

May I express publicly my sincere thanks and appreciation to all the members of this academic community for their kind expression of congratulations to me on this appointment. To the Board of Trustees of Xavier, I say in deep humility, thanks for the confidence they have demonstrated by their action. To Sister Maris Stella I am grateful for her words of encouragement and support.

And to the literal hundreds of well wishers, and their offers of assistance, I am encouraged as I assume this position.

Because there has been great turmoil and unrest on college campuses across the United States, and in view of the fact that large numbers of college presidents have left their posts, I have been asked the following question quite frequently.

Why would anyone in his right mind accept the leadership at this time of a private, church related institution which serves a predominantly Negro student body -- particularly, too, when there seems to be such chaos and even plans by national groups to wreck or stop everything on any college campus? My answer is simple:

I am here for the same reason that some 1,100 students and 200 faculty and staff are here.

We believe in God; we have faith in ourselves, and in each other; we are justifiably proud of who we are, and we understand the American system enough to know that in order to live as men, and serve our fellow men, one must be prepared to be a part of the system -- and Xavier has, and can continue to provide, the educational services for the struggle to right the wrongs, to heal the wounds, to build the society all of us need and deserve. And we believe that here is where the meaningful action is, and we want to do our part.

I am convinced that the students on this campus, like students elsewhere, have come here to develop further their minds and bodies to compete in an open society, and too, they want a part of the action. And despite perhaps what some small groups might later suggest, they don't want necessarily to run or wreck universities, they just want to be able to be a part of what their university does, and a part of how it is done.

They want to feel that their university is sensitive to their needs, and the needs of their society. They want a human approach, as well as a spiritual and academic approach, to their education. And even though they, like we, sometimes forget or neglect to practice all of what we preach, they expect to hear and to see the commitment we make to people. There is nothing wrong with this; nor is this something unusual as a goal and procedure for any university.

I pledge here and now that this will be this university's approach. We will demand that all people on this campus be treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve. Any student, faculty or staff member who feels that he is not personally comfortable under this system, for whatever the reason, we would strongly recommend that he or she seek some other institution to pursue his or her personal goals.

And racism of whatever color, shade or hue, open, subtle or by indifference, will not be tolerated. And I don't have to be told how it feels to be victim of racism. It cannot be explained in words. "Nobody knows the sting of the whip like the man who feels it on his back."

We will have enough other physical, emotional and academic problems on this campus as we continue to build a better Xavier. We can ill afford the presence of people who cannot

respect and show the common courtesies, of treating people as people. We can allow for mistakes and misplaced temper once or maybe twice, but all the good will later cannot eradicate or ease the pain of constantly subjecting anyone to personal indignities or humiliations, and we intend to free Xavier from any part of it now and in the future.

In anger and frustration the uniformed may question the past, now knowing it, by suggesting that the whole concept of a man-centered, people oriented campus is new to Xavier. The truth of the matter is that if there is a strength upon which Xavier has grown, and a pillar upon which it will adjust to the challenges of the day, it will be in its founding pledge to the dignity of man. This commitment has not changed.

The cornerstone of the Administration, leading from the library walk, is inscribed with this conviction:

"God's greatest work on earth is man;
Man's master art is the leading of
man to God."

This was no hollow pledge, and it is today the core around which we will move.

We may hear later, and understandably so, that we will have to get with it. That we must build power, and not just pray for a better world. We will be told this by some who will infer that nothing has been done thus far.

I am reminded that in Chapter I of Ecclesiastes there appears in Verses 9 and 11 these passages:

"What has been done is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the Sun."

I am not suggesting that as we face our future we do not intend to make bold changes, or for that matter we have not made mistakes in the past. I am merely suggesting that as we continue to build, we must have an appreciation of the past, clearly understand the present, and then project the future. Or else the past, present and future are all irrelevant. And if there is one thing we expect this university to be today, it is to be relevant.

Can we say that the past has been relevant for black people?

Let us go back briefly to the time of the founding of Xavier, say the 1915's and picture New Orleans, and the attitude of the South towards its black citizens.

Reconstruction was over and the wrath of Southerners, we call it now "backlash", had effectively purged all Negro participation in politics, government and business. The South had rebuilt its pre-civil war image. Might was right; justice, freedom and equality under the law did not include the sons and daughters of African ancestry.

