



Michael J. Graham, SJ

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Anne Ryckbost

2021 June 15

Schmidt Hall, Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio

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- Anne Ryckbost: [00:03](#) Hello. This is Anne Ryckbost, University Archivist on June 15, 2021. I'm here in Schmidt Hall with Father Michael Graham and today we are going to continue his oral history interview, focusing more on the intangibles versus the events-based interviews that we've doing. So, Father, some of these questions are things that people have sent to me that they are curious as to what you would say or how you would respond. And I know you've addressed some of these in other forums, like the Faculty Assembly when you talk to them. So let's just get started.
- Anne R.: [00:42](#) One person wonders, what's your favorite part of the academic year? Is there a special event, activity, or moment you particularly look forward to?
- Michael Graham: [00:50](#) Openings and closing, I suppose really. There's something, especially after the summer, that's so energizing about when the students come back. It's like this whole place wakes up again. It's not that we don't do anything over the summer, but it's at a more leisurely pace, and all of a sudden, it just accelerates. It's not unlike when they wench you up the hill at the roller coaster at the beginning and then you hang on and scream for the rest of the year. That's just incredibly exciting, seeing students back on campus again. You miss them over the course of the summer. It's just too quiet. The campus isn't supposed to be like that.
- Michael G.: [01:31](#) It felt like that after, for sure, this past fall, when we had to evacuate the campus in the previous March owing to COVID. So seeing them all back on campus



was just the best medicine possible. So there's that. And then graduation at the end of the year, by that point, everybody's exhausted, of course, and cranky. But there's something that's just so remarkable about commencement itself. It's what you've been working for over the long haul of the year and to see it happen is always just incredibly satisfying, the students and their parents and families.

- Michael G.: [02:16](#) One of my favorite things to do has always been to hang around out in front of the Cintas Center at the end of commencement. I view myself as free to leave when nobody wants a picture with me in it.
- Anne R.: [02:34](#) So you're there all day?
- Michael G.: [02:36](#) Well, I'll be out there for an hour and a half after the commencement. I didn't do it this year because of COVID, it just didn't seem wise. However, what I did do is I hung around at the end of the tunnel that the students all came out of when they left the floor and God knows the number of selfies and quick pics I was in, that kind of stuff. That was a lot of fun. I've always joked that as Goofy is to Disney World, so am I to Xavier, the person with whom you want to have your picture taken. It's always just very, very satisfying to interact with family members and the like.
- Michael G.: [03:14](#) I think that one of the most powerful parts of commencement though, for me, is always the Baccalaureate Mass. I suppose it goes with being a priest and all that. It's the sacramental center of it. The commencement itself is a jubilant, wonderful civil ceremony, but somehow the heart, the soul of commencement is the Baccalaureate Mass for me. So that's really powerful. And then the Christmas season is just wonderful at the end of the fall semester. Regrettably, it comes at the end of the semester and you're exhausted and tired and you've got all this stuff to do and then all these things get layered on top of it. But whether it's the Christmas reception for everybody that the deans have hosted or the different... There's a Christmas dinner for the Board of Trustees, for example, with festive music that's always a lot of fun.



- Michael G.: [04:25](#) I began doing, I think, my very first year as president, an annual mass reception dinner for retirees. That is just a huge, huge thing. They love it. They're elderly and so we do it beginning at 4:00 in the afternoon or so and I'm home by 7:00pm because they eat early. Like I said, they're old people, but they're folks who I remember from years and years back. They love being able to see each other. It's a great occasion for them to do that. That's the...the whole Christmas season is just really rich with all the stuff going on.
- Michael G.: [05:18](#) Basketball tournaments, that's another favorite time. That's not specifically a Xavier thing, but there's quite the NCAA tournaments. Well, the conference tournament, whether the A-10 and especially the Big East in New York. That's an occasion going to Madison Square Garden, the world's greatest arena. And then where we end up in the NCAA tournament. There's always a wonderful carnival-like atmosphere and a great cross section of students and faculty and staff and alumni and so on. Those are always just a ton of fun, especially if we win.
- Anne R.: [05:54](#) Yeah. That always helps. Someone else pointed out and asked "many individuals have assisted you along the way as president", and throughout the interview, we've talked about many of them. Are there a few who have been especially helpful to you in guiding you and supporting you as a leader here at Xavier?
- Michael G.: [06:13](#) Yeah, sure. One of your questions is about Mary Lang. I saw. And so my mind goes to her first. She's been my executive assistant all the way up until this year. Very thoughtfully the office staff decided that what they would do is... Should I get close the window for the buzzing?
- Anne R.: [06:36](#) You could.
- Michael G.: [06:36](#) I can do. Mary Lang became the president's executive assistant under Jim Hoff three or four years before I took over. And so she was well-versed in the rhythms of the office by the time I walked in and she stepped down from that role this past year to allow Nancy Downing, who was the number two to step up into the



