attention of the University's Board of Trustees who supported the president's decision to proceed with the event. The trustee remained on the board until his term expired but did not attend that or subsequent board meetings.

Several important lessons can be gained from the aforementioned scenario. Providing the president with an early warning that an event might be publicly protested near the campus is foremost. With such warning, there is opportunity to clarify for stakeholders—trustees, media relations, public safety, and university advancement among them—the rationale for the event, why it is appropriate at a Catholic college or university, and what steps the University is taking to ensure that the event airs multiple perspectives and viewpoints, including the clear Catholic teaching on the issue, and not just those of one person or group.

Further, incidents of this type underscore this essential point: both the center director and the sponsoring institution's president must be prepared for the possibility of controversy, as well as clear and united on their understanding of academic freedom and of the role of a university in the dialogue of learning.

The likelihood of controversy also highlights the importance of any center's organizational placement and administrative support. A center or institute like the CRPD thrives when it is autonomous and directly responsible only to the president. If located with Academic Affairs, Campus Ministry, or some other conceptually appropriate entity, a fledgling center can easily fall victim to internecine warfare, competition for scarce resources, a slow moving academic bureaucracy, and/or the inability to create its own programs and to seek its own funding. Autonomy, however, is not isolation or go-it-alone independence. A center director needs to work circumspectly and in regular communication with others, such as the university's development director or public relations officer, whose services and responsibilities could enhance or hinder the center's success.

Internal and External Audiences

Generally speaking, a center or institute like the CRPD can serve both the members of its sponsoring college or university and the broader constituents of the institution. Thus, both internal and external audiences are important, but such a two-fold focus can be difficult to maintain and can sometimes be unsuccessful. Despite exhortations to avail themselves of all the intellectual resources of a university—not just those in the classroom or in the computer lab—faculty, staff, and especially students

are often hard to draw to late afternoon or early evening programs. Yet, early evening events are optimal times for the general public. Thus, the timing and topics of a center's events can cause an audience and mission dilemma for a center director; while attracting large audiences from the surrounding community can be one measure of success, that very success can deflect attention from the primary mission of the college or university: service to students.

The Center for Religion and Public Discourse at Saint Xavier University has faced this dilemma. Aware of resistance or indifference to nonclassroom educational opportunities, yet committed to the University's "students first" ethos, the founding director searched out members of the academic community who were receptive to such events. Working with these faculty members, it became possible to incorporate some of the Center's programs into students' academic experience. The programs, for example, were utilized as part of ongoing freshman orientation or "transition" classes, as enhancements of student leadership programs, and as course requirements. Partnering with student organizations to match Center offerings with an organization's particular interest or focus also helped build student attendance at certain CRPD programs. Another helpful strategy proved to be involving faculty, staff, and/or students in planning Center programs or suggesting speakers. In short, finding ways to insert the activities of the Center into the academic and cocurricular programs, to create linkages between the Center's offerings on issues related to Catholic social teaching and specific academic disciplines, and to respond to the needs and interests of students and faculty in designing Center events all became important.

This quest to engage students also led to a particularly effective strategy that not only built an audience but also enhanced student learning—the prelecture dinner or reception. Whether the main course was pizza or pork tenderloin, such invitational small group gatherings with a featured speaker developed a certain cachet. They provide students with the sometimes unusual and always valuable learning experience of intellectual discourse in a social setting, a setting they may initially find intimidating but one that anticipates future professional encounters. While students need to be prepared beforehand and debriefed afterward, such prelecture opportunities provide them with a memorable event and certain "bragging rights" about having had dinner with heretofore unknown luminaries such as Kathleen Kennedy Townsend or Donald Trump "apprentice," Bill Rancic. Similarly, faculty and staff appreciated invitations to such preliminary events, which then served as a form of recognition and appreciation. Invitations to these prelecture

events provided new opportunities to showcase the university's academic program, build institutional loyalty, and cultivate new friendships among alumni, trustees, students, and potential donors.

Reaching beyond students and other campus constituents to serve Saint Xavier's neighboring community, the Center for Religion and Public Discourse engaged in a variety of typical public relations efforts. Announcements to local newspapers, parish bulletins, and educational institutions not only highlighted each program's speaker and topic but also announced that the event was free and open to the public. At the first several events, attendees were invited to complete small cards that allowed the Center to build a mailing list that became a source for audience members, which then led to donations from appreciative participants.

While word of mouth became the best advertisement of CRPD programs, the Center took full advantage of all the University's usual internal and external communications channels, employing an electronic marquee on the road in front of the campus, the student newspaper, advertisements covered by the University Relations budget, posters displayed in high traffic areas on and off campus where both students and neighbors would see them, and everything in between. The result of such outreach activities has been not only a steady growth in the number of audience members from the local community but also the surrounding community's growing consciousness of Saint Xavier's Catholic identity, ethos, and programs.

