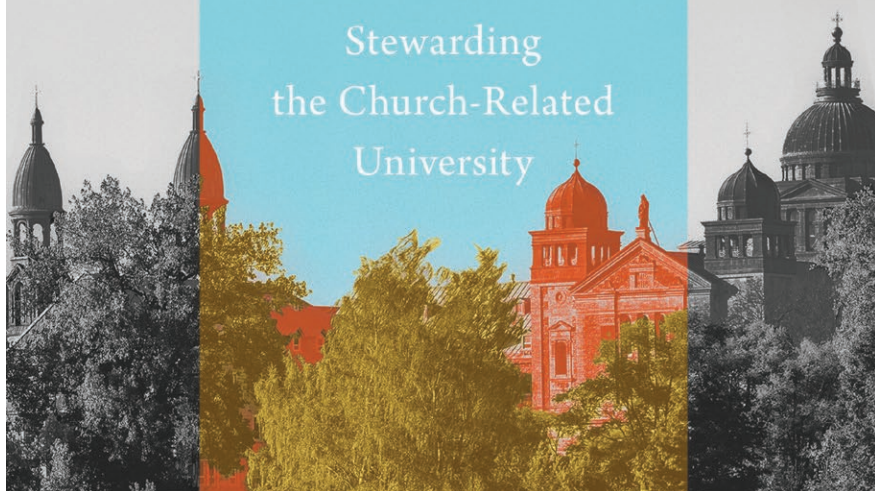


TODD C. REAM,
JERRY PATTENGALE, and
CHRISTOPHER J. DEVERS, eds.

Foreword by
Heather Templeton Dill

A
MISSION
HELD
IN
TRUST

Stewarding
the Church-Related
University



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INTEGRITY TO THE MISSION

Leadership, Discernment, and Action

MOLLY A. SCHALLER

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MISSION in the daily life of our college or university community? Although this seems like a simple question, living out our mission—having a mission that is alive and relevant for the current day—and helping all members of our community find their way to the mission is more complex than it appears. All who want to advance the mission of their institution, whether those with a new relationship or a long-standing commitment, face the challenge of applying the mission in a constantly changing landscape.

In my second year at Saint Louis University, I took on the role of faculty fellow for mission and identity. The position was a natural fit, as I had spent decades thinking, teaching, speaking, and writing about Catholic higher education. As a faculty member who also prepares people to work in student affairs, I already existed in two or three different worlds. So this new world of work in mission and identity engendered tremendous insight.

The director of the office, Fr. Chris Collins, SJ, was and is a gentle yet powerful leader. I have relished having a mission I respect, and I believed that an obligation to mission called me forward to lead and serve in unique ways. Although Fr. Collins never outwardly bristles when I used that phrase, he has often pivoted and talked about *freedom*. His consistent message is that God is calling us, and we are best served when we listen well. Obligation does not connote the freedom and joy that God provides when we choose to notice that God is there as our guide.¹

¹For a deep exploration of relational freedom, see Mark A. Noll, Jerry Pattengale, and Todd C. Ream, *The Anxious Middle: Planning for the Future of the Christian College* (Baylor University Press, 2023), chap. 2.



Collins's point to me is that when we seek a rule to guide us, especially when what we desire most is stability, we might be missing what can come from a deep discernment process. As Todd Ream and Perry Glanzer put it, "While in the game of life, rules are important (particularly if you are not following them) merely knowing and following the rules does not make one a good or flourishing human being."² This sets the stage for us to consider the kind of deep discernment that is required if our college or university is to become or continue being a good and flourishing institution of higher learning, enlivened by the mission that calls us to something important, good, and unique.

Higher education is in the midst of a third recent wave of significant disruption and thus ongoing instability. The Great Recession, the global pandemic of Covid-19, and now changes to federal policies have caused us to develop new languages. Colleges and universities "pivot," "innovate," and "diversify revenue streams" in response to a rapidly changing environment. David Dockery reminds us that "changes in higher education itself seem to be ever shifting in terms of focus, philosophy, methodology, and delivery systems."³ Ray Fitz and Michael Naughton argued, "The great challenge of Catholic universities is how to both meet the significant economic, technological and cultural challenges facing higher education today in a manner that deepens the distinctive and unique Catholic mission and identity."⁴ All church-related institutions are asking themselves similar questions. How might we actively discern what is best for our organization amid instability and remarkable pressures?