Plessy vs. Ferguson had been decided by the Supreme Court holding that street car segregation was legal, (this case was a Louisiana one) and its historic ruling was to secure the base for the developing doctrine of "separate but equal" in all public accommodations, and more specifically, education. And in all cases, the only consistency demonstrated in this tragic doctrine was its feature of separateness with no concern for its "quality" feature.

The emergency of a never, never again attitude against the Negroes' aspirations for equality was at its peak.

(This was not only true in the South because the entire nation had become insensitive to black Americans. For you historians, it was in the early 1900's that W.E.B. Dubois and others in the East held their famous Niagra Conference demanding equal justice for each American in education, economy, social life and religious affairs. It was then that the NAACP and the Urban League were founded -- radical organizations by any standards in those times.)

Imagine then a Philadelphia woman of great wealth, who had given not only her money but her life of service to Indians and Negroes, marching into New Orleans with a band of other courageous religious women; laymen, black and white, to build a college that would educate black young people to be teachers, lawyers, scientists, pharmacists and doctors. Look at the building which faces the canal and which bears the cornerstone -- it was then, and is today -- one of the finest academic structures in all of New Orleans. She was demonstrating in physical preparations what she had already pledged in energy and service.

This woman, Mother Katharine Drexel, was not simply talking, she was in fact building black power. She would have been described in the 1960's as an "outside agitator"; someone who didn't understand the "problem" here. But how much she did! She knew it too well.

She was saying to an indifferent and sometimes hostile community: "Black is beautiful" too, and there is an equal likeness of God in all of us -- a divinity which demands the finest treatment, buildings, the best teachers and the dedication of all who would dare to grace this campus -- students, faculty and staff.

Katharine Drexel was saying, despite the hardships, the cruelties and the lack of assistance, one day, "we shall overcome."

And my dear faculty, students and staff, we are here this day because what Katharine Drexel started in 1915 is as important now as it has ever been. (There is nothing new under the sun); and we are here to pledge as one of her sons that although the problems are many, "We too shall overcome."

The sons and daughters of Xavier have in fact lived up to the promise of Xavier.

- ___ They serve as educators in schools all over this nation;
- ___ They are surgeons and general practitioners in cities large and small;
- ___ They serve in state legislatures and courtrooms in the North and South, east and west;
- ___ They have led sit-ins and marches in Clarksdale, Miss., New Orleans and Birmingham, Ala.
- ___ They fill the prescriptions for the sick in drug stores and hospitals everywhere.
- ___ They have served in the Peace Corps, in the urban and rural neighborhoods of this nation.

Yes, they have formed a living memorial to the past. And we are proud of them all, and we are proud to be a Xavierite.

But what is the past. And it is history. This is the Now generation. Can we meet our challenges with the same service, dedication, sincerity and honesty? The rules have changed somewhat, but the game is the same. How well will we face our future?

That answer lies with the people in this gymnasium this morning. We are, in fact, the Xavier of Today and Tomorrow. Blessed with a glorious past, stirred by the events of our times and limited only by our attitudes, energy, determination and commitment, we face this academic year of 1968-69.

We intend to close the communication gap which has developed between the young and the old; the student and his teacher and his administration. We will work to eliminate the justified skepticism, bred by years of racial injustice that tends to create, even on this campus, another communications gap! We hope to convince those who would tend to be emotional, to deal with the facts, to search for truth and to weigh carefully the judgments that they must form. In a word, we would hope to teach the development of, as John Kennedy put it, "grace under pressure", and the ability to live with crisis, to seek difficult accommodations, to play for time, to move towards objectives sometimes through outrage and frustration. This will be a part of the game of life. We shall not create the circumstances, but where they may arise, we would want our own to be prepared.

It will take a special kind of courage. A courage-possessed by some and desired by others -- described by the former president of Brandeis University Abram L. Sachar as:

"The courage of tensile strength and clear, sure sanity, a quiet courage that can wait in the dark and face the bright day unafraid of agony and anxiety, distractions, disappointments and the steady erosion of morale and morality. This courage includes the determination not to be rattled, not to be driven into impulsive or capricious action when the stakes are terrifyingly high."

What are the practical application of the goals we seek?

We feel that the three core words to accomplish our work this year will be:

- (1) Innovation
- (2) Pragmatism
- (3) Involvement

If we may start with the last first.