Easing into Discussions about Catholic Identity

As previously mentioned, the founding director's initial exploratory inquiries around the campus led to the decision to focus first on informal conversations—that is, discourse or discussion designed to engage faculty and staff on topics related to their daily lives, but with an ethical thrust. Teasingly (but accurately) titled “Pub Discourses,” these conversations were the financially-limited CRPD's first undertaking. Pub Discourses occur three or four times a year, each offering a ninety-minute opportunity for faculty and staff to socialize over appetizers and beverages, to listen to a short presentation, and then to engage in a spirited conversation with the presenter(s) and those present. True to its name, each Pub Discourse is held in a neighborhood pub near the University; the discourse flows freely, along with the beverages.

Pub Discourse topics came from the traditional academic disciplines linked to religious, moral, and/or ethical concerns and used the talents of University faculty and staff members to start the conversation. The catchy title attracted a variety of staff and faculty to the events and provided generally serious discussions on important issues informed by ethical, moral, and religious perspectives. Illustrating the typical approach, one of the first Pub Discourses was entitled “Am I Dead Enough Yet?” Presented by an esteemed biology professor who offered four different scientific definitions of death, the discussion that followed gravitated toward a discussion of end-of-life issues. Other Pub Discourses have included “The Good, the Sad, and the Ugly,” a staff member’s post 9-11 reflection, and “Conjuring Christian Themes from the Adventures of Harry Potter,” which weighed in on the controversy about that popular series of books and films.

To launch the Pub Discourse, the director bartered. The pub proprietor offered a partially discounted price and the Center provided future pub customers. At first, the Pub Discourse participants were the director’s lunch table companions; some of the University’s “usual suspects,” inclined to support such events; and others personally “recruited,” sometimes primarily by the prospect of free food and beverages after work.

Since that first \$40 event ten years ago, there have been over forty Pub Discourses, each of which now costs about \$150. With the number of participants ranging from six to thirty-five, Pub Discourses continue to be occasional respites amid the busyness of the University and an opportunity for faculty and staff members to mingle and to learn about each other, to recognize how each contributes to the education and well being of the University’s students, and to experience and discuss aspects of the University’s Catholic identity, values, and mission without imposing theological constraints.

Focusing Directly on Catholic Identity

While the Pub Discourses are internal and informal, the second venture of the Center for Religion and Public Discourse was broader and more formal. To address the community’s wellness or “weal” by greasing the way into important conversations, the Center initiated the “Squeaky Weal Lectures,” an annual series of three or four lectures designed to bring prominent local speakers to the University to present and discuss issues of public concern that have implications for the common good. Lectures focus on the moral, ethical, and/or religious aspects

of such issues, thus drawing on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching even if such principles are not directly invoked.

Among Squeaky Weal speakers and topics were Andrew Greeley on “The Facts About American Catholicism”; R. Scott Appleby on “The Sex Abuse Scandal: Implications for the Roman Catholic Church”; Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I. on “Defending Yourself While Forgiving Your Enemies”; Helen Prejean, C.S.J. on “Dead Man Walking—The Journey Continues”; and Kathleen Kennedy Townsend on “How American Churches Are Failing Our Faith, Our Politics, and our Country.” Exploring topics like the morality of the death penalty, truth-telling in the news media, poetry and spirituality, immigration issues, racism in society and in higher education, history from a moral perspective, and ethics in government, the Squeaky Weal Lectures continue to connect Catholic ethos and praxis to a host of challenging contemporary issues.

Squeaky Weal speakers draw audiences ranging from 30-1,500 people. Such success has generated some donations and supported grant applications that have increased program funds and led to more respectable, though still modest, honoraria. Some budget sharing with the Office for University Mission and Heritage has provided further assistance so that Squeaky Weal Lectures remain free and open to all who wish to attend.

Broadening Catholic Identity

While Pub Discourses were designed for Saint Xavier University faculty and staff and the Squeaky Weal Lectures engaged the University and its neighboring community, the third project of the Center for Religion and Public Discourse was designed to support the University’s mission as a Catholic institution. WXAV-FM, Saint Xavier’s 24/7 radio station, has an FCC license that enables it to transmit its signal to urban and suburban households within a twenty-mile radius of the University’s Chicago campus. This area includes a potential audience of one million households.

