Anthony Albrecht
Professor Schatz
Wesleyan University
History 171

Like a Puzzle with all of its Pieces, Xavier is Complete with Community Help
Acknowledgements

I would like to extend a special thanks for those following persons that helped with this paper, whether it was help via research, writing, or finalizing it. Specifically, the following persons were most helpful:

Brother Thomas Ryan

Professor Ronald Schatz

fellow History 171 classmates
Like a Puzzle with all of its Pieces, Xavier is Complete with Community Help

"Be a man, a man like Jesus." This is the motto of Xavier High School of Middletown, Connecticut. Xavier, Middletown's first Catholic High School, was established in order to teach young boys to become "a man like Christ." This goal of giving young men a quality education is still the main focus of the school today, as it was when the school was founded almost a half-century ago. Founded in 1963, Xavier is still relatively young. However, the roots of Xavier go back to not only the history of Catholic education in Connecticut, but as well as the United States. Xavier High School was founded with the purpose of promoting Catholic studies in high schools. Not only were area residents thrilled to be able to send their children to a local Catholic school rather than a public high school, but even local politicians praised the building of Xavier too. Governor John Dempsey, who was the governor of Connecticut during the founding of Xavier and a Catholic himself, gave a speech at the school's dedication, saying how not only is the opening of the school important for Catholic families in the area, but it is just as important to the Connecticut school system as well – giving families more options, whether it be secular, public, or parochial. Xavier was a good option for those families who chose to send their children there not only because it gave them another educational opportunity, but it specifically worked out well with those Catholic families who previously did not locally have a Catholic high school. In order to fully understand the complete history of Xavier High School, there are other aspects indirectly related to the founding of the school that are essential in understanding the importance of this Catholic high school in Middletown. The understanding of the Catholic Church in Connecticut is essential, including the understanding of the Hartford Diocese and

---

Norwich Diocese. Another way to look at the history of the school is to look at a similar example. For this we can consider Notre Dame High School of West Haven and Sacred Heart of Hamden, two Catholic high schools that were founded a decade earlier than Xavier. After getting a general history of the Catholic Church in Connecticut, we then can look at the aspects that contributed to the establishment of Xavier – gaining financial support, receiving bids for construction of the school, problems that arose during building, the costs of the school, and the agreements between the Diocese of Norwich and the Xaverian Brothers, the brothers who ran the school at its opening and for years afterward. We will compare changes at Xavier in terms of goals, tuition, curriculum, stand, and student body and see how it has changed over the years.

In 1952, all of the Catholics in Connecticut were governed by Hartford Diocese. There existed 120 parochial schools and the times hinted more might be necessary. Between the years of 1940 and 1960, there is an extreme growth of Catholics both in Connecticut and the United States. As the Connecticut Catholic population grew, the need for an additional diocese did so as well. The Norwich Diocese was established in 1953 in order to aid the now Hartford Archdiocese with the increase in need of Catholic schooling and parishes. The Norwich Diocese would encompass the counties of New London, Tolland, Windham, and Middlesex. During the first years of existence, the Norwich Diocese setup a variety of schools, but no high schools yet. The first high school under the Norwich diocese was in New London. As it became successful, Bishop Hines, bishop of Norwich felt that it could serve as a model for other parishes. Middletown would be chosen as a second high school in the diocese, where two high schools

---

4 Ibid. 44.
were to be erected – one for boys and one for girls.\textsuperscript{5} Before continuing on with the founding of Xavier, it is important to take a step and see what existed prior to Norwich Diocese, the Hartford Diocese.

In terms of Catholic history, one of the amazing facts is that the first Sunday school in the United States existed in Connecticut.\textsuperscript{6} Among the first existences of schooling stem from the foundation of the Sisters of Mercy, a group of nuns who were mainly located on the northeast coast. Their mission was to help aid the creation of various institutes for education. On May 11, 1852, four of these nuns came to Hartford and then to New Haven, where they would start up new schools or means of learning.\textsuperscript{7} One of the first official Catholic school openings is with the founding of Sacred Heart Academy in Stamford. It was founded by the Sisters of Saint Joseph and the teaching staff consisted of six sisters.\textsuperscript{8} In terms of secondary education, the first high school was the Saint Thomas Seminary, existing within the Hartford Diocese. This school offered the options of being educated for the purpose of preparing for college (which was rare at the time, for people did not enter college in large numbers, or even more importantly, high school) or going to study to become a priest. Other schools sprung up quite shortly after the founding of the Saint Thomas Seminary. The first example of a Xaverian Brothers sponsored school is facility in Deep River called Saint John Industrial School where young men who could not afford to pay for schooling could attend for free to learn manual arts.\textsuperscript{9} As previously mentioned, the United States in the 1940s through 1960s experience a large increase of Catholic population. In 1953, stats would further prove this point. Connecticut’s families would support

