



Michael J. Graham, SJ

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Anne Ryckbost

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Schmidt Hall, Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio

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- Anne Ryckbost: [00:03](#) Good morning. This is Anne Ryckbost on April 28, with Father Graham, doing an interview about his presidency. Father Graham, when we spoke last, you had talked about the importance of mission and identity as you were coming in. And then I was looking at the talk that you gave to the hiring committee for your position, and in it, you identified, among a lot of priorities, two top priorities. One of those was mission and identity, the other, academic excellence. Let's start by talking about Xavier's Jesuit identity, and then the development of mission and an identity as an office.
- Michael Graham.: [00:43](#) Sure. Sure. Sure. In coming in as the president, I was impressed by the steps that the university had taken in terms of more deeply driving into the fabric of the institution care for the fundamental Catholic Jesuit identity of the institution. When I had been here in the 1980s, that was a matter of some controversy, and was regarded with a measure of scorn by some faculty members. I remember one faculty meeting in particular where a member of a department got up, an older member, and started talking about the Judeo-Christian tradition. And another member, a younger member of his department at that time, now a senior member in that department, stood up and made some caustic comment about how, if you keep talking about the Judeo-Christian tradition, I'm going to punch you in the mouth, or something like that. It was really uncalled for in many ways.
- Michael G.: [02:00](#) But I think to some degree, the university was going through, at that point, what a lot of Catholic Jesuit



universities were going through, which was a kind of generational debate over whether one could be a serious academic institution and Catholic in whatever species, Jesuit in this case, at the same time. Now, of course, that's way in the past, and nobody even thinks in terms of that either/or kind of choice. We've long since proved that we can be a perfectly capable academic institution and still hold fast to our identity as Jesuit and Catholic. At any rate, my predecessor inherited Father Leo Klein and Father George Traub, who were doing really good work in the mission and identity space. Our model at that time was something that became known as mission and ministry.

Michael G.:

[03:16](#)

What that refers to is that the chief mission officer heads initiatives designed to share the fundamental Jesuit Catholic identity with the permanent members of the university community, its faculty, staff, and administration, to some degree trustees, although that was very new on the horizon then. But also the student facing aspects of that enterprise, campus ministry and so on, reported up through that position. That was what we did until, I don't know, 2004, 2005. Something like that. Father Leo Klein was very creative in terms of the programming that he would come up with. Father George Traub was very skillful in terms of his own work. Father Klein had been a theology professor here, and pastor at Bellarmine Chapel at one point, early in his career, before becoming the province provincial. Then he returned here at the end of that to become this vice president, and worked with the community.

Michael G.:

[04:31](#)

Father Traub had been teaching here, left for some administration elsewhere, came back, taught in the English department. So they both had deep experience here at Xavier, and we were very fortunate in that. So when Father Klein decided it was time for him to step down from the position and yield to a younger person, that raised the question of where to next. How is it that we should organize our mission and identity efforts for effectiveness going forward? What I did is I constituted a group, pardon me, a group of faculty, staff and administration, what we called Discernment Group, Number One. Later, there



was a Number Two and Number Three, who also had some impact, but not nearly so great as this first discernment group.

Michael G.:

[05:39](#)

The problem in front of it was to identify ways of moving forward in terms of best ensuring the Jesuit mission and identity work at the university overall. But that wasn't where they started. Where I wanted them to start was to get to know one another. There were about 14 members altogether. We could find the list somewhere. They spent a good deal of time reading background articles on the Jesuits' spiritual tradition, especially as that spiritual tradition begat, if you will, Jesuit higher education, current issues and needs, and opportunities, and strengths, and weaknesses, and threats, etc., for Jesuit higher education. Then I wanted them to go to a couple of places where you could see the Jesuit spirit trying to become embodied in particular works. They went and spent time at several places, notably with Father Greg Boyle in Los Angeles, with the Homeboys Project.

Michael G.:

[06:54](#)

And then I also wanted them to do some kind of spiritual retreat or reflection. So they did that as well, or retreat opportunity. I can't remember where it was. We lined up spiritual directors and the like. That format, didactic input, application of the spiritual tradition embodied in a social apostolic work that constitutes for us who go visit them a sort of immersion experience with the poor. And then the spiritual reflection of that format has become very widespread as the Jesuit network tries to share its tradition with our lay colleagues. It forms the backbone, for example, now for the Ignatian Colleagues Program. So we were the first to that, if you will. We didn't invent it by any means. At any rate, this group did all that work, and then I wanted them to come up with their plans and submit those to the university for its feedback, before giving me a final report.