role while she was here to support Nancy. And then she'll be around for another year or so. My guess is she's keeping it a secret from all of us.

Michael G.:

[07:11](#)

But I think what she's doing is going to be... It's intended to stick around, to support Nancy through at least her first year as Colleen's assistant. So we'll see. Anyway, so Mary Lang has just been hugely, hugely helpful. She's the smile at the other end of the phone and lots of cranky people call the office because they're upset about this, that, or the other thing. And so Mary's demeanor is always very important, completely on brand, so to speak. And she also knows that people across campus will take her phone call when she calls. And so she's always able to lateral off the issue to the correct office. Our goal is to connect the people to the place that can solve their problem rather than talk to me, then I go talk to somebody and so on. It just saves a whole number of steps.

Michael G.:

[08:11](#)

Mary has also been really good because she's been around for so long and anticipating things that she just knows that we need to ask this question, or have you thought about that, or it's the rare day or week that goes by without her making sure that things stay on track. She's supported the board completely until we had a general counsel who became the secretary of the board. And then they've been of assistance there, but Mary has been the one who's really still managed the board at a very significant level. So the another person that I'd cite as really valuable is John Kucia, who stepped down as administrative vice president several years ago. I know you've interviewed him. He's been stepping down into retirement and will step out completely at the end of this month, at the end of this June as well.

Michael G.:

[09:16](#)

But he and I worked very closely together, as I believe I told you, when I was first on board as the university relations vice president. And so John has been... To call him an alter ego would be a little too strong. But he's been a go-to guy that I've always sat down and hashed things through with whenever I've been puzzled about stuff. John Kucia would be somebody...



Oh, I'm sorry, rather Joe Feldhaus would be somebody else having brought him on as General Counsel eight years ago, or so. Like I told you that I talked to a number of people about whether or not we should go to an in-house counsel. They said it was the smartest thing they'd ever done. I don't know if it's the smartest thing I've ever done, it's up there. And Joe very quickly established himself within the university.

Michael G.:

[10:20](#)

And he is just such a wise man with great perspective, terrific judgment. He's somebody that I really counted on to give me a good advice. Board Chairs always, whether it's been Mike Conotan initially or Joe Pichler or Bob Kohlhepp or Barb Howard, Vince Caponi. They're always people who I need to run important university things by them. Just because as board chairs, they need to be aware. But there's also a way in which you have to have things cooked a little bit before you bring it to them. So you have some sense as to what value add there you're asking from them beyond simply awareness. So those would be a handful of people. Lots and lots of the faculty committee chairs I've had a really good working relationships with, which is very important. Marco Fatuzzo, the outgoing Faculty Committee Chair has been the best, I think, of an extraordinary group of men and women. He has just such a deft touch and the way he frames issues and there's no drama whatsoever, which is really huge. So that'd be a handful, I suppose, to people.

Anne R.:

[11:51](#)

What stands out as most noticeable difference, considering that you've had a long tenure here, the most noticeable difference between the student body when you started and now?

Michael G.:

[12:05](#)

I think there's huge differences and some similarities. As to the similarities they are young people and so they are millionaires of time and hope and dreams and ambitions and fears and wonders and futures and all that kind of stuff. And so they're going through an incredibly important period of their life, as they're trying to figure out who they really are, and what they want to be. They're looking for people who put their



lives together in such a way that it resonates with the students. And so they glom on to faculty and staff as role models and so on. And so all that, it's just, I was going to say precious, the word properly would be sacred. I think it's why I love working at a university. That said, there's huge differences [pause] that this group today are much more diverse, much more talented, much more sure of themselves.

