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1925 – 2025

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Xavier University of Louisiana Art Gallery to Spotlight Work of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament

New Orleans – For nearly a century, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament (S.B.S.) have been at the core of the achievements and student successes at Xavier University of Louisiana. The religious order, established by St. Katharine Drexel when she took her vows in 1891, would help her found the nation’s only historically Black and Catholic university when Xavier’s College of Arts and Sciences was affirmed in 1925. Now, as Xavier prepares to celebrate its centennial, a timely tribute to the S.B.S.’s work is set to be displayed at the university’s Art Gallery on the first floor of the Administration Building, located at [1 Drexel Drive in New Orleans, LA 70125](#). From February 19 to March 30, 2024, the exhibit “Lighting the Path” will explore the work of these women who tirelessly gave of themselves to fulfill their vows of service to Black and Native American people, seeking racial equity through the uplifting power of Catholic education. An opening reception will be held on February 19 at 5 p.m. in the Art Gallery.

“Lighting the Path” will feature rarely-seen photographs, historical papers, artifacts, memorabilia, and works of art from the Xavier University of Louisiana Archives and Special Collections. Among the featured items will be the Thomas Mundy Peterson Medal, crafted to honor him as the first African American to vote in an election under the then-newly enacted provisions of the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution. The gallery will be open Monday – Saturday, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., except holidays.

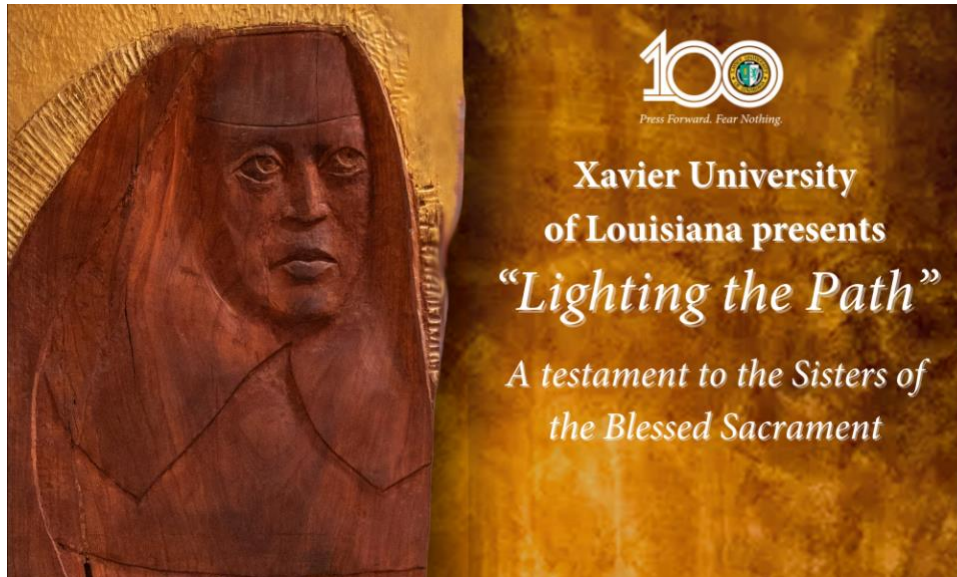
“For generations, the S.B.S. has been instrumental in the education, leadership, and faith guidance of thousands of Black and Native American students,” said **Vincent Barraza, archivist at Xavier University of Louisiana**, whose research efforts were instrumental in the exhibit’s curation. “It is thrilling to display rarely seen historical ephemera from the [Xavier University of Louisiana] Archives & Special Collections in such a thought-provoking and reflective exhibit, and we look forward to commemorating the extensive and essential work they undertook, even in the face of animosity.”

Ahead of her time, St. Katharine Drexel, then Mother Katharine, worked with her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament to bring education to those denied equity due to the sin of racism. St. Katharine gifted the university its great mission to promote a more just and humane society by educating its students to become the next generation of leaders in a global society, and for decades, the Sisters instilled it in every pupil who walked the campus. The powerful legacy they and St. Katharine left the institution is its guiding light into another century of service.

Along with seldom-seen art pieces, historical papers will offer a rare glimpse at works prepared for Mother Katharine Drexel by Xavierites during her recovery at the motherhouse in Bensalem, Pennsylvania.

“The uniqueness of this [exhibit] is how it manages to interweave all of these different elements— photographs, art, and artifacts, to weave a story of the strength of these women who quietly went about their work for Christ that was often on the cutting edge of the cultural, academic and social norms,” said **Anne Collins Smith, curator and director of the Xavier University Art Gallery.**

“Lighting the Path” is a collaborative effort of the Xavier University of Louisiana Art Department, Archives and Special Collections, and Office of Institutional Advancement. All are welcome to attend the opening reception on February 19 and celebrate the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and all their work in building the great history of Xavier University of Louisiana.



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About Xavier University of Louisiana

On the cusp of celebrating its first 100 years of service, Xavier University of Louisiana remains America’s only historically Black and Catholic University and is ranked among the top HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) in the nation. Recognized as a national leader in STEM and health sciences, Xavier has historically produced 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 among the country’s top producers of African American pharmacists.

Established almost a century ago in 1925 by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament as a place for African Americans and Native Americans to receive a quality education, Xavier has since expanded its programs in nearly every industry, including the arts, sciences, business, education, pharmacy, and political science. More recent additions in STEM-based master’s programs and undergraduate options in robotics, bioinformatics, engineering, data science, neuroscience, and genetics, have provided Xavier students (3,181 students) an unbeatable experience of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities, and life experiences. Xavier students collaborate with world-renowned faculty and experts in their fields to produce award-winning research and notable work. The winning Xavier formula provides students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls, developing all who choose to learn at the institution into the next generation of leaders and agents of positive change. Blessed with a mission to promote a more just and humane society, Xavier is leading the way to a brighter future for all. For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana, visit www.XULA.edu or contact the Marketing and Communications Department at (504) 520-5425 or XULANews@XULA.edu.