Michael G.:

[08:07](#)

I don't have the date at hand as to when that final report came in. But eventually it came in, and pretty much, I accepted the whole thing. Elements of it included the gifts of the Ignatian tradition that are so



familiar from banners and so on, mission, reflection, discernment, solidarity and kinship, service rooted in justice and love. All that came from there. The idea of splitting what had been the Mission and Ministry into Mission and Identity on the one hand, and then the student facing organization on the other, that came from that group. The reason for that was because in many ways, the student-facing work is more immediate and rewarding. You're dealing with attractive younger people who are open and eager to learn, and so on, as opposed to prickly faculty and staff who rebuff your best efforts.

- Michael G.: [09:09](#) So what we wanted to do was to create a staff that would focus exclusively on that work. So it wouldn't be sidelined from it, by this other work. So we did that. It recommended a full-time director, and Debra Mooney had been a part. She'd been recruited to the Mission and Ministry staff by Father George Traub. So she was a part of this discernment group. I asked her to take on, leading that work. Another element, another thing that was really important and has turned out to be incredibly impactful, was the half-time faculty director of Ignatian programs that came from that group. Right?
- Anne R.: [09:55](#) And that rotates every year or two years?
- Michael G.: [10:00](#) I want to say it's three years. Gillian Ahlgren was the first. I want to say Leslie Prosak-Beres after her. Linda Schoenstedt did it for a while.
- Anne R.: [10:13](#) Tom Strunk.
- Michael G.: [10:13](#) Tom Strunk does it now, yeah. I have a sense that I'm leaving somebody out along the way. I'm sure I must be, given the number of them I've named and how long it's been around. But anyway, you get the point. And that officer has been really crucial for helping drive Ignatian programming among the faculty. So it's been, I think, one of the deepest professional pleasures of my presidency to work with Debra Mooney over three quarters of the time I've been in office, that she has the exact right blend of personal and professional skills, outlooks, disposition,



sensibility, whatever those words would be, to drive the work effectively. She's incredibly inviting. She's an expert listener, which is really what the work requires.

Michael G.: [11:21](#)

I note at many Jesuit universities, they want some golden-tongued Jesuit to come in and lead that work. It always fails when they do that because they come in, believing that they know what the work is, and it's their work, and they will enunciate it, and others will agree to it. Debra has just done a great, an unparalleled job really, of enabling the community to appropriate the work. I don't even know where AFMIX came from, Assuring the Future of Mission and Identity at Xavier. Not a happy name, but it captures what we do. And we're into, I don't know, cohort nine or 12, or something like that. It's a two-year program.

Michael G.: [12:13](#)

What began to happen early on was that Debra would have participants in a program, come to her and say, "Oh, you know what it'd be cool to do would be this, right?" So a group of people got together for a program and that would beget the next program. And you know you've got something when that happens, that they're the ones taking ownership and pride in the future of the work. One of our approaches has always been that there are multiple on-ramps to the work. In pre pandemic times, when we could send people abroad to things, we were and will be again, I suspect, active participants in a number of Jesuit themed development opportunities that are sponsored either by their colleges or by the AJCU, the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, like the Ignatian Colleagues Program that I referenced a while ago.

Michael G.: [13:27](#)

We've been in that since the get-go. It was born out of what we called Heartland Delta at the time, the group of colleges and universities in the Midwest and south. So they included the six Midwestern Jesuit universities, Xavier, Marquette, Loyola Chicago, John Carroll, University of Detroit Mercy, and Creighton. Added to that number, Regis in Denver, St. Louis University, Rockhurst in Kansas city, Loyola in New Orleans, and Spring Hill College. Probably, that group lasted for about 12 years or so, did a number of



conferences, a triennial conference that was wonderful for members from all those campuses. There was a lot of creativity in that group and it birthed a number of really good programs. That's where the Ignatian Colleagues Program came from, out of that group of schools. And it got absorbed by the larger AJCU.