Michael G.:

[13:13](#)

They've had to grow up fast. I think faster than previous generations have done. They're digital natives who live in the world of Instagram and TikTok and Twitter and all the rest of that. And so that's just... I'm of a variety of minds. I view social media in general as, at the very best, a mixed blessing, and believe it's been downright detrimental in a lot of ways. And you see it in the kids that they don't have attention spans anymore. It's hard for them to do sustained work. They've got to be entertained [finger snapping] by rapidly moving things. They feel aggrieved. That's part of our culture. Everybody has a right to feel aggrieved nowadays, and it spreads like wildfire on social media.

Michael G.:

[14:20](#)

So that's sad. There's also a way in which kids nowadays, the literature bears this out, lack resilience. That they are a generation who have for a whole variety of reasons everybody points the finger at social media. I suspect that that's a large part of it. These kids have real, real trouble in a whole variety of ways. So it shows up in terms of students accessing mental health services more than generations in the past did, demanding even more than we're able to provide. That's just a kind of an endless hole down, which you can pour resources and you'll never meet the need. It's just so gigantic. I don't mean to sound like I'm belittling it, I don't, at all.

Michael G.:

[15:26](#)

It's just, the wound is huge and gaping. I feel for the kids. Now that said, one thing that stuns me really is that we've been saying how this generation lacks resilience and so on, but look what they've just come through and they've done it. So it's like they aren't as unresilient as they seem. I think certainly the mental health challenges remain. But I think that they've got a





spine that I don't think we gave them credit for having. And so that's been a really good discovery. I'm glad to know that certainly what they've learned in the last couple of years, they will trade on for the rest of their lives in all kinds of ways. And they've changed in lots and lots of ways. But as I said, there's still the undergraduates anywhere. They're still 18 to 22-years-old. And in many ways they remind you that they're closer to being 10 years old and than being 35.

Anne R.: [16:42](#)

And same with faculty and staff. We have talked about the transformation, professionalization of the university as a whole. Talk about some of those differences that you see between faculty and staff then.

Michael G.: [17:00](#)

I think there's more of them, right. I'd be interesting to know how many faculty there were in 2001 when I took over and how many there are now, and that kind of stuff, and what the percentage of them would be that have terminal degrees. I'm sure that it's more now. So there's that and the way in which the... What the university has grown spinning off a College of Nursing, for example, in the last couple of years, which has been an incredibly important development. So they themselves are a more diverse lot. They come from a wider degree of colleges and universities from which they've gotten their terminal degree so that they're better prepared, I think, as a faculty than the generation of the faculty before them. Someone once said that the most important thing that the faculty can do is to hire faculty collectively better than themselves.

Michael G.: [18:08](#)

And I think that our faculty has really done that over time, so that the junior faculty that we have now, are just terrific and it's remarkable to see people who were junior faculty 10, 15 years ago, like Marco, Rachel Chrastil, David Mengel, Niamh O'Leary, Stephen Yandell, you could just go on and on and on, who have moved into places where the university is really in their hands. And I feel very, very good about that. The other thing I'd say is that, and this is a tribute to Debra Mooney and the work that she and her staff



do, is that faculty and staff have a greater appropriation of, and appreciation for the fundamental Jesuit Catholic mission of the institution. They make it their own in multiple kinds of ways and operate out of it.

