

Saint Xavier University in Gilbert reaches milestone with celebration of first Mass on campus

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Saint Xavier University passed a huge milestone in establishing its Catholic identity by celebrating the first Mass at its new Gilbert campus Dec. 3.

“It was a wonderful moment,” said Maria-Claudia Tomany, the university’s vice provost. “It really felt like a holy moment, a very auspicious beginning.”

Knights of Columbus Council 10540 paid for the altar and is helping to furnish the chapel. The council serves St. Anne Parish in Gilbert, which has the university within its parish boundaries.

“We are very grateful to them for that,” Tomany said.

Fr. Daniel Vanyo, St. Anne parochial vicar, celebrated the Mass on the feast day of St. Francis Xavier, the school’s patron, in the campus chapel with an altar that had been installed the previous day.

“If you say that God is first in my life but you’re not praying every day, how can I believe you?” Fr. Vanyo told *The Catholic Sun* about the message he shared in his homily. “Your deeds have to witness your words. How are you showing that?”

The Gilbert campus of Saint Xavier is the first branch for a university that has been a fixture on the south side of Chicago for 170 years. Saint Xavier is one of 16 American universities sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, Tomany said.

The university opened in Gilbert in August and the first business students – about 15 – started classes in October. A nursing program is expected to start in 2016, and an online education program is being developed as well.

“We’re starting out slowly and deliberately rolling out one or two new programs every semester until we are where we want to be,” Tomany said.



Fr. Daniel Vanyo, parochial vicar at St. Anne Parish, whose boundaries now include Saint Xavier University, celebrates the first Mass on campus Dec. 3, the feast day of the university's patron saint.

One thing that sets Saint Xavier apart is that semesters are two 7- or-8-week sessions, which gives greater flexibility for the students, Tomany said.

Community service is another strong point, says student Joseph Godawski.

“Faith is something that has many different ways of showing itself, and at Saint Xavier University it shows it the most greatly in the form of service,” he said.

“We have a student body that loves to serve the community but also each other. Our Campus Ministry Department is always there to lend a listening ear or to provide opportunities for worship and service.”

Fr. Vanyo, who served as chaplain at Benedictine University in Mesa during its first two years, said all the Catholic university options are great for Arizona and having one of them in the St. Anne’s parish “is a real blessing. How extra cool is that for the people living right around here?”

“We look forward to helping out as able in the future and continuing to build that relationship with the university and get the word out that they are there and that that’s a real option for our parishioners’ teens.”

Saint Xavier is among four Catholic higher-education level options now available for Valley residents. The others: Benedictine University at Mesa; the University of Mary, which collaborates with Arizona State University in Tempe; and the College of St. Scholastica, a Minnesota-based college that operates a satellite out of Mesa Community College.



(Catholic Sun file photo)

“The four Catholic universities should work together ... to extend their market share,” said Tomany. “Catholic higher education has a lot to offer not just for Catholic students but for all students ... the Catholic values that permeate our teachings I think make Catholic universities a great choice for all students from the Valley. So we should work together.”

Catholic education has an “enormous opportunity because of the diocese’s growth in the Phoenix area, where about 20 percent of the population is Catholic and where 37 Catholic schools operate, she said.

The university, which is fully accredited, is located in Gilbert’s downtown Heritage District, just off Gilbert Road on Vaughn Avenue. The Gilbert Town Council gave Vaughn a second name, Saint Xavier Way.

– *By Mike Tulumello, The Catholic Sun.*



The Catholic Sun

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