- Michael G.: [14:32](#) Anyway, we were always sending delegations to the ICP or to Loyola, Chicago, in the summers for an institute in Jesuit higher ed, that they ran. We were very active participants for a pilgrimage program in the footsteps of Ignatius, and the early companions in Spain and Rome, done by the College of the Holy Cross. They did the whole thing. All we had to do was send people and write the check. It was great. I couldn't understand why more people, more schools didn't take advantage of it.
- Anne R.: [15:08](#) I know. I haven't had the chance to participate. [Laughs]
- Michael G.: [15:08](#) [Laughs] You'll get there. You'll get there. At any rate, we have all these different ways in which people can participate in this work, as faculty, as staff. The Ignatian Mentoring Program that came about between senior faculty and junior faculty is now almost universally done by faculty in their first several years. So by the time they are up for tenure, it's the rare faculty member who has not done that program. And the reason they do it is not because they're just looking at me, the Jesuit, who's going to sign or not sign, or recommend, or not recommend their tenure to the board, but because it has such positive chatter among their senior colleagues. Gone are the days when we worried about mission and identity on the one hand, or academic legitimacy on the other. So-
- Anne R.: [16:05](#) The Mission Animators grants. That's another [crosstalk 00:16:08].
- Michael G.: [16:07](#) Yeah, that's another one. So where that goes back to, the grants making is a kind of thing for them to do, if you will, that allows them to have an easy, visible identity. My conviction, a number of years ago though,



was that here at Xavier University, as at many universities, there are all kinds of things that we do just as a part of the higher ed enterprise. Diversity, for example, or sustainability, or community engagement, or whatnot. My conviction has always been that we do those things because it's important for us to do them as a university. But we do them in the way that we do them, and with the particular emphasis that we bring to them, because they proceed from the fundamental Jesuit Catholic mission of the institution as well. So the question is always, well, how does diversity work, for example, to pick one, look different at Xavier University than at Miami University up the road, in Oxford.

- Michael G.: [17:16](#) What I did is I brought together a group of individuals that we call the Mission Animators, and they had trouble figuring out what they might do in terms of programming, because everybody went their own way. And you're busy, tunneled into what you do, like the Brueggeman Center, or what have you. But what they came up with was this grants making idea, which I thought was just fabulous because it also underwrites opportunities for individuals to further the Jesuit mission of the institution. And in dozens of ways, I was going to say large and smaller, usually not large, they're small and tiny, but nonetheless meaningful.
- Anne R.: [18:03](#) And timely because the topic changes.
- Michael G.: [18:07](#) Exactly right, exactly right.
- Anne R.: [18:08](#) So flexibility is built in [crosstalk 00:18:10].
- Michael G.: [18:10](#) Right, yeah. The very first time we did it was perhaps in some ways the most successful. And the group chose to have an emphasis on immigration and refugees. And then the wall happened, or all of that. Right? So all of a sudden it was like we chose a topic that could not have had more contemporary resonance to it, or they chose the topic. So I did a talk at a conference with Debra a number of years ago, secrets of our success. And I believe many things about fostering the mission and identity of the



university. It's like patience over time, and incremental growth, and having somebody like Debra who can get into conversations that I would never, as a priest, be able to access. But it's also something that I've been very attentive to in the hardscape of the university campus as such, whenever we've done building projects, for example. There is mission elements of it.

Michael G.:

[19:28](#)

So you see the banners with the student commitment on Fenwick Place, that was a completely student-driven project. I came up with the banner idea so that people could see it everywhere, and that's become a part of student culture here. But the reflection garden here on the academic mall, dedicated in honor of the guy who was the chief horticulturist here, Walt Bonvell. Wonderful man. Wonderful man. The idea of a memorial garden, by the way, came from Discernment Group number two, who had seen one elsewhere. So an element of it is those remembrance stones that you can place in the fountain when you've lost someone. That was something they hoped to see. Years later, I'm sure it was a decade between their idea and the garden, we were able to make it happen.