Chris Collins's book *Habits of Freedom* gives a starting point for coping with the instability we currently face. Collins writes about the experience of the disciples after Jesus' crucifixion and death, noting:

In the immediate aftermath they were obviously afraid, and they found each other and gathered, just to be together. And Jesus came into their midst repeatedly bidding them peace (see John 20:19-21). That was the essence of his

²Todd C. Ream and Perry L. Glanzer, *The Idea of a Christian College: A Reexamination for Today's University* (Cascade Books, 2013), 5.

³David S. Dockery, "Toward a Future for Christian Higher Education: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future," *Christian Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (2016): 115.

⁴Ray Fitz and Michael Naughton, "Introduction: The Challenge of Institutionalizing Mission and Identity," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 31, no. 2 (2012): 143.

ministry in the wake of his death and Resurrection—to go to his disciples, to meet them in their fear and isolation, and to give them courage, to en-courage them. He personally seeks them out in instances when they don't even know what to seek and what to ask for.⁵

When we gather with other members in our institution or with those who serve in similar roles across higher education, God is there to give us courage, to *en-courage* us as we continually find ways to live our mission. The mission of our institutions is not an automatic guide during unstable times. In fact, it may not provide any guide at all if our organization is not practiced at an iterative process of alignment. However, Collins reminds us that our first step is to know the peace of God. This peace is the foundation on which the work of discernment takes place as leaders and others in the organization go about the process of alignment of their values, actions, and mission.

BEYOND WORDS: WHEN MISSION STATEMENTS BECOME LIVING MISSIONS

When students, faculty, or staff say that they are a member of your community because of the mission, what do they mean? Is it an inexplicable mission? Is it directly related to the ways your college or university lives out the mission? Is it the mission statement? It may be all those things. The mission may live in ways that are far beyond description, but this also means that maintaining some clarity of purpose can be challenging. Mission statements, James Woodrow argues, are “much more significant than the words themselves.”⁶ The mission can touch the heart of your organization's members and provide for a shared purpose. Mission statements, though, provide anchors for organizational choices. Even more, they act as a guide for the kinds of in-depth conversations needed for organizational decision-making.

In a review of literature, Woodrow identified the components found in effective mission statements.⁷ These ingredients include history, educational philosophy, constituency or the religious character of the institution, strengths, uniqueness, and precise words. Additionally, these statements tend to endure over time and are widely communicated. His study of 105 mission statements

⁵Chris Collins, *Habits of Freedom* (Ave Maria, 2022), 81-82.

⁶James Woodrow, “Institutional Mission: The Soul of Christian Higher Education,” *Christian Higher Education* 5 (2006): 314.

⁷Woodrow, “Institutional Mission,” 313-27.

from the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities member institutions led him to conclude that “some institutions should pay more attention to the importance of their mission.”⁸

Similarly, in their study of ten colleges (nine of which are secular), involving more than two thousand student interviews, Wendy Fischman and Howard Gardner identified the “importance of a central mission and the dangers of projectitis” (which they describe as the many centers, projects, and distractions that are evidence of mission sprawl) as their central finding.⁹ Having a sense of mission is not the same as having a living, active mission statement that supports and guides the many complex decisions leaders will make about the use of resources. And in truth, not all our institutions have a clarity of the role of its founding faith tradition in its current existence.

My husband, who has been a dean at two different church-related institutions and a provost at a third, recalls an experience he had when he interviewed for a senior-level position at a church-related institution. One of his references told him that when the institution called to check on his background, the interviewer asked, “Could he work at a place without a mission?” We interpreted that as meaning that the interviewer perceived that my husband seemed very committed to his faith, and the interviewer wondered whether he could put that aside. Perhaps we are wrong, but the question has stuck with us for years. Not all church-related institutions want to rely on their founding or their history. That is certainly a shift in mission that leaders should be honest about.

THE INTEGRITY CHALLENGE: WHY MISSION ALIGNMENT IS SO DIFFICULT

Mission integrity does not happen with ease. While having a clear and fully adopted mission statement is key, finding ways to live out that mission with integrity is much more challenging. Those who study human development tell us that developing integrity is tremendously challenging.¹⁰ For one, integrity is built on identity. Until individuals have a clear sense of self, they might have a very challenging time living with integrity. This may be due to their attempts

⁸Woodrow, “Institutional Mission,” 326.