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{6} Duggan, Right Reverend Thomas S. \textit{The Catholic Church in Connecticut}. New York: The States History Company, 1930. 35.
\item\textsuperscript{7} Ibid. 165.
\item\textsuperscript{8} Ibid. 172.
\end{itemize}
this point because seventeen percent of the children residing in Connecticut were attending some kind of Catholic school in 1953. The national average during this same time period was eleven percent. By 1953, an estimated more than fifty thousand students in Connecticut attended one hundred twenty parish schools that existed within the Hartford Diocese. One example is Notre Dame School for boys in West Haven. Established in 1946 by the Brothers of Holy Cross, Notre Dame opened only seventeen years prior to Xavier.

The most obvious similarity between Xavier and Notre Dame is that each school has a counterpart school for the opposite sex. Both Xavier and Notre Dame are all male schools. Mercy, Xavier’s counterpart, which was built in 1965, was also in Middletown. Notre Dame’s sister school would be the Sacred Heart Academy for girls, which was in Hamden. Just as Sacred Heart was established after Notre Dame to be its counterpart school, so too, did Mercy two years after Xavier was built. As a matter of fact, during the first two years of Xavier’s existence, Mercy girls were being taught on the second floor of Xavier while their school was being completed. Between the two schools we not only see that they are founded around the same time and same manner, but they also have changed in the same ways throughout the years. For example, both schools mainly started off with brothers making up the teaching staff and have changed since. As time has changed, both schools’ faculties and staffs consist mostly of laypersons. Just by looking at the simple comparisons between Xavier and Notre Dame, it is easy to recognize how schools were evolving and following similar patterns.

Bishop Hines was the catalyst behind the whole project of building Xavier in Middletown. In 1960, Brother Gilroy, the provincial of the Saint Joseph (New England)

province of the Brothers, wrote a letter to all of the bishops of New England with the hopes of thinking of possibilities for establishing Catholic schools in new areas. In his memoirs, Brother Gilroy mentioned how Bishop Hines came forward first with enthusiasm to build a new school in the Norwich Diocese. After meeting with Brother Gilroy in December 16, 1960, Bishop Hines anxiously called Brother Gilroy on March 27, 1961, eager to tell him that he found a site for where the school could be built. It would be in Middletown, Connecticut. The exact site of the school would be of Randolph Road near Route 9. Route 9 was a fine spot because not was Xavier accessible by residents of Middletown and surrounding towns of Portland, Middlefield, and Durham, but it was also accessible by those cities and towns on the other side of the Connecticut River. A forty-two acre farm was bought from Gustav and William Kutzner, who were chicken farmers. Reported purchase price for this land was $67,000. The following picture is a map where the projected Xavier school site was to be located:

---

15 Ibid.
As plans were underway, a need for financial support was also necessary. This school would not have been built without a campaign. Luckily, the families in parishes of Middlesex County were eager and excited with the prospect idea that a Catholic high school could be built in Middletown. As plans were being finalized, it was estimated that construction of the school would cost roughly four million dollars. In order to defray a part of this payment, parishes in Middlesex County established a campaign. They chose Monsignor Ladislaus B. Nowakowski as Honorary clerical chairman of the campaign and Monsignor Joseph V. King as Executive clerical chairman. Monsignor King at the time was the superintendent of schools in the Norwich Diocese. The fund drive began at Saint Sebastian Church in Middletown on November 24, 1961. Richard Cardinal Cushing, the Archbishop of Boston, was the main speaker. As the campaign was raising money, a builder for the school was still to be determined. It would turn out that the chosen architects would be Russell, Gibson, and von Dohlen, A.I.A., of West Hartford.