Anne R.:

[20:30](#)

Xavier does have a lot of very purposeful art on its campus. Is that what influences your decisions on what art goes where, and how it's-

Michael G.:

[20:41](#)

To some degree. That statue of Ignatius on the Ignatian stairs, it's supposed to be a knockoff of a really wonderful statue at the Jesuit Retreat House in Guelph, Ontario. And if you look at that statue, there's a sweeping, dynamic gracefulness to it, whereas this one is clunky. So I wish that we'd been able to get a statue like the original in Guelph. But if you go up the steps, you'll also see plaques that have the Prayer for Generosity there. Right? Do students read those? Probably not. But do some students sweep over them from time to time? Yeah, probably. That's a good thing. I like the fact that when you go into the main door of the Williams College of Business off the parking lot, you go by Mother Teresa sitting there. It's like, there she is. Hey Terry, what's up? The board wanted to do something for me upon the occasion of my retirement, like name a building.



- Michael G.: [21:53](#) I was dead set against that, but what they're going to do is, there was the next piece of this kind of stuff that I wanted to do, which was a labyrinth that would be down in the direction of University Station, but in a fairly quiet area. It's going to be adjacent to where that bike path is now going through.
- Anne R.: [22:17](#) Oh, the Wasson Way?
- Michael G.: [22:18](#) Yeah, the Wasson Way. It'll be 60 feet in diameter and it'll be its own little park there.
- Anne R.: [22:25](#) Oh, cool.
- Michael G.: [22:25](#) Right. Exactly. So I think you should always build opportunities for people to step back and reflect, and invite people to step into a space like that. I'm a big fan of labyrinths, and I've always wanted to do one here. And I'm really glad that that's what the trustees have decided to do. One of the things. We're also raising money for a Center for Roman Catholic Social Thought. That'll be another element in the necklace, if you will, of mission- focused things. It will work collaboratively with the Department of Theology, Bellarmine Chapel, the Mission Animators, The Center for Teaching Excellence, and so on. It'll be in that mix of initiatives that, broadly speaking, help spread the fundamental mission of the institution across it.
- Michael G.: [23:34](#) I'm grateful for both of those things because the mission is so important to me. I'm glad that the trustees and others will be investing in several things that will be, certainly through that Center for Catholic Social Thought, will drive the Jesuit Catholic mission more deeply into the fabric of the place. Our campus has got all these beautiful little, park-like moments all the way through it. So this will be another element in that. And I love the fact that it'd be right off the bike path so people can bike to it and walk the labyrinth, feel cleansed, and get back on their bike, and go over to the new Listermann's, and have themselves-



- Anne R.: [24:25](#) The bike path is extremely popular. I see students on it every day. So the other pillar, when you came on, was academic excellence.
- Michael G.: [24:36](#) Right, right.
- Anne R.: [24:36](#) That you saw is also one of the top two priorities.
- Michael G.: [24:41](#) Right.
- Anne R.: [24:41](#) Talk about, as university president, what's your role in the academic excellence? During your time, we've had some major initiatives, academic plan, revisioning of the core curriculum, new programs come on board. How do you shepherd that?
- Michael G.: [25:01](#) Right, right. With great care in some ways, because the faculty, as you know, is very alert to its responsibilities under shared governance. And its responsibilities under shared governance are premiere when it comes to curricular issues. Right? So you have to be very careful about how it is that you champion stuff and so on. But at the same time, if you're saying, "Well, what we want to do is to take the academic heart of the enterprise more and more seriously, and advance it as such," what does that mean? At a convocation that I had after the last board meeting in February, I did a tribute to the faculty, who I've been privileged to recommend for tenure. It's better than 200 faculty members. I read all the names of the people who are still here. Some of them have moved on, and it was a long list of names.
- Michael G.: [26:07](#) I began with those most recently tenured, and worked back to those tenured early in my own tenure. And there's an incantatory power to it, I think. All of a sudden, you start hearing names of senior colleagues here, who have been around. My hope was that junior colleagues would go, "Oh, my," so that they would see constituted before them, the profile of the faculty as such here. One of the most important things that faculty does, in my view, these are not my words, I learned them from somewhere, is to hire a faculty better than itself. And I think that our faculty has done



that all along. So my role in that is making sure that the bar for tenure is set suitably high.