- Michael G.: [19:00](#) We have a common linguistic universe, I think, within which we operate. We know what we mean by terms like cura personalis or people for and with others and that sort of stuff so that as a result, collectively, we're much more mission focused than we were a generation or two ago. And that the faculty themselves own that in a very special way. When faculty came forward, as we were revising the core curriculum, about a decade ago, I suppose, it must be a little bit more perhaps. And they had the idea of... No, it was not quite a decade ago because it was after the last HLC review. They were the ones with the idea of using the gifts of the Ignatian tradition as an organizational framework for the core. And that was, I thought, a really powerful signal that they had made Debra's work, so to speak, their own. So that that'd be a big point.
- Anne R.: [20:15](#) Another question that came to us was over all of your achievements in the last 20 plus years you've been at Xavier, of what are you most proud of?
- Michael G.: [20:26](#) Yeah, it's the mission stuff, without a doubt. The marketing department has been having these little infographics, Father Graham By The Numbers, which is all very cute. Dollars raised or diplomas awarded, and acres gained and building square footage and capital campaigns and the rest of that stuff. All of that's appealing because it's bite sized, it's easily reduced to infographics. But for me, it's the much more subtle pervasive stuff that I've been thinking a lot about the nature of the culture here. And because it's the culture that I've seen operating in remarkable ways during the course of this past year, as we've navigated the pandemic, as we've had the HLC review that we did. That was just spectacular. And so it's the culture of the place that is able to operate in this really remarkable way.





- Michael G.: [21:36](#) A fundamental element of that, not the only element, but a fundamental element of that, is all that Jesuit DNA stuff that's very much a part of who we are. And so for me, helping the university become the university that the university has become in multiple ways, but especially in that way that we're a worthy Jesuit institution, that we do a very good job as a specifically Jesuit university. We're a really good university, but we're a really good, even better, Jesuit university. So that for me is the thing that I... That's the dearest to my heart, if you will.
- Anne R.: [22:26](#) Is there a challenge facing Xavier that you think you didn't have a chance to tackle fully?
- Michael G.: [22:35](#) I'd rephrase the question slightly, I suppose. Are there assets that I wish I'd built up that I didn't build up? And the endowment is like the top one, having that savings account in your pocket that you know is going to be there to help tide you through difficult times. And it also enables you to achieve a higher level of excellence, if you will. So that's a big one. We have been enhancing the brand and hence the perceived value, actually the actual value as well, of the university considered as a degree granting institution. And so that's work that simply has to continue so that the university will be able to compete effectively in the world, in the future where... To the degree that your brand is perceived as being a value. You're going to have an easier time of it than if it's not. So that's a work in progress, I guess. But really what this job is in large part is, what comes over the transom on any given day. That is the challenge that has to be negotiated, navigated.
- Anne R.: [24:11](#) Someone else had asked about crisis management, that it feels like as much as you can do to strategize and prepare and plan, as university president-
- Michael G.: [24:19](#) Then something happens.
- Anne R.: [24:19](#) ... and you're also responsive to outside matters.
- Michael G.: [24:22](#) That's exactly right, yeah.



- Anne R.: [24:24](#) So, how do you deal with that? What advice you have then?
- Michael G.: [24:27](#) Again, it would be two things. I think I've talked about the centrality of enterprise risk assessment before, that that's an arrow in the strategic quiver that's terribly important in terms of inviting the university to anticipate problems and then respond to them proactively. So it creates systems and structures such that should those problems arise, you'll be able to navigate them more easily. That was central to our ability to handle the COVID crisis as well as we did. Now, that said, doing that also creates the muscles, if you will, that allow you to navigate better the unanticipated crises that come along. For example, when members of the Patriotic Front decide to invade the campus and rip up a Black Lives Matter sign, how it is that you handle things customarily become incredibly important at a moment like that where you have to do it fast.
- Michael G.: [25:44](#) So I think that the message is to my successor, continue figuring out what those potential problems are and how best you might navigate them. And at the same time figure out how the lessons for those kinds of situations can be normalized or mainstreamed to be able to be used in helping manage the day-to-day as unanticipated things arise.
- Anne R.: [26:21](#) Do you also see those same exercises being helpful as Xavier has grown and continues to grow in terms of its student body, it's national recognition, it's employee base even, whereas 20 years ago, you might not have had the capability to set up as many processes and procedures in place?
- Michael G.: [26:46](#) Oh, yeah, sure. There's a couple of responses. First, something that we were incredibly blessed by is the fact that we had a larger... Our deeper bench strength going into the COVID crisis than a lot of other institutions smaller than us. We had the luxury of having Jeff Coleman as the Vice President for Risk. And so he became the natural person to quarterback the COVID team. But then we had all kinds of folks who were positioned middle management types.



Dave Johnson, Jean Griffin, Rachel Chrastil, et cetera, who were able to just really step up. Doug Ruschman, Connie Perme, and be incredibly helpful to that effort as well. So there's that.