The Center for Religion and Public Discourse saw in this resource the possibility to extend its mission and promote its goal of visibility for the University and its Catholic identity. From this possibility developed *God Matters*, a weekly half-hour interview program focused on how God does or does not inform how people live and what they do on the job or at home or in the community day by day. The CRPD’s founding-director-turned-radio-producer engaged talented, locally known, and in some

cases, nationally prominent individuals in conversations about their active lives, and about whether and where God comes into the why and how of what they do. While not usually theological in approach or expressly Catholic in viewpoint, the core of each interview is clearly sacramental in the sense that the conversation helps attune listeners to “finding God in all things.”¹⁵ Many of the programs also address important social justice concerns such as the involvement of the U.S. military in Central America, the plight of undocumented immigrants, and teen dating violence where young women are most often the victims.

God Matters has been recognized for its quality, winning a second place *Silver Dome* award in the category for “Best Public Affairs Program in a Large Market” from the Illinois Broadcasting Association in its annual competition, where the program surpassed two of the largest commercial radio stations in Chicago.

As the activities of the Center expanded over the past ten years, the time came to ensure the future of *God Matters* by providing for a transition in leadership. While the Center director continues to be the executive producer of the program, the programmatic, interviewing, editing, and promotional activities are now the responsibility of a young, creative station manager who both understands the mission of the program and possesses excellent interviewing skills. Recently, as beneficiaries of a small grant, the station manager and a professor in the School of Education who is also a Vietnam veteran have begun to collect interviews from Saint Xavier University student veterans to contrast their experiences of military service in the twenty-first century with that of veterans of earlier twentieth century wars. How does God matter during times of war, and does God matter differently to veterans of different wars?

Deepening Catholic Identity

By 2006, the Center’s varied approaches to addressing and enhancing the University’s Catholic identity were popular fixtures in Saint Xavier’s academic calendar. It was time for a more direct approach to expressing, exploring, and deepening the University’s Catholic identity.

This readiness gave rise to the Catholic Colloquium Lectures, a title that spoke directly to the importance the University attaches to its

¹⁵ Michael J. Himes, “Finding God in All Things: A Sacramental Worldview and Its Effects,” in *As Leaven in the World: Catholic Perspectives on Faith, Vocation, and the Intellectual Life*, ed. Thomas M. Lardy (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 2001), 91-103.

Catholic heritage and identity. This new series of three or four lectures per year brings Catholic theologians, historians, journalists, and Church leaders to the University specifically to address issues of Catholic social teaching, Catholic analysis of contemporary issues, or the Catholic intellectual tradition. Among Catholic Colloquium presenters were Shawn Copeland on “Appreciating Differences: The Catholic University in the Formation of Persons”; Peter Steinfels on “Ballots and Bishops: The New Landscape of Catholic Politics”; Cardinal Francis George, O.M.I., on “Paradigms of Interpretation: Catholic Universities and Catholic Moral Life”; J. Bryan Hehir on “The New Nuclear Age: Political and Moral Dimensions”; and Deirdre Mullan, R.S.M., on “The Vision Still Has Its Time: The U.N., Catholic Social Teaching, and Global Citizenship.” With an established reputation for quality provided by the Center’s Squeaky Weal Lectures, the new series drew respectable audiences from the very first lecture.

Not only did these specifically Catholic lectures give the University community and the public important opportunities to expand or deepen their understanding of Catholicism as an incarnational and sacramental perspective on life and as a doctrinal and highly organized religion, these occasions also gave students, faculty, staff, and guests the chance to engage directly with Church officials and theological scholars. Moreover, when speakers and their writings were appropriately linked to the academic program so that students were reading books or articles by a Center speaker or related to a speaker’s topic, opportunities for discourse within the classroom multiplied.

Indicators of Success

With clarity of mission, administrative support, community linkages, and freedom to create, despite limited financial resources, the Center for Religion and Public Discourse emerged into University and community circles. That the Center has continued for just over a decade indicates its success. But there is much more. In its first decade (2001-2011) the Center has accomplished the following:

- Mounted over 200 programs including lectures, panels, seminars, symposia, exhibits, and teaching events cosponsored with local high schools and artistic organizations, many with nationally recognized speakers;
- Organized and presented a national weekend conference on the topic of “Women and Islam” that attracted over 150 participants;

- Published three monographs based on the lectures of some of the Center's most prominent speakers;
- Produced a weekly award-winning half-hour radio program that reaches a potential audience of nearly 1.0 million people; and
- Garnered an award given to its director for the public service contributions the Center has made to the greater Chicago metropolitan area, thus providing the University with broader visibility and recognition.