I am pleased that the student leaders have already pledged their continuing efforts to build a better Xavier. Not only have many devoted time this summer to a number of projects, but committees and assignments have already been made by Mr. Edward Francis for a number of key concerns. There will obviously be other developments during the course of the year, and the Student Government, as well as dormitory councils, have geared themselves to serve the best interests of the students and the University by addressing themselves immediately to any problem which would tend to keep the University from meeting its commitment to the people on this campus.

We have discussed already appointments of students to any number of University committees -- some old, some new. We expect dedicated and unfailing service.

Students will be involved; we are committed to this for a stronger University. We are looking for people who are willing to give in time and service as much as they expect to receive in return.

We have asked faculty and administrators for the same involvement. We need and want more people to people relationships.

The handbook is now being reviewed by student committees, and indeed it should be. There are a number of confusing sections. For this we take full responsibility. We expect that these will be clarified. We are suspending the entire section on Student Conduct until the University and students have worked out together all the details.

This is not to say there are no guides to student conduct. As reasonable men and women, I think we can evaluate that conduct which no society of mature individuals should condone. Should these occasions arise, I am confident that the students and faculty who review serious matters will be just and fair.

We are not naive, and we realize there may be those who would care to do things their own way -- that is, they will deal without facts; they would rather embarrass than correct; they would rather tear down than build; they are far from being idealistic -- they are rather selfish. They would deny to others what they would demand for themselves. They are by no means typical, but their lack of respect for others, and even themselves, cause serious embarrassment for the 99% of those of us who are sincere in our efforts.

It is in this area that we explain our second core word, Pragmatism.

Someone has to be responsible for the order which allows the divergence of personalities and characteristics on a campus like Xavier to be protected in their freedom to grow and learn. Without some focal point, there is chaos and even anarchy. This responsibility on campus resides ultimately in the office of the president. I pledge to all of you that I will depend on your advice, support and good will and respect your judgments. But I shall not hesitate to act when the best interests of this University, its students, faculty and staff are in jeopardy. I pray for the wisdom and courage that will be needed in making the decision to act in those circumstances, but we will be guided by what is right and just -- but act we will.

In being practical further, we expect that disappointments and frustrations will be many. We ask for patience. We do not expect to deal continuously with minutia or trivia, but neither do we hope that red tape or bureaucracy will not allow each person to get a hearing or an answer to a problem, even if this answer is "there is no answer."

And, lastly, we hope to be innovative -- not simply for innovation's sake. Some people think they are innovating when they merely change an approach to something with no measurable change in results.

I am asking that all students, teachers and administrators look to doing things better, and if innovating will produce the results -- innovate! We should not be slaves to change, but neither are we so bound to traditional approaches that our results are weary and stagnant.

Administratively, you will be seeing change. We hope to serve our responsibility in a better fashion. We hope to do so in a way that we economize both in financial ways and in personnel resources.

We hope to see more counseling on campus. We have asked departments to see that this is done. We would like to see more campus organizations come alive and do something. We would like to see more students and faculty involved in community affairs, political, civic and educational. There is much to be done, and Xavier must continue to be a part of the community's growth; we must help our brothers in need now.

We expect to have more intramural activities on campus this year. Let's get together and plan some meaningful athletic activities.

And let us all quit "letting John do it." Quit sitting in the dorms all day, in the lounges, on each and every weekend in the T. Let's get involved. Edward Francis and Kenneth Ferdinand will need the support of every student. They should not see you only when there is a complaint to be lodged.

And what about the academics? As we live to learn, we must also learn the competencies to make a living. We hope that the love for learning is a preoccupation of all students. The library ought to be a bee hive of activity, and classrooms should be more than 50 minutes of presence only. We have asked faculty to expect more, offer more, and hopefully accomplish more!

I have great faith in the students at Xavier and confidence in this staff. We will deal honestly with our problems. We would ask for the same of everyone else. Let's build a better and brighter Xavier. Let's grow as men so that one day we can meet our Maker and we can say like the contemporary Christian soldier of our day, Rev. Martin Luther King: "Free at last, free at last, Great God Almighty, we are free at last."

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At the request of the staff of The Xavier Herald, copies of President Norman C. Francis' speech have been printed by the Xavier University Printing Office for distribution as a supplement to the September issue of the paper.