- Michael G.: [27:49](#) By virtue of our scale, we're a little bit bigger and so we had a bench strength that came in really, really handy. But what I'd also say is that the larger group of people in 2021, as opposed to 1990, expect a greater degree of sophistication, I think, from the university administration in terms of how it conducts itself, its relationships with multiple stakeholders, especially them, faculty staff, students, to some degree. So they expect more, they deserve more, that we're a better place than we were in 1990 in multiple ways. And so that has to be demonstrated, I think, to people. So the expectations are simply higher.
- Anne R.: [28:49](#) Tell us about your leadership style and how do you think it... Well, I guess first, do you think it has evolved over your presidency and how?
- Michael G.: [29:00](#) Yeah, incredibly so. I orchestrate really well, I think, and I'm comfortable doing that, that as you settle into a job like this, you get to know how it works, where the hidden gears and levers are and how to get work done more easily. You always want to get over there, but you need to figure out the steps by what you get there. I had a 360 review by the board five years ago now I believe that was—maybe it was six at this point—that was, for me, transformative with the feedback that I received. I have been emphatic about my senior team and how I work with them both individually, but especially as a team since then, and I wish I had learned those lessons earlier on in my presidency. That it makes a huge amount of difference, I believe.
- Michael G.: [30:13](#) It certainly feels right to me. And then the focus on mission, that's something that has come to the fore, I think, in the last handful of years. Well, you do something and get better at it, so you can do it a little bit better and then you get better at it still. And then it's like you can do it better. And that's been the story of our relationship with making mission identity issues



more of our mainstream issues. So that's been really important. I think in some ways whatever I might... That as a priest, my leadership isn't necessarily pastoral. I think I've led with that in a more deliberate way in the course of the last 10 years than I did in my first 10, that that's become a much more important piece being the president.

Michael G.:

[31:24](#)

And so I've been much more deliberate about that. I try to be as much of a consensus builder as I can be, understanding that I can't build a consensus entirely. Part of the nature of a university of course, is shared governance with the faculty. The faculty tend to have a variety of opinions as to what shared governance means. There's strict constructionist versus loose constructionists schools of thought [laughs] with respect to shared governance. It pertains to these things. No, it means that you can veto anything, so it'd be the extremes. But at the same time faculty are incredibly talented, smart people, especially at a place like Xavier when they're rooted here that they're a tremendous asset. Doing things without them being on board is just the surest recipe for failure and it deserves to be.

Michael G.:

[32:38](#)

So how it is that you can keep people as much as you can in the big middle and move them forward collectively, that's the challenge and requires still a lot of work and hence the relationship with the faculty committee chairs and faculty in general. But I'd like to think of myself as inherently collegial. I would grant at the outset that there have been any number of times where I've been the one to fracture shared governance in one way, shape or form, or acted in a more precipitous way than I should have. I think, by and large, I've learned from those episodes, which is not to say that I wouldn't at times, because it seems to me to be the right thing to do, to act swiftly in a way that some would find problematic. So that just comes with the territory though. So you have to make those judgment calls.

Anne R.:

[33:57](#)

What would you say is the most important issue facing Jesuit Catholic higher education?



Michael G.:

[34:12](#)

Yeah. Some of the most important issues facing Jesuit Catholic higher education today are issues facing higher education today. And those need to be pulled apart because we have to be able to meet those issues effectively or we're not going to be around to do the Jesuit Catholic thing. [Both laugh] And those have to do with affordability and access and relevance and all the rest of it. So that it's terribly important. This next chapter of Xavier's history will require it to burnish its brand, as I was saying a moment ago, to be perceived to be a better value tomorrow than it is today. Universities who are able to navigate that are going to have an easier time with it in 2025 and 2030 than schools that don't. That said, I think what's also important is to provide a value add that is clearly aligned with the specific religious inspiration of the institution. The issues there are many, I think, that the Catholic church is riven in this country by the same forces that have divided our political discourse and culture.

