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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

XAVIER UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA, ST. MICHAEL INDIAN SCHOOL SIGN MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING TO ESTABLISH AFFILIATED CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY FOR NATIVE AMERICANS

ST. MICHAELS, AZ (MONDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2019) -

St. Michael Indian School (SMIS) and Xavier University of Louisiana (XULA) announced today that the two institutions have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a partnership to explore the establishment of a Catholic university to be located on the campus of St. Michael Indian School in St. Michaels, Arizona. Both institutions founded by Saint Katharine Drexel will implement a four-stage process through 2020 that begins with a feasibility study conducted by both institutions for an affiliated Catholic university.

XULA / SMIS MOU

The intent of the MOU signed today by Xavier University of Louisiana and St. Michael Indian School is to explore the founding of an affiliated university to provide Catholic higher education that builds up the faith, values, and wisdom of the students on the Navajo Nation. It also established an ongoing relationship between the two institutions to explore the university's feasibility and funding possibilities along with a potential infrastructure plan.

The MOU outlined a four-phase process where each institution will take the deliberate steps necessary to ensure the appropriate groundwork is completed that would lead to the founding of a university on St. Michael Indian School's campus. Today, the first phase of the MOU began with the implementation of a study that will explore the feasibility of building an affiliated Catholic university to serve the Native American population. Conversations during this phase will center around project funding, potential funding prospects, and the overall plausibility of the university.

"With a signed MOU in place, Xavier University of Louisiana and St. Michael Indian School join together through faith, fervent prayer, and the providential vision of our shared Foundress to undertake this exploration with a prayerful discernment over 100 years in the making," said Reynold Verret, president of Xavier University of Louisiana.

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Strategic partners outlined within the MOU also include the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady of Guadalupe Franciscan Province. These strategic partners will have input and decision-making capabilities throughout each of the phases outlined within the MOU.

Today, there are over 240 Catholic universities and colleges in the United States. Xavier is the nation's only historically Black and Catholic university. If solidified, this partnership would establish the nation's first affiliated Catholic university with the explicit mission to provide a four-year, liberal arts curriculum to serve the Native American population.

A Shared Mission and History

SMIS and XULA have a shared mission and history as educational institutions founded by Saint Katharine Drexel whose mission continues today through her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament to create Catholic educational opportunities for Native and African American peoples.

In 1900, Saint Katharine Drexel began her work to establish educational facilities for the Native people through buying land in the area known today as St. Michaels, Arizona. With assistance from nine of her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady of Guadalupe Franciscan friars, and tribal leaders including Chee Dodge, Saint Drexel opened St. Michael Indian School in 1902, making it the oldest and continuously operating school on the Navajo Nation today. In 1915, the archbishop of New Orleans approached then Mother Katharine about the lack of Catholic higher education for African Americans. Mother Katharine opened a high school that same year on a site located in New Orleans, Louisiana. Within eight years, what we know today as Xavier University of Louisiana began offering a four-year, liberal arts curriculum.

"Throughout Saint Katharine's storied life, she remained committed to providing an educational ladder from kindergarten through college for Native Americans," explained Dot Teso, president of St. Michael Indian School. "Today, we continue that commitment by joining forces with Xavier University of Louisiana to begin the process of establishing a Catholic university on St. Michael Indian School's campus. Saint Katharine Drexel would be very pleased to see us expand her mission for the Native American people."

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