



**Resolution for the
100th Anniversary of the Founding of
Xavier University of Louisiana**

Approved by the Xavier Board of Trustees, October 19, 2024

WHEREAS, Mother Katharine Drexel founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Native Americans and People of Color in 1891; and

WHEREAS, Mother Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, through a series of secret business negotiations, purchased the former Southern University campus in uptown New Orleans in 1915 to create a high school devoted to the education of African Americans; and

WHEREAS, in 1916, Mother Katharine Drexel's new school was incorporated as "Xavier University Preparatory School" and added a Normal School, offering one of the few career fields (teaching) open to Black Americans at the time; and

WHEREAS, by 1925, with escalating enrollment at Xavier University Preparatory School, Mother Katharine and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament opened the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and in 1927, they opened the College of Pharmacy; and

WHEREAS, Xavier University appointed its first president, Reverend Edward Brunner, S.S.J. in 1928; and

WHEREAS, despite an encyclical from Pope Pius XI condemning co-education as a "pernicious error," in 1930, Mother Katharine Drexel secured an official exception that would allow Xavier, which had been co-educational since its founding, to continue to educate both men and women of color; and

WHEREAS, in 1931, Xavier appointed Mother Agatha Ryan, S.B.S. as president to oversee the development of the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Pharmacy and the graduate school; and

WHEREAS, Xavier University opened a new campus at its present-day location in the heart of New Orleans in 1932, on what was an abandoned industrial site located on the edge of the Gert Town neighborhood; and

WHEREAS, upon the passing of Mother Katharine Drexel at age 96, in 1955, Xavier's President, Reverend Mother Agatha, sent an appeal for funding, noting, "Owing principally to the death of Reverend Mother Foundress last year," she wrote, "Xavier is now in much need of financial assistance;" and

WHEREAS, Mother Agatha Ryan, S.B.S. was succeeded in the presidency by Sister M. Josephine Kenney, S.B.S. and Sister M. Maris Stella Ross, S.B.S.; and

WHEREAS, in 1961, Xavier Senior Class President Rudy Lombard ('61) helped to organize the first "Freedom Ride" across the South; after the Freedom Riders were beaten, arrested, and firebombed by the Ku Klux Klan, Xavier's Dean of Men, Norman C. Francis ('52), arranged a haven for them at St. Michael's dormitory as the caravan came through New Orleans; Xavier students, staff and alumni organized to help Black voters register, a process that, at the time in Louisiana, included a written test, an oral test, and a "moral" and "character" test; and

WHEREAS, in 1968, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament called a campus-wide meeting to ask Executive Vice President Norman C. Francis to become the University's first lay president, and subsequently transferred governance of this Catholic university to a lay board; and

WHEREAS, in 1970, Xavier hired Dr. JW Carmichael, who developed, with colleagues throughout the sciences, its Summer Science Academy and premed program, which has been emulated as a model of success for producing Black doctors and scientists and bringing Xavier recognition as a leader in the graduation of scholars who complete medical school and Doctors of Philosophy; and

WHEREAS, in 1980, the Institute for Black Catholic Studies was established at Xavier University of Louisiana to educate both non-ordained laity and clergy for ministry within U.S. Black Catholic communities; and

WHEREAS, in 1988, Xavier began a series of major construction projects on the campus, expanding the original footprint to include the Norman C. Francis Science Complex (1988), Xavier South (1990), the Library Resource Center (1993), and the Living/Learning Center (1998); and

WHEREAS, on October 1, 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized Mother Katharine Drexel as Saint Katharine Drexel at the Vatican, naming her patron saint of racial justice and philanthropy; and

WHEREAS in 2005, Xavier University of Louisiana achieved its longtime goal of enrolling 4,000 students, only to suffer campus-wide devastation in Hurricane Katrina, in which the aftermath burst levees and flooded New Orleans, leaving hundreds trapped on the campus, including the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament who cooked food for themselves and others at Xavier, ferrying food in boats to stranded students; and

WHEREAS, despite the desperate state of the City of New Orleans and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, President Norman C. Francis told his staff that to save Xavier University of Louisiana, they must reopen the campus in time for spring classes; and

WHEREAS, with President Norman C. Francis chairing the Louisiana Recovery Authority, and with the help of federal loans and the sweat and effort of thousands of volunteers, New Orleans slowly recovered, and Xavier University of Louisiana reopened its flood-damaged campus on time on January 17, 2006; and

WHEREAS, just a few months later, the graduating "Hurricane Class" of 2006 was inspired by the words of their commencement speaker, President Barack Obama, then the U.S. Senator from Illinois; and

WHEREAS, in 2006, United States President George W. Bush awarded President Norman C. Francis the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor; and

WHEREAS, through the generosity of domestic and international donors, Xavier University of Louisiana recovered from Hurricane Katrina; and

WHEREAS, on October 6, 2012, the Saint Katharine Drexel Chapel, which sits at the heart of campus and was designed by renowned architect Cesar Pelli, was consecrated; and

WHEREAS, upon the retirement of President Norman C. Francis in 2015, after having served the longest tenure of any United States university president, Xavier University of Louisiana announced the selection of Dr. C. Reynold Verret, a distinguished biochemist and immunologist academician as its new leader; and

WHEREAS, in July 2016, President C. Reynold Verret spoke of Saint Katharine Drexel's value that education is a "right by justice and a means of empowerment;" and

WHEREAS, Xavier University of Louisiana has forged a 100-year tradition of academic excellence through the transformational growth and development of its talented pool of students whom it prepares to become leaders of a global society; and

WHEREAS, Xavier University of Louisiana reaffirms its traditions and values in higher education, research, alumni engagement, and community involvement for the betterment of society and mankind.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of Xavier University of Louisiana by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament shall commence on January 1, 2025, and shall conclude on December 31, 2025; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, through the engagement of students, alumni, civic leaders, parents, friends, faculty, benefactors, retirees, neighbors, and staff, the celebration shall lead all in the reflection upon and reaffirmation of Xavier University of Louisiana's legacy of preparing students for lives of leadership and service, and its Catholic values in higher education, research, and community engagement for the betterment of society.