⁹Wendy Fischman and Howard Gardner, *The Real World of College: What Higher Education Is and What It Can Be* (MIT Press, 2023), 288.

¹⁰Arthur W. Chickering and Linda Reisser, *Education and Identity*, 2nd ed. (Jossey-Bass, 1993).

to adopt values from others without an active choice, without fully examining their own values and discerning the right fit for their life.

One way to understand a lack of personalized values is to look for incongruence.¹¹ Do we behave in ways that seem to be contradictory to our expressed beliefs and values? What is most challenging here is that we might understand our values in one way and others might be reading our behaviors in another way. These external evaluations give us data or insight into how the world interprets our choices, and they may shape our value system, but ultimately living with integrity is an individual endeavor. Aligning our behavior to our values and our values to our behavior should get easier as we progress through life. We get practice in this feedback loop, and our values become clearer with discernment.

Within organizations, this process is much more complex. We use words and phrases to capture what our organization stands for, but we do not often help members understand those words. How might we align our choices in our organization to the values that are most important for us to live out our mission?

The purpose of this chapter is to stretch beyond the finger-pointing that can happen in our organizations. We will need to get beyond the accusation of “we would be in a better place if only our faculty could live out the mission” or “our administration is filled with new people who really do not understand our mission” or “students today are just a mess; we have to find a way to get them to hold to our mission.” Each of these may or may not be true, but all of them deny one key to our future success. If our complex organizations are going to be driven by their mission in ways that makes us capable of manifesting integrity to the mission, might we all need to ask ourselves, “Am I a witness to this institution?”¹²

BEYOND DELEGATION: MAKING MISSION EVERYONE’S RESPONSIBILITY

In many of our church-related institutions, there are active discussions about what it means to work for and through a mission-driven organization. As a new department chair, I participated in a Hiring for Mission weekend retreat

¹¹Chickering and Reisser, *Education and Identity*.

¹²This is a question a graduate student, Jerome Holland, asked out loud in my Leadership in Higher Education course at the University of Dayton decades ago. His question has become a starting place in my own reflections through the years.

at the University of Dayton, a Catholic and Marianist institution. The retreat was a deep dive into the documents that guide the Catholic and Marianist mission. What struck me then is even clearer now via Fr. Jim Heft's *The Future of Catholic Higher Education*.¹³

Heft designed the retreat with colleagues committed to the Catholic intellectual tradition.¹⁴ The retreat and subsequent engagements with staff and faculty formation programs made it clear to me that living the mission would require deep intellectual engagement beyond simply being open to the mission. If we are going to find mission integrity on our campus, we will need to think, talk, and struggle through what it means to live the mission.

This awareness begins a complex cycle within our organizations. On some of our campuses, the mission has been delegated to an office or a committee. There might be only one person who upholds our mission. In his book on Lutheran higher education, Tom Christenson asked the question at the core of this exploration: How is our mission affecting “the way in which the place is a university and the way it does those things essential to its being a university”?¹⁵ In the case of Lutheran higher education, he argued that leaders cannot simply add in the mission as an extra on the top of university life; rather, it must be woven deeply into the fabric of the college or university.

What does this type of integration require? Certainly, it calls for hiring for mission on all levels, but that will not be enough. Leaders must also engage in persistent and ongoing intellectual examination and values exercises when addressing new challenges. But there is a daily approach to living the mission that touches on the everyday interactions our staff and faculty have with students and one another. What kinds of guides exist to help us make sense of the constant prioritization that occurs on our campuses? If we are all going to live the mission, there must be a sustained conversation on all levels to assist and guide our campus.

DISCERNING THE NEED FOR MISSION EVOLUTION

Sustained conversations among all community members are the beginning steps in mission integrity. In an unstable environment, we can find ourselves

¹³James Heft, *The Future of Catholic Higher Education* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

¹⁴Heft's text explores this topic fully.

¹⁵Tom Christenson, *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education* (Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 10.

grasping for stability. And yet we know that missions shift. One need only look at the original documents from Harvard or Yale to be reminded of how much the mission can change in higher education.¹⁶ But what about *our* organizations? What if we mostly like our particular mission? Do we have to change? Does our mission have to be examined?