Michael G.:

[35:51](#)

And so for a university to take the stands it must as a Catholic university... are going to be divisive for people, alienating. And that's true on both sides of the political spectrum left and right. And so trying to keep everybody under the tent is going to be a challenge going forward. And also making sure that you don't dilute the identity down to some least common denominator, such that the gap between what you provide and what a place like Miami of Ohio perfectly good institution provides when it comes to service. That's the thing, that it isn't so watered down that there's just a thin whisker of difference between what you do and what they do such that people raise the natural question, "Why should I pay for what you do when I can get what somebody else does that looks kind of like what you do for half the money or less?"

Michael G.:

[37:12](#)

So that's a very important thing. So I think that the challenge, going forward, is to be able to leverage as fully as possible the gifts and graces of the tradition out of which we come such that we can provide something that's inspirational to these young people who are looking to invent their futures and



themselves, and that what we provide can be good assets for that.

- Anne R.: [37:47](#) I think I know exactly what you'll say when I ask this question. [both laugh] What do you consider a strength for Xavier as you leave it, that Xavier can carry it forward? I think mission and identity is obviously central to that carrying forward, anything outside of that?
- Michael G.: [38:03](#) Strong sense of community. People have always said that about us, that that's a strength of who we are. Ohio State can and does talk about the community and personal attention, all that stuff, but it's like, "Well, give me a break." And there are certain sectors of the university where they're able to pull that off. Well, the honors program or whatnot. But what they've got to do is sort out most of the people so as to focus on a small number of people for whom they can deliver that experience expertly. We do it in a really pervasive way. The saw is that once kids come to campus for a visit, we can really get our hooks in them. And it increases dramatically the probability of them enrolling here because they're able to feel something.
- Michael G.: [39:06](#) I found it very interesting actually when in the last handful of years we've hired people from the Registry to fill in senior administrative roles while we hunt for the permanent successor. We did that with the provost, we did that with a Chief Business Officer. We've also had the experience of people coming to us as ACE's fellows and so-
- Anne R.: [39:31](#) Dale Grubb.
- Michael G.: [39:31](#) Exactly, Dale Grubb, for example. Can't remember the name of the guy from Kentucky. Andrew something from several years ago. Anyway, all of them come in and remark on the culture here. That it's something that we, fish who swim in this water, don't quite see. They do come in from the outside and uniformly praise it for the coherence, I guess, it gives to the institution that the rest of us we don't quite see it as effectively as outsiders do. So I think that's a remarkable thing.





- Anne R.: [40:22](#) And we're all looking forward to the new school year. As great as the summer is, to be back together with a physical presence and renew that sense of community in a new way.
- Michael G.: [40:36](#) Yeah. I think people are going to really dive into it. You saw it a couple of weeks ago when the deans sponsored that cookout after the students had left and finals were over and graduation had come and gone. And I don't know how many people there were. It was before the cicadas arrived. Thank God. But we had maybe 350 people altogether who were there for some time. 225 people, maybe, 250 people there at the peak. And people loved it. They loved it, just seeing folks once again. I was talking to some people afterwards and they said, "It was so funny because I thought to myself, I've got to email, this person, because I got a couple of things I want to say to them." And then they saw them, were able to go up and just have the conversation just like old times. And so I think everybody will look forward to being back in a predominantly face-to-face environment come fall, August, when things start gearing up for the next go round. So yeah, it'll be a great moment, I think.
- Anne R.: [41:48](#) Well, what are your plans for the future? And everyone wants to know if they in some way include Xavier.
- Michael G.: [41:54](#) Includes Xavier. [Both laugh] Yeah, we'll see. So I've had lots of conversations with my provincial superior. Although yesterday my old provincial superior left office and a new provincial superior came in. We were together in meetings up in Chicago last week, actually, both provincial superiors, old and new. And so I had an opportunity to sit down with the new guy, called Father Karl Kiser, who's a great man, because in the normal course of things, I won't see him until sometime next spring during his visitation down here at Cincinnati. And I wanted him to hear about me from me. I know that he heard about me from Brian Paulson, the previous provincial. And so as he starts getting his feet on the ground and thinking about things that he wants to do and so on I want him to



have a sense as to who I am and what advantage I might be able to be to the province going forward.