Additionally, occasional special events—e.g., a collaboration with local high schools to mount an art exhibit on the subject of war; a partnership with a local arts organization to present a musical performance on “Inspiration, Creativity, and Meaning”; engagement with the local interfaith community to produce a conference on “Women in Islam: Comparative Perspectives and Challenges”—extended the service and reputation of the Center. Such special events reached new audiences, offering them creative examples of how a Catholic university embraces the fullness of a religious tradition whose name means “universal.”

Expansion of programs, increased audience size, a widening range of collaborating partners, public awards—these tangible indicators of success are summarized above and mentioned throughout this article. Similarly tangible and valuable indicators of success are the growing mailing list of those who want to be notified of Center offerings, the interest of other University departments and programs in cosponsoring selected lectures, and the willingness of local businesses and parishes to display posters or publish notices about upcoming events.

Additionally and importantly, the funding garnered by the Center, which continues to have only a modest \$6,000 operating budget, has grown. Since its founding in 2001, the CRPD has raised almost \$400,000 in grants and donations. Modest donations from audience members, successful grant proposals to Catholic, educational, and philanthropic foundations, and event sponsorship by local businesses paved the way for more major gifts. A \$100,000 grant from a local foundation gave stability to *God Matters*, the weekly radio show. The previously noted quality of this radio program has more recently attracted the aforementioned grant (\$5,000) to fund a series of interviews with veterans of U.S. wars, including Saint Xavier University student veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Most recently, a major donor's gift of \$200,000 has endowed an annual lecture to be given by a nationally or internationally respected scholar, expert, or leader.

The most significant success, however, may be the impetus that the activities and prominence of the Center for Religion and Public Discourse provided for the creation of the Office of University Mission and Heritage at Saint Xavier University. This unanticipated development took advantage of a rising engagement within the University community with its Catholic identity and the circumstance of a new presidency. The founding director of the Center became the inaugural Vice President for University Mission and Heritage, the office within which the CRPD is now housed.

Thus, while no formal evaluative process has tried to measure the impact of Center programs on the minds and hearts of students, faculty, staff, or community participants, there is little doubt about the significant accomplishments of this small Center at mid-sized, tuition-driven Saint Xavier University. Behind those accomplishments stand listening-based strategies about how to win the support and involvement of all segments of the University.

What's Next?

As Saint Xavier University's Center for Religion and Public Discourse looks to the future, plans involve not only continuing the established programming but also expanding the reach and the formats of such programs. The previously mentioned endowed annual lecture has just been launched and will need to be firmly established as a major event that enriches the University, serves the broader community, and realizes the hopes of its founding donor.

Extending the reach of past, but still relevant, Center lectures is another project just underway. While currently many of these presentations, as well as *God Matters* broadcasts, are available as podcasts on the University's website, the Center hopes to add to the available collection as the University radio station increases its capacity and adds personnel who can edit the programs for website placement. Similarly, two lectures and a small volume of conference papers have thus far been published. As funds become available, additional lectures will be transcribed and compiled into an edited volume that demonstrates how one Catholic university "sets the table" for important conversations about God, meaning, human dignity, and responsibility for the common good.

The Center is also experiencing its first leadership transition. A new director¹⁶ was installed at the start of the 2011-2012 academic year. Though familiar with CRPD programs and processes as well as with the University itself, this director will assuredly bring new ideas and possibilities to the Center's future. One continuing challenge of particular interest to the incoming director is the question of how to engage more students in this important nonclassroom aspect of their education.

Finally, the Center continues to harbor a yet-to-be-realized goal that will require additional funding. The CRPD hopes, in time, to be able to support scholarly work by University faculty, encouraging and enabling them to address the ethical, religious, and spiritual dimensions of critical issues within their disciplines.

In Sum: A Model

Beginning with an idea, the support of an entrepreneurial president, a \$4,000 operating budget, and a full-time director with a background in higher education and broad connections to the community, Saint Xavier University's Center for Religion and Public Discourse has exceeded all programmatic expectations. Except for scale and the inability to conduct basic research or fund fellows or scholars-in-residence, the activities and accomplishments of the Center do not differ markedly from those of larger well-endowed institutes and centers. Thus, this Center offers one model evidencing that even tuition-driven Catholic colleges and universities can create centers that express and enhance their Catholic identity and academic mission. Indeed, as is the case at Saint Xavier, such a center or institute can generate the type of value-added discourse and learning that make the Catholic intellectual tradition and Catholic social teaching accessible, understandable, and meaningful to both the academic and the local civic and religious communities.

¹⁶ The new director, Sister Joy Clough, R.S.M., joined the Center as a part-time staff member in 2007. She had served as Communications Director for the Archdiocese of Chicago and was familiar with the University community as an alumna, a former trustee, and the author of the University's history.