I would argue that our behavior, the choices we make as leaders and members of the college or university community *on behalf* of the mission, may be the key to answering this question. Many of our institutions have been in place for a long time. Our programmatic and policy approaches may have been designed to maintain or further develop our mission, but our clarity about how our organizational choices are related to our mission may be sorely lacking.

Jonathan Malesic wonders whether the mission of many institutions is simply to stay open. But keeping our college or university open is not a mission that can carry us into the future. He also ponders how we make a college “worth saving.”¹⁷ The pressures leaders face in higher education are unrelenting. In a challenging environment, it can be difficult to see how much our organizations have been pushed to adapt and change. If we are not engaging in a discernment process, listening carefully to our communities, we might not be able to see whether we are showing signs of incongruence.

What does it mean for our institution to be driven by a particular mission? How do we joyfully take responsibility for that call? Each one of our institutions is grounded in a specific history and tradition. It was founded in a time past, but the purpose is connected to that founding. We can turn to our founders, historical documents, and thought leaders within our congregations or denominations to help us think about the ways we can enliven that mission today. This is an important task. Leaders are searching for a way to respond to the current context while keeping one eye on the horizon.

Dockery argues that Christian higher education should “connect teaching, learning, research, and scholarship with the church’s heritage and tradition.”¹⁸

¹⁶Alexander Sosler, “A Typology of Christian Higher Education: Analyzing the Purpose of Learning,” *Christian Higher Education* 22, no. 2 (2023): 99.

¹⁷Jonathan Malesic, “Catholic Colleges: Do Less If You Want to Save Your Religious Mission,” *America*, July 19, 2023, 1.

¹⁸David S. Dockery, “Toward a Future for Christian Higher Education: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future,” *Christian Higher Education* 15, nos. 1–2 (2016): 115.

The question about where our heritage and tradition fit into today's context is not just a given. Institutional leaders must explore these questions within their community. Alignment is not as easy as “mandates for right Christian thinking, right Christian believing, and right Christian living.”¹⁹

In Catholic higher education, for example, the need for alignment may be even more apparent as the role of vowed religious sisters, brothers, or priests as faculty or institutional leaders has changed dramatically. In 2022, 80 percent of Catholic college and university presidents were laypeople.²⁰ Just before the turn of the century, that number was just over 40 percent. These institutions must now engage in preparing leaders to be capable of engaging deeply with their institution's mission.

For one, many of our institutions have not done the work to discern or describe what this means within the context of higher education. We must ponder how our mission guides leaders in setting tuition pricing, awarding scholarships, designing curriculum, choosing educational programs, hiring senior leaders, awarding contracts, expanding to new markets—and the list goes on and on.

Further, our institutions are burdened by the realities of Christian traditions that have done real damage to people in the past and the present. One need look no further than the sexual abuse scandals that have plagued the Catholic Church as well as a host of Protestant denominational and non-denominational churches. This means that living our mission does not always start with the next decision; rather, it may be deeply tied to the community's need for reconciliation or reparation.

When institutions face budgetary pressures, they may be particularly prone to making decisions that damage the mission. Joshua Travis Brown's study in *Capitalizing on College: How Higher Education Went from Mission Driven to Margin Obsessed* is a deep exploration of the ways that mission exists amid budgetary pressures. We know that our “passion does not fund educational opportunity.”²¹ But Brown's study of eight religious colleges illuminates in

¹⁹Dockery, “Toward a Future,” 116.

²⁰Dennis H. Holtschneider and Nadine Jalandoni, “Relationship Reconsidered: Catholic Universities and Their Changing Governance Structures,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 41, no. 1 (2022): 5-31.

²¹Joshua Travis Brown, *Capitalizing on College: How Higher Education Went from Mission Driven to Margin Obsessed* (Oxford University Press, 2025), 2.

detail the approaches these institutions took to respond to market pressures. While we often hear phrases such as “no margin, no mission,” Brown found that “the relentless competition among institutions for students all but ensured leaders remained challenged to balance the pervasive tension between maintaining a distinct identity that remained true to their values while having to continually reshape their schools in dynamic ways to set them apart.”²²

Mission integrity is not simple. It requires leadership and a process, and there are guides.