- Michael G.: [43:06](#) So if I got to have all my marbles, what I'd like to be able to put together as a portfolio of responsibilities that would include colon, first dot [both laugh] would be continued contribution to the ministry of higher education by the Society of Jesus both on a province level and/or at a national level. Second bullet point would be that I'd like to be able to have more time to do pastoral stuff. Third bullet point would be that I'd like to be able to do both of those things in a way that would allow me to stay resident here in Cincinnati, because I'd love to be able to be of a pastoral use here in the greater Cincinnati area, specifically through our two parishes Bellarmine, here on campus, St. Xavier downtown, our Jesuit Spiritual Center. I'd like to be engaged in campus ministry here, even do the odd thing out of the high school.
- Michael G.: [44:21](#) I've got social capital, so to speak, a reputation here in Cincinnati, where if I go to Cleveland or Chicago or whatever, I don't have that. And so that's an asset that the Jesuits can leverage, I think, for the advantage of our ministries here. So that's the third bullet point. Fourth bullet point is that I'd like to be able to be of whatever use to Dr. Colleen Hanycz I can be, going forward.
- Michael G.: [44:50](#) I used to think that what I wanted to do was to be, not a chancellor, but a president emeritus and maybe be involved in lots of local boards and that thing. I'm not sure I want to do that anymore because I would rather spend my time working for the Jesuits in terms of the ministry of higher education, mentoring presidents, or helping to do retreats for board members or any one of a number of different sorts of things. So I'm not interested in that portfolio of work, if you will, because it would be done at the expense of something dearer to me. I very much am looking forward to being a priest who doesn't have to worry about being a president anymore.
- Michael G.: [45:45](#) And so I want to recenter my life in things Jesuit in kind of roughly speaking. Dr. Hanycz knows that I'm a



Zoom call away for anything she needs me for. We're well positioned in terms of, I think, friends of the university such that Gary Massa, the Vice President for University Relations, has very, very strong relationships with people of consequence to the university in such a way that there are some to whom I can add something, but not very many, really, when you get right down to it. He and Colleen will make a dream team together. So I'm not worried about my... I don't believe that I'm central to the university's future philanthropic success. I can add something to it, but I'm not central for that.

Michael G.: [46:53](#)

But I know where the bodies are buried, so to speak, and all of that can be of help to Colleen as she gets her feet on the ground. And so I'd enjoy being on boards of other Jesuit institutions because I do that work really well. I like it a lot. But we'll see what Karl wants me to do in terms of that portfolio. The core portfolio is engagement in higher education in some way, shape or form. There's a couple of different ways that could take shape. And I'm interested in doing that at a moment where the Jesuits administratively know that we need to put more resources into that. So what that will look like, I'm not quite sure. Most immediately what I'm going to be doing is getting my left knee replaced.

Michael G.: [47:49](#)

Been looking forward to that for quite a while. So yes, it will be... I'm not looking forward to the first two weeks of pain, but after that things get better, they tell me. But it's also important for me to disappear for a good long time so that Colleen will have the sense of my not looking over her shoulder. That's the most important gift I can give her. And what I'm going to be doing is deepening my own appropriation of the spiritual tradition of the Society of Jesus, especially the Spiritual Exercises. So I always wanted to do preached retreats, for example. It's a staple of our retreat houses. I could always go through and schedule a couple of them, but the problem has been having the time to work up the material.

Michael G.: [48:37](#)

So I've got our retreat workshop at the end of August down in Dallas, at our retreat house there for a whole



week. But apparently you come out of that with the material. So and then I'm going to spend a couple of long weekends at our retreat houses in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, a couple of weekends there, Demontreville outside St. Paul. So watching those weekend retreats in action, making further notes from the notes I've made down in Dallas, I've got a bibliography on the Spiritual Exercises and Jesuit spirituality that I'm going to be working my way through. And have as a conversation partner, a guy up in Chicago who's our great man right now in terms of Jesuit spirituality, a guy named Bill Creed who's in his early 80s and he is just revered. So I'm looking forward to conversations with him. I'll see him, for example, in September. There's the Ignatian Colleagues Program, which is that effort through the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities to provide opportunities for assimilating the Jesuit identity for our colleagues at our colleges and universities.