Michael G.:

[27:00](#)

Early in my career, it was not at all unusual for me to see candidates being recommended for tenure, but not for promotion from assistant to associate professor. They don't want to say hard things to their colleague because if you don't give them tenure, then they've got to leave. And my, that's just hard as all get out. But they also know that somehow, they aren't really doing the work that they should do. I let it be known through the provost at the time that that would be regarded as a kiss of death, and that I would not advance for tenure people who that department did not think should be promoted to associate professor, because that told me that they were not serious about the person. But then that also puts into place all kinds of other mechanisms to make sure that people do not get to the place where you're recommending them for tenure, but that they will be successful. So we're much better at that than we used to be.

Michael G.:

[28:10](#)

I think that's an element, a cultural element, that I've collaborated with the faculty in holding them to a high standard in such a way that I don't even need to do that anymore. They're very aggressive about the appropriate standards for admission to full professorship. I'm really proud of how they police that, for lack of a better term. A second thing that I think that we've done is the Center for Teaching Excellence. That was a part of the To See Great Wonders Campaign. It was the brain child of associate academic provost, Kandi Stinson, at the time. She was the real champion for it. It's nice that she finally took her turn as the faculty director of the Center for Teaching Excellence. I mean, I can't, you can't imagine this place without the Center for Teaching Excellence. It's the nerve center for faculty communication and collaboration with respect to teaching and learning, but much else besides. It's been transformative here.

Michael G.:

[29:27](#)

In terms of the core curriculum revision, mostly my role was to urge it. It came out of the last Higher Learning Commission review because we hadn't



looked at it for a while, and we weren't assessing it. That was their point. First assess, then revise, see if it's accomplishing the goals you have for it. Well, what would those goals be? I mean, they didn't even think in those terms at that point, right? So a happy moment of my presidency was when I sat down with a Core Curriculum Review Committee who came forward with a core review process that was allied to those, gifts of the Ignatian tradition, right? Mission, reflection, identity, or discernment, solidarity and kinship, service rooted in justice and love. You know, that the core is allied to that.

Michael G.:

[30:28](#)

You know that you've done the right mission identity work when the faculty, on its own, chooses to tie the core curriculum to that. That was very powerful. Another moment was, I had been the director of the university scholars program during my time as a faculty member, as we discussed, and knew well, Dr. Tim Quinn, who was the director of what we call the honors bachelor of arts program. It has a name now, philosophy honors, bachelor something. I always forget. P-Fab or something. Anyway, that program was actually borrowed from Oxford. So their traditional BA at Oxford is the so-called greats degree where you read deeply in philosophy, and to some degree, theology less so. But the classics, right?

Michael G.:

[31:28](#)

So we had a series of Jesuits and others, mostly Jesuits in the 1940s and 1950s, who took that degree at Oxford, and they brought it here. Okay? That was our earliest honors program, was that honors bachelor of arts program. Well, as it happened, Oxford decided that this degree was a wonderful degree, but not applicable or appropriate for everybody, to everybody or for everybody. So they created a second degree program called philosophy, politics and economics, PPE. I knew that because when I was an undergraduate at the college I went to, they had a PPE program. I was just so dimly aware of that. And I always thought that, wouldn't it be interesting for us to have that as well? Something like that. So it was the very first time I ever engaged the faculty as president. I was musing on a number of these things, like academic excellence, and what



would that mean? And mentioned the PPE program, and wouldn't it be interesting for us to have it?

Michael G.:

[32:38](#)

Well, Paul Colella had walked in late to the session, and parked himself in the back of the auditorium where I was speaking. And I think a light bulb went on over his head at that point. He drew together a group of faculty, and I made sure ... My role is to remove obstacles, right? And I couldn't remove all obstacles because it has to make it through the Core Curriculum Committee and the College Curriculum Committees, and Board of Undergraduate Studies. All that stuff. And you don't want to get in the way of that, or be seen too much to be championing it because lest it be associated with administration and be killed then, by faculty, as a result. But, my God, that's just been an incredible program. Just incredible. And we've learned how to do cohort-based honors programs really well, such that now we've got the Smith Scholars over in the Williams College of Business. It's modeled on it. And then this data science honors program, that's just getting off the ground now.

Michael G.:

[33:50](#)

I'm just so pleased by that. So here we have five honors programs, here at the university, which I think is just wonderful. Just wonderful. There's also a way in which I think my passion around issues of diversity and inclusion fits under this heading, because a university that takes diversity and inclusion seriously is a better example of a university than a university that does not, because all the research shows that our outcomes accrue from places where there's a group of diversity, a greater degree of diversity around tables and in conversations, and so on. Another element has been buildings. So the ...