On June 12, Brother Bartholomew, who represented the Xaverian Brothers in Newton, Massachusetts at the Provincialate, received a drawing of the plans of the school, in which he was pleased. In these drawings of the school, there were plans for a chapel, which was to replicate the one existing at Notre Dame High School in Utica. In sending such news to Brother Oswald, the Superior General of the Xaverian Brothers, Brother Bartholomew also sent

him floor plans to review and comment if any change is necessary. The hopes of sending the information and floor plan diagrams were to receive approval and begin the construction of the school. Brother Bartholomew wanted a quick reply because Bishop Hines was leaving for Europe on July 1 for two months. They wanted to have the preliminary plans set before Bishop Hines departed.\textsuperscript{20} The following drawing is the plans for the first floor of Xavier:

\begin{center}
FIRST FLOOR PLAN
\end{center}

The following first floor still remains almost identical as displayed in the diagram above, with the exception of a few renovations and additions. This first floor plan, as well as the second floor plan, would be finalized would represent what was to be built. James Russell would be the representative of the architectural company. He scheduled a meeting for October 26 or October 27 in 1961 to meet with Brother Bartholomew to review the drawings and to finalize any

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
specifications. His plan was to have final drawings ready by November 15, 1961. Not only did Brother Bartholomew meet with Russell on October 27 but in a confirmation letter he mentions his delightfulness on how smooth the project is going so far. Russell and the rest of the members of his company seemed to be well approved by those working with them, including Bishop Hines and Xaverian Brothers such as Brother Bartholomew. As the architects did their job successfully, bids were next needed to determine who would build the school. With bids ranging from $1,660,000.00 to $1,800,000.00, the lowest bidder, the Downes Construction Company would be chosen. They were not only chosen for their price, but their known reliability as well. As the building of the school was set, problems did arise, as did new ideas. With simply just identifying the problems and compromising to form solutions, Xavier High School was ready to be built and completed successfully.

Among the earliest problems was one that existed prior to construction. When Bishop Hines first saw the detailed plans for the school, he was pleased with everything except the plans for the front entrance. He wanted it to stand out, and that is exactly what happened. The architects were versatile and altered the plans, suiting Bishop Hines's wishes. Brother Bartholomew also had some requests, in response to the drawings that were made by Russell, Gibson, and von Dohlen. Some of the comments that were in response to the drawings are the following – altering space in the Brothers’ residences, insufficient plumbing drawings, putting electrical outlets in the bathrooms, placing speakers in all faculty and guidance areas for announcements, changing the brand of a waterproof material called Membrane Waterproofing, and poorly detailed locker room drawings. Brother Bartholomew said to the architects, “We do
want to have some flexibility here, but we do not want to overdo it."26 It is apparent through Bishop Hines and Brother Bartholomew that problems did exist with the architects. However, both parties, Xavier representatives and representatives for the architects, were flexible and able to put together a final plan. Not necessarily a problem but a next step, Brother Bartholomew wanted to have a plan ready to establish a successful layout of the library, once construction was completed and furniture and shelving was installed (to be completed around July 1963). Xavier chose to speak with library specialist Steven Hvasta, of Remington Rand in Hartford, Connecticut. Brother Bartholomew suggested that Mr. Hvasta contact Russell, in order to plan a layout for the library, that would include eight thousand volumes, seating for sixty, and other various stands for display.27 Among the problems that existed and the new plans that were made, Xavier High School was well underway, with only a little more than a year to be completed.

As all of these excited plans were to be completed, the unfortunate side of things came up – the costs and exact numbers of it all. As the cost of things was adding up, so were the plans to build Mercy High School, further down on Randolph Road. As Xavier released a list of items of memorial opportunities, it mentioned that the list was to be applied for both schools. As is took community support in the first fund drive campaign, the community’s aid was needed once again. This time it was for the costs of those items and rooms that were needed to be built in the school. In a “Memorial Opportunities” list, Xavier provides a variety of items that one can donate money to have a specific item be in memory of someone. Prices of items ranged from $500 to $100,000. The $100,000 item was the education center. Some of the other expensive items were the gymnasium ($50,000), the sanctuary of the chapel ($25,000) and the main entrance lobby ($25,000). Some of the $500 items included sacred pictures, crucifixes, and

kneelers. The next item we can analyze is the cost analysis of the school. The total amount of square feet for the school came out to be 76,213 square feet. For example, classrooms were 24 feet by 32 feet, totaling 768 square feet. With twenty regular classrooms to be built, the total classroom square feet amount was 20 classrooms times 768 square feet per room, equaling a total of 15,360 square feet, just for the classrooms. The following excerpt comes from a document “Cost Analysis,” released by Xavier High school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assume 76000 sq. ft. @ 15.00/sq. ft.</td>
<td>$1,140,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence for 32 Brothers inc. chapel</td>
<td>290,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architect’s fee @ 6%</td>
<td>85,800.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment and supplies at 12% of construction</td>
<td>170,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$1,685,800.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is apparent that through these costs, the memorial items were very important in covering some of the costs that the school endured. When dealing with the costs, it is important to also understand the role and relationship between the Norwich Diocese and Xavier High School.