Michael G.:

[50:09](#)

So I'm going to go on an immersion experience with them to the Dominican Republic in December for 10 days. I think it is a week, 10 days. And there's a couple of other ones that I may do after the first of the year. It depends upon how a couple of other things play out. Now I want to... I had originally thought of doing another 30-day retreat, the long retreat that Jesuits do twice in their Jesuit career. And that seems like overkill. But I do want to do a couple of eight day retreats. The first one, I'm accumulating what I call the Book of Consolation. People are sending me all kinds of cards and notes and emails. So I'm not saving all of them, but I'm saving a lot of them. And so at the end of September, I'll go out to a favorite place in Arizona and just read my way through those things slowly, savor them, see what kinds of doors they open up. If I get lucky, really lucky, then late April to early June next year will find me at Manresa in Spain.

Anne R.:

[51:24](#)

Wow.

Michael G.:

[51:25](#)

Yeah. For a six week colloquium on the Spiritual Exercises that includes a lot of rereading of fundamental Jesuit documents and making an eight



day retreat. And you look out your window and there's Montserrat. And it's in English, thank God, so I don't speak Spanish. So that'd be a great wrap-up for the year. So I'm looking forward to coming to the Spiritual Exercises. open-handed in a way that is more deliberate, I think, purposeful that I've done in the last 20 years at the age of 68 with all this experience under my belt. And regardless of what Karl Kiser, the Jesuit Provincial asks me to do subsequent to the sabbatical, deepening my own appropriation of our tradition is the best possible preparation for anything that I'll be of a greater use, I think, for the next assignment, whatever that next assignment might be.

- Michael G.: [52:43](#) So we'll see. So I hope it's at Xavier. Like I said, if I get all my wishes, I'll be based here, and would be able to be engaged you know in a variety of ways with the life of the place. So we'll see. I'm very excited about it. People say to me, "Isn't it weird not knowing what you're going to do next?" And it's like, "No, it's great. I love it. I've known what I'm going to do next for the last 25 years, I'm really enjoying not knowing what I'm going to do next."
- Anne R.: [53:17](#) Just to know that there's so many opportunities. It's really the neatest part there.
- Michael G.: [53:21](#) Yeah. Well, as I said earlier, what I want to do... This became clear to me over the course of a number of years is that especially—I've served as a Province consultor, an inner circle of advisors for the provincial. I've just cycled off it. I was in June, in Chicago last week for my last meeting—But service around that table really invited me to think in different ways about what I want out of the next stage of my life. And so basically I want to be of use to Karl. Have him send me someplace to do something. I'm looking forward to that a lot. Not that I haven't been doing useful Jesuit stuff here, but I want to recenter my life in more deliberate Jesuit ways.
- Anne R.: [54:10](#) Well, Father, is there anything out of the last five, six sessions that I haven't asked that you wish I had asked?



- Michael G.: [54:19](#) No, I can't think of any. Maybe after I read through everything, I'll send you an email and saying one more thing. But, no, I feel that it's been complete. So what about you? Is there anything that you wish you had asked?
- Anne R.: [54:37](#) No. I just want to let you know that this has been a wonderful experience. It's been incredibly rich and I think eye-opening for not only the archivist, but it will be for the whole campus community and understanding where we've been, where we've gone, how we've got there and what we've [crosstalk]
- Michael G.: [54:54](#) Yeah. Well, at least one man's view.
- Anne R.: [54:56](#) Yeah. One man's view.
- Michael G.: [54:58](#) No, that's not what I mean. I always think that a university is rather like that story about the blind people and the elephant, the one grabs the tail and says, "Oh, an elephant is like a rope," and one embraces the trunk and or the legs and says, "An elephant is like a tree," and so on and so on, that I have my own perspective on the place and it is not complete. It is as partial as is a student's perspective or staff members or faculty members or whatever, but I see a lot more of different kinds of data than other people do. But it's also necessarily at a higher altitude. And so it has its own advantages and deficiencies.
- Anne R.: [55:59](#) Well, thank you very much. We all greatly appreciate your time and the consideration that you participated.
- Michael G.: [56:06](#) Sure, Anne. It's been fun. Thank you.
- Anne R.: [56:07](#) Thank you.