CURA APOSTOLICA: CARE FOR THE WORK

Jesuit colleges and universities often cite their call to care for the whole person, *cura personalis*. This notion is rooted in the teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola, who designed a process for members of the Society of Jesus to be guided and led by a mentor who cared for the Jesuit as a whole person. Similarly, the idea of *cura apostolica*, or care for the work of the apostolate, grew out of St. Ignatius’s careful and specific directions for the growing Jesuit missions. But in today’s vernacular, *cura apostolica* can be a way to think about how the mission is lived in our daily decisions. As Stephanie Russell, the vice president for mission integration with the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, writes, “Threaded through the history of Jesuit higher education is the expectation that decisions about the work—which is to say the realization of the mission—will be spiritually discerned and responsible to the most pressing of human needs.”²³

How do we make decisions about the work in our institutions? Are those decisions spiritually discerned? Who has responsibility for this? For years, the notion of hiring for mission has been described and supported in various Christian institutions. Hiring choices exist on a full spectrum. Within church-related institutions, this range spans from those with expectations that those hired will make a faith statement and be active members of the faith community to those who seldom mention or think about the mission in the hiring process. How do we know when a faculty member, leader, or board member is ready to spiritually discern what is right for the organization in the light of the mission? How do we support this kind of deep connection to the mission?

²²Brown, *Capitalizing on College*, 240.

²³Stephanie Russell, “Cura Apostolica Revisited,” *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*, August 15, 2019, 4.

In his explication of the discernment process laid out by St. Ignatius of Loyola, Dean Brackley identifies the “internal movements” that individuals experience when facing renewal or change: “Reform of life stirs up sadness and fear, but also enthusiasm for the future,” while “fear and discouragement” can block reform. While Brackley’s text is a guide for individuals, it also provides needed encouragement for leaders of organizations. Discernment requires attention to both spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation. “‘Spiritual consolation’ refers to the peace and joy that arise from our center and affect our interior state as a whole.” It “releases new energies, widens our vision, and directs us beyond ourselves.”²⁴ In contrast, spiritual desolation is an inner turmoil that may arise from external events but brings about a disturbance or a loss of one’s way. Consolation is easily understood as those times when our heart grows closer to God, while desolation distances us from our call.

Organizationally speaking, do we know what is allowing us to fulfill our call? Where is our organization enlivened by God’s spirit? Where is our organization existing in fear, separate from our call? There are organizations and supports in place for board members, leaders, faculty, and staff to come together to learn about the mission of the organization, but the mission can also be a guide amid crisis, turmoil, or significant change if all members of our organization are in fact prepared for the mission.

THREE ESSENTIAL PRACTICES FOR MISSION RENEWAL

There are numerous volumes, conferences, and papers on the role of faculty in maintaining the mission. In church-related higher education, there is advocacy for hiring, formation, programs directly tied to faith, and governance structures that engage board members in mission and identity work.²⁵ Ray Fitz, SM, former president of the University of Dayton, and Michael Naughton, a previously noted prominent Catholic theologian, describe this challenge for Catholic institutions:

If Catholic universities are to maintain their distinctive identity and promote excellence, then leadership at the board, administrative, and faculty levels must

²⁴Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times* (Crossroad, 2004), 45, 48.

²⁵Don Briel, Kenneth E. Goodpaster, and Michael J. Naughton, *What We Hold in Trust: Rediscovering the Purpose of Catholic Higher Education* (Catholic University of America Press, 2021).

both creatively promote the core Catholic mission and educational traditions and stimulate adaptation and change to be responsive to external challenges. Without institutionalizing the Catholic mission and educational traditions we lose our Catholic identity; without adaptation and change we lose our relevance to the contemporary world. Without survival there is no mission; yet, survival without a distinctive mission and tradition is not worth all the effort or all the resources.²⁶

However, there are fewer resources to assist board or organizational leadership in (1) identifying specific expectations for organizational leadership as guided by the mission, (2) revising the mission as needed, and (3) engaging in regular review of alignment. Integrity to the mission requires attention to our institutional practices, discerning direction when times are challenging. It also requires openness to renewal and a willingness to regularly examine our priorities.

Leading with mission: Expectations for organizational leaders. How do members of your community know whether their choices represent the mission of your organization? Do we have mechanisms to raise this question?

David Batstone, a professor of management at the University of San Francisco, argues that within corporate settings there can be a deep sense of betrayal within workforces when employees find themselves assessing the integrity of their leaders.²⁷ He articulates eight principles for corporate behavior, and three of these are particularly applicable to the approach of the church-related college or university.