On May 8, 1961, an agreement was released and printed between the Norwich Diocese and the American Northeastern Province of the Xaverian Brothers. Some of the agreements in the document include the following – the Diocese is to provide 20 acres for the school, an architect is to be chosen by the Diocese, both the Diocese and Brother’s must submit both costs of construction and cost of equipment and supplies, an agreed cost, a twenty-five thousand dollar annual repayment from the Brother’s to the Diocese if enrollment exceeds 600 boys, tuition is set at $200 for members of parishes in the Norwich Diocese (with $50 cost per boy per parish), $250 for those not within a parish in the Norwich Diocese, the girls’ high school, temporarily on the second floor of Xavier for two years, will have no connection to Xavier, and the Norwich Diocese agrees to aid the Brothers if after three years of opening the school, they still lack.

---

sufficient funds. This agreement includes twenty-seven points of agreement and is signed by Bishop Hines and Brother Gilroy. The most seemingly important agreement, in terms of what parents might like to hear as well, comes from point twenty-six in the agreement, which states, “The Brothers agree to conduct Xavier High School in the high traditions of religion, scholarship, and discipline, characteristic of the finest American Catholic education.” As this document dates back to 1961 when the beginning of plans were established, these principles and agreements were still important to both parties, not only when the school was completed, but when it first opened and the first couple of years of the school’s existence.

As the construction of Xavier was completed, the school was ready for opening. The first principal was Brother Robert, C.F.X., who was pleased with the school’s completion as it planned to open. When first classes opened in September, 200 boys attended. Three boys even received $200 each (pending honors status) in scholarship money. These scholarships were based on the three highest test scores from the entrance exam that took place on February 23 at St. Mary’s Church in Middletown. The three scholarship winners were Thomas G. Conway of Middletown, William F. Csere of Portland, and James J. Kendzior of Middletown. The next big step in Xavier history came with the day it was dedicated, September 7, 1963, at 11 a.m., where Governor Dempsey gave the dedication address. Bishop Hines was also present to bless the new school. At the dedication, the hundreds of attendees were able to explore the new school. Visitors were impressed with the twenty-six classrooms, physics, chemistry, and biology labs, a library that could hold 8,000 volumes, and a beautiful chapel that could hold sixty

31 Ibid.
As mentioned earlier, Governor Dempsey, a Catholic, gave an address that pointed out the positive roles of Catholic schools, including the idea of another option for families, and simply perfect for Catholic families who now have a school that is closer to them. In his speech, Governor Dempsey points out four separate ideas titled, "Education For Life," "Vocations Are Vital," "More Than Stone, Mortar," and "Example of Saint Francis." He even gives credit to the diocese, who made this project possible, by saying, "What we are actually dedicating is hard work, faith, courage, and vision – particularly the vision of the shepherd of your diocese who had the faith to believe, the vision to see, and above all, the courage to do."

Now that we know how the dedication of the school went, we must now look at how the school ran and functioned in its inaugural year.

As the school opened in September 1963, the school's main faculty was composed of brothers. The school's original faculty was composed of eight brothers as well as Mr. Art Kohs (athletic director, biology, and physical education), Mr. Lawrence McHugh, who is presently the chairman of the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce (football, track, history, and physical education), and Father Joseph Finnerty (religion, chaplain). Three years later this eight-to-three ratio of brothers-to-non-brothers switched drastically. In 1966, only twenty of the total forty-four faculty members were brothers. In the school’s inaugural year, Xavier handed out a pamphlet that stated its objectives, faculty, curriculum, admission, and expenses. In terms of location and transportation, the pamphlet explained that no set means of busing or routes have been established yet. It covered that the school will have to determine who is going to need busing and who will provide private transportation. In terms of curriculum, there were two options – the general course for those whose education will be complete after high school and the

37 "Governor’s Address At Xavier Dedication." The Catholic Transcript 12 Sept. 1963: 9.
college preparatory course for those college-bound students. Honors courses were offered by all departments. Each student was required to take four years of religion, English, mathematics, languages, science, social studies, the arts, and physical education. However, different levels existed within each subject. For example, a ninth grader could either be taking earth science or biology. A tenth grader will take either biology or chemistry. All eleventh graders will take physics. A senior will take either chemistry or advanced science. This pattern of different levels exists in other subjects, such as the arts or social studies. Other items of interest in this pamphlet are social activities, such as dances with Mercy, and parental activities, with the establishment of the Home and School Association.\(^\text{38}\) Although no student records were found that stated their different religions and ethnicities, the times of Catholicism in Connecticut would suggest that with a sudden increase of Catholic population, a very high majority of students that first attended Xavier were mainly Catholic and white.\(^\text{39}\) As Xavier evolved over time, it did diversify not only through faculty, but through students as well.