Anne R.:

[34:35](#)

Yeah, there have been a lot of building projects.

Michael G.:

[34:44](#)

Yeah, and they've been split between academic and non-academic buildings. I was really glad that the first big projects were the Conotan Learning Commons, which was the first imagining of our library. We were going to renovate McDonald and haven't gotten to that yet, but that's in the offing in a couple of years' time, knock on wood. And then the new home for the



Williams College of Business. And then the Health United Building, of course, which has academic components to it for a number of our health science programs. And then the complete, total, wonderful makeover of Alter Hall. That, for me, is perhaps my favorite project.

- Michael G.: [35:37](#) I love the way it took a venerable building and re-imagined it in this dramatic way. The sawing off the ends of it was just brilliant because it allowed them then to use structural steel, to break out of the rectilinear box approach that the structural pillars required in the building. It serves us so well. It just serves us so well. I mean, some very large percentage of our classes are taught in that building. So Xavier students will pass through that building. And you walk into that building and you know that the classes are a different kind of thing because of the way in which the space speaks to you.
- Anne R.: [36:25](#) It's perhaps the academic heart.
- Michael G.: [36:28](#) Absolutely, it is.
- Anne R.: [36:29](#) And it preserved the-
- Michael G.: [36:30](#) No perhaps about it.
- Anne R.: [36:31](#) ... that academic mall and the intentionality of that size.
- Michael G.: [36:34](#) Right, right. Oh, yeah.
- Anne R.: [36:38](#) What about some of the other new buildings and how they impacted campus? Like, in addition to the academics, we've had Bishop Fenwick Place, which is going-
- Michael G.: [36:48](#) Right, yeah. Right.
- Anne R.: [36:48](#) ... to be Justice Hall. And the Health United Building was something that really students have been asking for, for how long?



- Michael G.: [36:58](#) Decades. I wanted it. It was just a matter of waiting to ... We could get to it and get it done. Yeah, all of them are very special, each in their own way. One of my favorite projects is the, Our Lady of Peace Chapel on the mall here. I knew for years, that what we were going to want to do was stub the Academic Mall out to Dana Avenue. You may remember that there used to be a little spur of what was called Harold Avenue that cut through campus. Right? And that spur was called Short Herald. So people would park there, and there were garbage cans there. It was just a mess. I looked forward to the day when we'd be able to vacate the street, after coming to own a piece of property, which is the hill that comes down from ...
- Anne R.: [37:48](#) There had been a house on that. It's my understanding.
- Michael G.: [37:49](#) Yes, there'd been a house there, owned by somebody who regarded the sale that a house as a payday not to be missed. An attorney, who is a friend of the university here in town, finally brokered an arrangement when that person died. And that person's heirs were more eager than that person was to cash in on it. So we were able to acquire it for a more reasonable amount. Well, the thing I love about that chapel is that it's a lovely end of the mall. It's in the middle of everything, but it's also apart from things. As we were saying earlier, it's a quiet space that encourages reflection.
- Anne R.: [38:43](#) It has that beautiful prayer garden.
- Michael G.: [38:46](#) In the back, yeah, which I helped design.
- Anne R.: [38:49](#) Oh, good.
- Michael G.: [38:50](#) I was very engaged in that. I picked up the containers and the benches, and I approved the layout.
- Anne R.: [39:00](#) Well, you did a good job.
- Michael G.: [39:01](#) And the landscape material. When I have enough time for a hobby, I garden. So all that comes naturally.