First, Batstone contends that “the directors and executives . . . will align their personal interests with the fate of stakeholders and act in a responsible way to ensure the viability of the enterprise.”²⁸ As we apply this to college life, we might reword this: The board, president, vice presidents, deans, directors, and all leaders will align their interests with the fate of their college community and act in a responsible way to ensure the viability of the mission.

In James Smith and Lindsey Monihen’s study of highly rated senior leadership teams in Council for Christian Colleges and Universities institutions,

²⁶Ray Fitz and Michael Naughton, “Introduction: The Challenge of Institutionalizing Mission and Identity,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 31, no. 2 (2012): 142.

²⁷David Batstone, “Preserving Integrity, Profitability, and Soul,” in *Business Leadership*, 2nd ed., ed. Joan Gallos (Jossey-Bass, 2008), 463.

²⁸Batstone, “Preserving Integrity,” 469.

they found that these leaders “demonstrated a common commitment to their institution’s mission over personal or divisional interests.”²⁹ This would mean that a commitment to mission would not pit academic units against one another. Leaders would not jockey for resources to strengthen their unit over another if the mission did not clearly point to a rationale. It would also mean that leaders would engage in an ongoing renewal conversation, outlined below, to explore what is working and not working for the mission. These discussions would yield change, but not for its own sake.

Second, Batstone argues for transparency, with this principle translated for college life: Business operations will be transparent to students, faculty, staff, and the community, and leaders will stand by the integrity of their decisions. Within our institutions, there is often a sense that high-level decisions are made with only those who have the most information present. If we are going to live our mission with integrity, transparency can serve as a guide to the rest of our campus community.

As a result, what are the issues you have considered and explored as you have made decisions? How might this approach to decision-making be a model for the rest of your campus? What values guided your decision-making, and how do those values serve as a lived expression and guide for your community? It is not always the case that members of the community can engage in the decision-making process, but are there times when leaders can provide information to faculty, students, or staff to help them share their perspectives about the issues leaders are balancing on your campus? This kind of transparency can be challenging to negotiate, but it also increases the likelihood that multiple sides of an issue are unearthed before a decision is made. College and university leaders continue to hold responsibility for decision-making, but transparency increases the likelihood of integrity.

This same principle was also evident in Smith and Monihen’s study. They found that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the exemplary shared leadership teams “demonstrated transparency, a commitment to prolific communication, and a clear delineation of responsibility.”³⁰ This type of transparency and commitment to communication works best when it is always in place, not

²⁹James W. Smith and Lindsey K. Monihen, “Characteristics and Practices of Highly Rated Senior Leadership Teams: A Comparative Case Study of CCCU Institutions,” *Christian Higher Education* 23, nos. 1–2 (2024): 147.

³⁰Smith and Monihen, “Characteristics and Practices,” 149.

employed only during difficult times. Robert K. Vischer, president of the University of St. Thomas, for example, writes a weekly column or letter to his campus community, often addressing complex issues that affect the campus. Regular, purposeful, and brave communication paves the way for members of the community to anticipate clarity in difficult times.

The third of Batstone's principles that applies to the work of church-related institutions applies as it was originally written: "The worker will be treated as a valuable team member, not just a hired hand."³¹ In mission-driven organizations, there is the reality that many of the people who work at our institutions do so because of the mission. It is tempting to take advantage of their good spirits and willingness to work for the mission. As mission-driven leaders, maintaining our integrity to the mission means that we are careful about our treatment of others. If our faith is a guide, then we must strive to find ways to carefully consider the experiences of the people who work at our institution.

Smith and Monihen advocate that presidents hire trustworthy senior leaders and then let them do their work. I would advocate that this needs to be a clear expectation throughout the college or university organization. But hiring well is not enough.³² If we want our organizations to demonstrate integrity to the mission, we must be prepared for the entire employment cycle.³³ We must hire for mission well and then provide enough support so faculty, staff, and administrators can learn about the mission in deep ways while also learning the job. There are specific examples of this type of renewal that take place on a national, ecclesial, and institutional basis.³⁴

There is also a need for retraining in higher education, as faculty become academic leaders and as others are promoted within the organization. These leaders might ask, How might I think about and enact the mission differently now that I have supervisory responsibilities? How might I enact the mission differently now that I am responsible for managing a budget? These decisions

³¹Batstone, "Preserving Integrity," 470.

