



XULA Contact: Regi Reyes
(505) 264-9251 | rreyes@xula.edu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Adrian Dominican Sisters provide scholarship endowment for Xavier Institute for Black Catholic Studies students

New Orleans, La. – In 1942, a college-educated Black man sent for his equally-educated wife and their children to escape the dangers of being “educated negroes” in the south to join him in Chicago from their hometown of Pritchard, Alabama. His wife braved the long train ride with six children in tow, including their youngest: an infant who would grow up to become a renowned theologian, educator, leader and scholar. Sister Jamie Phelps, Ph.D., formerly Sister Martin Thomas, spent eight years of her illustrious career as the Director of Xavier University of Louisiana’s Institute for Black Catholic Studies (IBCS). Now, the Adrian Dominican Sisters, an order of which Dr. Phelps has been a member since she was a teenager right out of high school, is honoring her service to her faith and pupils by endowing a scholarship named in her honor.

Xavier and the Adrian Dominican sisters have signed an agreement to endow \$500,000 for the Sister Jamie T. Phelps, OP Ph.D. Endowed Scholarship Fund to provide financial assistance to students enrolled in the advanced degree or continuing education program in Xavier’s IBCS.

In addition to honoring Dr. Phelps’ remarkable contributions to the IBCS, the Black Catholic community and the Church at-large, Sr. Elise D. Garcia, O.P., newly elected Prioress of the Adrian Dominican Sisters, describes the endowment as reparation for the congregation’s “past participation in structural racism and in support of new pathways toward racial justice.”

“The Sisters’ investment responds boldly to the need for solidarity that engenders right relationships in the Body of Christ. The IBCS looks forward to this collaboration. IBCS participants are immersed in a unique learning environment rooted in critical theological studies that focus on Black approaches, critiques and contributions to systematic and pastoral theologies, ministry, aesthetics and education,” said Kathleen Dorsey Bellow, Director of Xavier’s IBCS. “The academic rigor of the program is balanced by a rich community life of Black Catholic prayer, worship, and cultural activities. In the IBCS process, faculty, staff and students engage deeply with God’s gifts of Blackness, adapting to historical and modern challenges of anti-Black racism, white supremacy and other injustices that oppress God’s people in the Church and society at-large. The mission of the Institute corresponds with that endowed by Xavier’s foundress, St. Katharine Drexel, to promote a more just and humane society. The generous endowment of the Adrian Dominican Sisters will enable the IBCS to recruit young

Black adults, members of poorer parishes and struggling scholars who would not otherwise have the means to study in the Institute, to make their own important contributions through Christ to the community and Church.”

Besides serving as director of the IBCS for eight years, Dr. Phelps was instrumental in its establishment at Xavier, the nation’s only historically Black and Catholic University. She served many years as a member of the Institute faculty and the Associate Director for the Degree Program, providing important structure to the academic program and encouraging ThM graduates, many her former students, to pursue doctoral studies so that they could return to teach at the IBCS.

The IBCS was the general idea of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus and the Black Catholic Theological Symposium, whose members discerned in the late 1970s the need for an educational program directed by Black Catholic leaders for the Black Catholic community as well as pastors, religious and educators of other cultural backgrounds who minister with Black Catholics. The pilot program was presented by the Reverend Thaddeus Posey, OFM Cap. and launched in 1980. Dr. Phelps, who at the time was a doctoral candidate in systematic theology at the Catholic University of America, gave a presentation on the significance of such an educational program for the Church in its ministry to Black Catholics during a meeting of key administrators and faculty of Xavier as well as the Catholic bishops of the New Orleans Archdiocese.

“My life objective is to assist in the inner transformation of the human community by participating in the education of Christians and other religious women and men committed to using their knowledge and expertise for the construction of a more inclusive world by sharing their knowledge and experience of God and in the case of Christians by continuing Jesus’ proclamation of the good news of God’s universal love and His call for social justice and communion,” Dr. Phelps previously shared.

Two years after the initial pilot program, Xavier’s Board of Trustees approved the curriculum design of the Master’s Program in Pastoral Theology. This approval empowered the IBCS to initiate the Degree Program that would be accredited and awarded through the University’s Graduate School. In 1984, the IBCS celebrated its inaugural class of graduates. For more information about the Institute for Black Catholic Studies, go to <https://www.xula.edu/ibcs/> email ibcs@xula.edu or call 504/520-7691.

###

About Xavier University of Louisiana

Xavier University of Louisiana, America’s only historically Black and Catholic University, is ranked among the top three HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) in the nation. Recognized as a national leader in STEM and health sciences, Xavier produces more African American students who graduate from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Additionally, Xavier’s College of Pharmacy is also among the top producers of African American pharmacists in the country.

Established in 1925, by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament as a place for African American and Native Americans to receive quality education, Xavier has since expanded its programs in art, business, education, biological sciences, chemistry, pharmacy and political science. More recent additions in robotics, bioinformatics, engineering, data science, neuroscience and genetics, in addition to new STEM-based master’s programs, have provided Xavier students (2815 undergraduates and 787 graduates) an unbeatable combination

of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities and life experiences. Xavier students collaborate with world-renowned faculty, who are experts in their fields, to produce award-winning research and notable work. The winning Xavier formula is to provide students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls, thereby facilitating a more just and humane society for all. For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana, visit us online at www.xula.edu or contact Regi Reyes at (504) 520-5240 or rreyes@xula.edu.