- Anne R.: [39:13](#) Do you have plot in the campus garden?
- Michael G.: [39:13](#) No, I don't. I work with some friends-
- Anne R.: [39:15](#) Oh, nice.
- Michael G.: [39:15](#) ... out of their house. They have quite a backyard, front yard too. The backyard is fabulous.
- Anne R.: [39:27](#) What about the relationship with TriHealth, that helped build that?
- Michael G.: [39:27](#) Yeah, that goes back a long way, really. Jim Hoff and Sister Myra Bradley, she was on our board. She ran Good Sam at the time. This is in the 1990s. We're very close, and developed a number of relationships in terms of ... Their RNs being able to come here and complete their BSN. So her successor was John Prout, and Jim's successor was me. So John Prout and I began talking about collaborative stuff, and it was more of a hope, I think. But then the Health United Building made it happen, or it made the Health United Building happen. It's a chicken and egg kind of thing. So the situation was this, we were finally gearing up to do a new student rec center, and we put together a trustee task force to oversee the project.
- Michael G.: [40:40](#) We had, at one point, a Physical Facilities or Plant and Building Committee, whatever it was called, of the Board, but it didn't really have a heck of a lot of work to do. And any of the work that it needed to do, it needed to fund so that the work always came to the Finance Committee. So we figured we could simplify the agenda, give the resulting agenda to the Finance Committee. And whenever we need to do a building, we'll constitute some kind of interdisciplinary trustee task force to oversee it. That's what we did for this proposed new rec center. One of the trustee members on that committee, a doctor, remarked, "Well, up at Miami, both TriHealth and Mercy are engaged in the student wellness and fitness space," in ways that he was pretty sure were financially beneficial for the institution. Shouldn't we investigate?



Michael G.:

[41:47](#)

So at that point, a group of people on campus had been around the Midwest to look at different, brand new campus rec centers, and get a sense as to what the state of the art was, and all that. We had a sense of the path we wanted to go down, if you will, but we thought, yeah, okay. So we hit the pause button, and opened up conversations with Mercy and TriHealth, and ended up doing a requests for proposals, to suggest a partnership. Well, I mean, at this point, the new head of TriHealth here in town ... John had stepped down and I can't remember Mark's last name, I'm blanking on it [Clement]. It'll come. He was relatively new to town. He came from Rochester and had developed a partnership with, I think it was the Rochester Institute of Technology. And it was a unique partnership between a healthcare system and a university, which did not have its own hospital associated with it.

Michael G.:

[43:01](#)

So he was familiar with this kind of partnership, and actually had arrived here, thinking he'd like to do something like that here. He's an alum, which is also helpful. At any rate, when their response to this RFP came back, speaking for the other members of the university team, we were like kids on Christmas morning, that we were just jumping out of our skins. Their response was breathtaking in its depth, complexity, comprehensiveness, generosity. So the partnership that we have with TriHealth now, as they seek to develop a collegiate health expertise that we can help them with, and we want to be known for that as well, population health, and so on, it's just breathtaking. I mean, the Health United Building is what, as we say in the Catholic sacramental tradition, an outward sign of indwelling grace, that there's a whole lot behind that partnership. And it's represented by that. But we had Beacon Orthopedics come along as part of the bargain and that has been instrumental in what we do for our student athletic training.

Michael G.:

[44:38](#)

And then a Center for Population Health, and so on. I can't imagine having navigated the pandemic absent our partnership with TriHealth. We have a number of reasons why we've done as well as we have, which is about as well as you can, I think, in the course of the



last 15 months. Top of the list is our students doing all the things we asked of them, top of the list. But man, having TriHealth right there, informing us of what they knew, such that a guy named Dave Rigdon from TriHealth was part of the conversations that were happening daily, with the TriHealth Task Force. I'm sorry, the-

Anne R.: [45:27](#)

COVID Task.

Michael G.: [45:28](#)

... COVID-19 Task Force, along with all these university people. To have Dave as a part of that was just instrumental. That partnership with TriHealth has really been transformative in all kinds of ways. And I suspect that as transformative as it's been so far, the future ahead is really good. It's just a great asset for the university to have. I'm really proud of these two venerable Catholic institutions, shaking hands and agreeing that there's cool stuff that they can do together. I'm really glad we hit the pause button on the rec center project because it turned into something so much bigger than we ever could've imagined. Just so much bigger.

Anne R.: [46:27](#)

Well, we're at our time today. Do you want to-

Michael G.: [46:27](#)

Where you in terms of how much more you have?

Anne R.: [46:30](#)

I was going to ask you-

Michael G.: [46:31](#)

Well, here's what I'm going to propose though. We can just get another hour on the calendar.

Anne R.: [46:35](#)

Okay, that would be good.

Michael G.: [46:37](#)

That's the easiest thing to do, I think.

Anne R.: [46:38](#)

Yeah.