³²Don Briel, "Mission and Identity: The Role of Faculty," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 31, no. 2 (2012): 169-79.

³³For a good exploration of this topic in corporate settings, see David Batstone, *Saving the Corporate Soul—and (Who Knows?) Maybe Your Own: Eight Principles for Creating and Preserving Integrity and Profitability Without Selling Out* (Jossey-Bass, 2003).

³⁴See the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities' Annual Collegium, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' many institutes, the Lilly Network of Church-Related Colleges and Universities, and the many programs hosted by specific denominations or religious orders for resources or examples.

are not easy to answer. Institutional leaders must find ways to support all members of the college or university community in making sense of the mission in the daily decision-making of their role.

Mission review: When and how to examine institutional purpose. Mission integrity is impossible if students, faculty, and leaders do not believe in the mission. And mission integrity is impossible if the college or university has drifted far from that which has been articulated without an active examination of the mission. In many church-related organizations, there is a complex relationship between the founding denomination or order and the current-day expression of the mission. Dennis Holtschneider and Nadine Jalandoni point out how complex this relationship is in Catholic higher education.³⁵ As the makeup of the governing boards has shifted in these institutions, mission review or revision may be a governance matter. Periodic review of the institutional mission can feel threatening or enlivening. Leaders will need to prepare thoughtfully for such a review.

For example, over the course of the 2022–2023 academic year, the University of San Diego (USD) engaged in what it called a synodal process that mirrored the process that Pope Francis led for the entirety of the Catholic Church beginning in 2021. The goal of this process was to enlist “as many people as possible in the conversation, providing opportunities for them to listen deeply to one another, and ensuring that each voice was afforded equal weight.”³⁶ USD undertook this process after a period of dramatic growth on its campus. It completed many new building projects, revised its core curriculum, and enacted other key changes in its internal directions. The process it undertook is summarized here as an example of the structural process that an institution can embark on in its mission review.³⁷

USD began by using a Society for College and University Planning tool to review its mission statement at a senior leadership level.³⁸ President James Harris then brought the findings from this review to the trustees, who

³⁵Dennis H. Holtschneider and Nadine Jalandoni, “Relationship Reconsidered: Catholic Universities and Their Changing Governance Structures,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 41, no. 1 (2022): 5–31, <https://jche.journals.villanova.edu/index.php/jche/article/view/3111/2893>.

³⁶Michael Lovette-Colyer and James T. Harris, “A Synodal Process for Revitalizing the Mission of a Contemporary Catholic University,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 41, no. 2 (2022): 86.

³⁷See Lovette-Colyer and Harris’s full article for additional details.

³⁸The guide, written by Nicholas Santilli and Sadie Wutka, “Reviewing and Updating Your Mission Statement” (SCUP, 2021), provides a structured way to review existing or write or rewrite mission statements.

enlivened the process with specific concerns about the existing mission and vision statements. This is an important step, as institutional leaders can begin a review process by first understanding the ways their boards may be required or want to participate in such a review. Founding congregations may also have responsibility over mission statements.³⁹

USD's board then provided a charge to President Harris and the vice president for mission integration, Michael Lovette-Colyer, to begin a process of review. The leaders asked the campus to explore the current mission and vision statements, identify components they appreciated, and make suggestions for the next statement. A small writing group took more than four hundred responses from students, staff, and faculty in groups and via online responses and wrote initial drafts; they returned the next semester to listen again to the campus. The iterative process yielded an agreed-on mission and vision statement for the campus.

What is most compelling about the USD example is that it engaged in a process of review that allowed the campus to stay open to how the community might see mission. Certainly, there are those who think that a mission statement should not be voted on, so determining in advance the key characteristics that might need to be engaged could be useful. However, another way to think of this is that a campus that understands the mission of the institution might be best prepared to enliven that mission for today's world.

Institutions may want to explore the use of the Society for College and University Planning tool or use the guide to develop a tool for their own specific mission. The next step is to make decisions about what might trigger such a review. Although setting a regular schedule may be attractive, it may also leave the process open to losing the meaning or authenticity of a process. On the other hand, the process should not become a tool for attack. Review of the mission should certainly occur when significant changes are made to strategic plans, when other growth or changes occur, or during times of distress.

