



*Press Forward. Fear Nothing.*  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Xavier University of Louisiana’s Institute for Black Catholic Studies Awards Three Master of Theology Degrees this Summer**

**New Orleans, LA** - Founded in 1925 by St. Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Xavier is the nation’s only historically Black Catholic institution of higher education. This made it the ideal home for the Institute for Black Catholic Studies (IBCS). Established at Xavier in 1980, the Institute is a graduate program of pastoral theology whose mission is the formation of African American Catholics and others for ministry in Black communities and the church at-large. Each summer, IBCS faculty, staff and students gather on Xavier’s campus for an intense semester of graduate studies and continuing education courses. They are immersed in a rich community life of prayer, worship and cultural activities. Now, as the university approaches its historic centennial celebration, Xavier’s IBCS just celebrated its 45<sup>th</sup> summer session with the commencement of three master’s of theology (Th.M.) graduates: Dr. Rafiqur Rahman, Fr. Patrick Hyland, S.J. and Fr. Joshua Peters, S.J.

*Meet the Graduates*



Dr. Rafi Rahman is an assistant professor in the College of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Department of Religious Studies at Florida A&M University. Dr. Rahman received his Ph.D. in Religious Studies and Theology from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. In his academic career, he has studied Religion and Culture, Islam, Judaism, Comparative Religion, Black Church Studies, Sociology of Religion and Inter-religious Dialogue. He spent Summer 2024 on a teaching fellowship in Rome, Italy. Although he missed the commencement ceremony, Dr. Rahman dedicates his Th.M. degree to the late Dr. Kirk Gaddy, who was instrumental in his educational endeavors at Xavier.

“The IBCS experience at XULA is not one that is solely concentrated upon the acquisition of a theological education to augment an individual’s academic competency in theology, history, Christian ethics, or Black Church studies per se. But, rather, it is about gaining and appreciating the skills, knowledge, and understanding needed to become a better person and create a more inclusive world that is tolerant of the Other,” said **Dr. Rahman**. “The

life education I received and the people I have met at the IBCS have profoundly and positively affected my life – I am proud to be an IBCS graduate of the Xavier University of Louisiana.”



Fr. Patrick Hyland, S.J., is from Cleveland, Ohio. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Hispanic Studies from Boston College. Fr. Hyland also received two Master of Art degrees, one in philosophy from Cleveland State University and another in history from St. Louis University during his formation as a member of the Society of Jesus. Fr. Hyland also received a Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology (S.T.B) from the Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Madrid, Spain. His first assignment as a Jesuit priest is St. Ignatius High School in Cleveland, Ohio.

“I was attracted to the Institute for Black Catholic Studies as a way to deepen my faith and commitment to the universal Church, which is far more diverse, talented, and hopeful than any single parish or diocese can possibly hope to represent,” said Fr. Hyland. “Jesuits are called to the frontiers, and one serious frontier in the Church today is the long history of African American Catholics.”



Fr. Joshua Peters, S.J. was born in Detroit and is a member of the Midwest Province of the Society of Jesus. He serves as the Director of Mission and Identity at Christ the King Jesuit College Prep on the West Side of Chicago. Fr. Peters was ordained to the priesthood in June 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, and this experience made him a priest who takes nothing for granted.

“I credit my family as well as the Black Catholic communities in Detroit, Cincinnati, Dayton, Oakland, Chicago, and New Orleans for helping me answer God’s call,” said Fr. Peters.

The IBCS, an interdisciplinary and holistic pastoral theology program, develops laypersons, religious men and women, and clergy for culturally competent, effective ministry. In keeping with Xavier University of Louisiana’s mission to promote a more just and humane society, the IBCS prepares students to assume roles of Black Catholic leadership and Christian service in a global society, drawing others to Christ in the spirit of St. Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

The IBCS will reconvene in 2025 – June 29 to July 18. For more information, please visit the website at [www.xula.edu/ibcs](http://www.xula.edu/ibcs) or contact the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at (504)520-7691 or [ibcs@xula.edu](mailto:ibcs@xula.edu).



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### **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 (3,419 students) 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 provides 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](http://www.xula.edu) or contact Regi Reyes at (504) 520-5240 or [reyes@xula.edu](mailto:reyes@xula.edu).*