



President's Perspective

REV. VINCENT M. COOKE, S.J.

THE CANISIUS COLLEGE MISSION STATEMENT, easily reached through the college's Web site (www.canisius.edu/jesuit_mission_statement.asp) prominently mentions the college's mission as a Catholic institution of higher education in the Jesuit tradition. This fall, the college's Board of Trustees will delve into some very important discussions about the college's mission and identity.

At the college's recent Academic Convocation, which begins our academic year, I suggested that there were two ways of looking at Canisius as a Jesuit Catholic American University. The first is to focus on the words in the sequence listed: Jesuit, Catholic, American and University. Such an approach, however, could tend to suggest the subordination of the academic enterprise in which we are engaged to its modifiers: Jesuit, Catholic and American.

The alternative approach – and the one that I prefer – is to focus on the words in exactly the reverse order: University, American, Catholic and Jesuit. In doing so, we, like Cardinal Newman in his great work, *The Idea of a University*, affirm the primary importance of the goals proper to a university. We must be first and foremost a place committed to truth in teaching, truth in research, and to professionalism in everything we do. Further, American universities are unique kinds of universities. They are free from government and other outside control, they are self governing, they adhere to definite notions of due process and academic freedom, and they exist within a society of laws, not the least of which is the United States Constitution.

American universities that are Catholic embrace and develop a culture that is welcoming to religion in general and to Catholicism in particular. The Catholic Church has a presence on the campus and there is respect for Catholic doctrine. Exactly how this occurs on each campus is the focus of much of the mission and identity discussion today, and it is something that Pope John Paul II hoped to encourage when he issued his apostolic constitution for Catholic higher education, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

Finally, a Jesuit university is a unique style of Catholic university in which there is a high priority given to the work of the intellect, and an openness to the inspiration derived from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and the Gospel. Jesuits work here in close collaboration with their colleagues. One need look no farther than the accomplishments of some of our distinguished graduates (page 6) to see how the Jesuit commitment to faith and justice that they experienced here at Canisius has impacted their lives.

Our mission statement is a living document at Canisius and we remain very much committed to enhancing our identity as a truly great university that is American, Catholic and Jesuit!

Vincent M. Cooke, S.J.

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