Exploring mission alignment: Ongoing assessment. Finally, enlivening the mission is and should be an ongoing endeavor. Accreditation organizations often require explicit assessment and analysis of choices that occur within the college or university setting, but alignment of the mission requires a different type of

³⁹See Holtschneider and Jalandoni, "Relationship Reconsidered," for the ways founding religious orders may have responsibility or a voice for mission.

review. In church-related institutions, there may be a call for a regular review of connections to the founding organizations. One such example is the requirement that Jesuit colleges and universities engage in a Mission Priority Examen.⁴⁰

In my role as faculty fellow for mission and identity, I had the opportunity to colead the Examen at Saint Louis University, a process that has since been repeated on our campus. The activity is designed to allow institutions to “re-affirm the Jesuit, Catholic mission” of the institution. While the process is externally driven—“requested” by the leader of the Jesuits—it is fully supported by the presidents of the Jesuit colleges and universities. Leaders could use this process to explore their own institutional expressions of mission.

The examen is intended to be a campus-wide process. A broad-based self-study committee is formed, including students, faculty, staff, administrators, and board members. The committee is charged by the Jesuit provincial and, with the institutional president, may be guided to adopt a specific emphasis for the review. The committee engages in activities to prepare the campus for the upcoming examen and then facilitates the process. In the case of Saint Louis University, ninety-seven focus groups were held, and more than six hundred members of the community engaged in the process in 2024. “The examen walked participants through the process of intentional reflection (composition of place) from a posture of gratitude (presupposition), with an honest and courageous review of the health and vitality of Saint Louis University’s mission (examination of conscience) and an acknowledgment of both light and shadow in each person’s lived experience (discernment).”⁴¹ The examen process provides participants with an opportunity to review the mission of the institution and prepares them to then reflect on the specifics of that mission. Collecting data on what is working and not working on the campus in light of the mission is a whole-campus approach to exploring the lived experience of the mission.

Taken in a different direction, institutional leaders can actively structure reflection of the successes and pain points in living the mission. This process can be challenging, as individuals will need to be able to contribute without fear, and leaders will need to be able to receive feedback openly and without fear. If leaders are not supported in the process by board members, then it is

⁴⁰“Mission Priority Examen (MPE),” Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, <https://ajcunet.edu/mission-and-identity/mission-priority-examen>.

⁴¹Saint Louis University, “Mission Priority Examen Self-Study Report,” fall 2024, www.slu.edu/mission-identity/initiatives/-pdf/slu2024mpeselfstudy.pdf, 16.

unlikely the findings will yield openings for change. In addition, if resources are not available to live out the mission as the community recommends, there must be open and transparent conversations about the fiscal pressures being weighed and how the leadership has chosen one approach over another.

Much like any other accreditation review, a review of the mission works best when there is an open process in which trust is cultivated first and then enlivened as concerns or opportunities for growth rise to the surface. Celebrations of successes are one way to make sure that these reviews do not simply engender a negative atmosphere across campus.

THE COURAGE TO LIVE THE MISSION

Living the mission is nearly impossible if we do not understand how it can serve as a guide, a source of clarity and inspiration. If the notion of mission integrity causes a negative reaction on our campuses, we will need to honestly explore that phenomenon. In organizations that hire and pay people, we may be tempted to think that mission integrity is more about individuals than about the collective. I would encourage leaders to ponder how responsibility for the mission can be shared throughout the organization while also being modeled from the top. Mission integrity cannot be passive. In fact, it can be an act of joyful celebration of a shared understanding of our collective call to bring our values into our daily work with clarity of purpose.

This chapter began with Fr. Chris Collins, SJ, calling us to discernment. Many of us feel called to live out our institutional mission. Or perhaps, like me, you find yourself obligated to the mission of your institution. Either way, discernment takes us beyond a requirement. And yet discernment within our organizations does require deep intellectual and spiritual engagement. Discernment requires that we find ways to engage with others to explore how we might live the mission and how we balance demands on our resources. During challenging times in our university life, we may find comfort, much like the disciples, in relationships with others who are facing similar challenges. And within our institutions our mission is best lived when we articulate our values as often as possible while also using those values to guide our daily decisions. There is simply no easy answer when things are complicated. Rather, discernment will require attentiveness to our history while we work hard to find our way in the present. Finding new paths forward that are grounded in our mission and clear in our values will take courage.



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