At the local level we see the importance of Xavier in terms of Catholic faith at the school. On a more global note, Catholics and Catholic schooling in general experienced a number of changes from 1963, the year Xavier opened to 1974, eleven years later. One of the first ideas we can look at is why families during 1963 did not send their children to a non-Catholic school. Some reasons included that Catholic schools were too expensive and there existed better education in non-Catholic schools. However, the number one reason why families did not send their children to Catholic schools is because there was no Catholic school available or it was too


far away. Along with its criticisms, Catholic schooling did have some praise. Families now had a Catholic high school to send their children. This is why the first student bodies of Xavier were mainly Catholic, because Catholic families in Middlesex County were able to now send their children to a Catholic high school, and they did. The 1970s experienced somewhat of a decline, however. The percent of children, whose parents were both Catholic, attending Catholic schools declined in 1974 compared to 1964. This belief was true and did not make a difference if you from the city or lived in the suburbs, all varied areas experienced a decrease. In 1964, there were forty-four percent of children from Catholic families who went to Catholic schools. In 1974, this share dropped to twenty-nine percent. However, Xavier did not suffer in the 1970s. It still had a steady influx of students. As time elapsed, however, Xavier began to see a change in both the makeup of its faculty and its students.

As previously mentioned, the first staff of Xavier consisted of eight brothers and three non-brothers. The 2005-2006 faculty consists of very few brothers, with an overwhelming majority of lay persons. A current roster of the faculty shows us that only two brothers are currently teaching, Brother J. Robert Houlihan (intro to physical science) and Headmaster Brother William Ciganek (Christian Lifestyles). Signs of change also exist with the change of the makeup of the student body. As there were no specifics of the 1963 student body, it can be hypothesized that it was very homogeneous. Forty years later, for the 2003-2004 academic year, the following numbers explain the make up of the student body. During this academic year ninety-four percent of the students were Caucasian/white, with the next being African American.

41 Ibid, 234.
at close to three percent. The Catholic population was eighty-two percent. Also notable during this fortieth anniversary year, students resided from sixty-two different towns.\textsuperscript{44} In terms of curriculum, requirements for graduation for the 2005-2006 year existing in the Curriculum guide are as follows:

"\textbf{ACADEMIC POLICIES}
Graduation Requirements
4 credits in Religion
4 credits in English
4 credits in Mathematics
3 credits in Science (including Biology and Chemistry)
3 credits in Social Studies (including Civics and United States History)
3 credits in Foreign Language\textsuperscript{**}
1 credit in Physical Education
.5 credit in Health
.5 credit in Fine Arts\textsuperscript{**}\textsuperscript{45}

Slight changes occur in this most recent set of requirements compared to those of 1963. This might suggest that Xavier's goals and means of achieving such goals might not have changed that much over the years. It appears that the times have changed, but the purpose of Xavier High School has not.

Xavier has been a successful school since its founding. Admission rates have always been high in terms of continual high amounts of applicants and Xavier has proved its success with ninety-nine percent of its graduates continuing their education.\textsuperscript{46} Has the faculty changed? Have the students changed? Have the times changed? The answer to all of these questions is yes. Xavier, however, has proven that its purpose to promote a Catholic education in preparation for college has not changed, and has remained central to why the school is successful. Xavier has become an important asset of both Middletown and Catholic schooling overall. As we look

\textsuperscript{44} Calkins, Kevin. Personal interview. Nov. 2003.
forward to the future we can look at the following Xaverian philosophy - "To impress upon students the dignity of the human person created by God, to guide and counsel students in educational and vocational need, and to help students prepare for college, for life work, and, above all, for life itself."47

Works Cited


"Memorial Opportunities." Catholic High Schools Building Fund Campaign. 1963.

"New Xavier High To Be Dedicated." The Catholic Transcript 5 Sept. 1963


