



Guide Us By Your Light

*"We are called to be community, to know and celebrate  
God's love for us and to make that love known to others."*

# Catholic Identity



**MARYMOUNT**  
UNIVERSITY

*Arlington, Virginia*



*My child, if you receive my words and treasure my commands; Turning your ear to wisdom, inclining your heart to understanding; Yes, if you call for intelligence, and to understanding raise your voice; Then will you understand the fear of the LORD; the knowledge of God you will find; For the LORD gives wisdom, from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. For wisdom will enter your heart, knowledge will be at home in your soul.*

PROVERBS 2:1-3, 5-6, 10



The first edition of Catholic Identity at Marymount represents the effort of the Catholic Identity Standing Committee with support and input from many on our campus.

As stated in the Marymount mission, “Marymount University is a comprehensive Catholic university, guided by the traditions of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary....” While this has been our guiding light since the founding of Marymount in 1950, this work represents the first attempt to describe what our Catholic identity means *for Marymount*. Stated simply, what are the common characteristics that Marymount shares with all other Catholic universities and colleges, and what makes Marymount unique?

This document will most certainly change and evolve over time as Marymount grows and adapts to changes in the environment. However, the foundation and basic tenets of the Marymount education and experience are timeless.

While it is our hope that this work creates clarity, it is not intended to be the “perfect” document. Instead, it provides a springboard for reflection and discussion. Please use it in that spirit.





## Vision

Marymount University will be known as a comprehensive Catholic university and the institution of choice for students, faculty, and staff. Marymount will distinguish itself through a culture of engagement that fosters intellectual curiosity, service to others, and a global perspective.

## Mission

Marymount University is a comprehensive Catholic university, guided by the traditions of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, that emphasizes intellectual curiosity, service to others, and a global perspective. A Marymount education is grounded in the liberal arts, promotes career preparation, and provides opportunities for personal and professional growth. A student-centered learning community that values diversity and focuses on the education of the whole person, Marymount guides the intellectual, ethical, and spiritual development of each individual.

# Core Values

## Excellence

The Marymount community consistently strives for excellence in carrying out the University's vision and mission.

## Integrity

The Marymount community conducts all activities and interactions in an authentic, transparent, and ethical manner.

## Professionalism

The members of the Marymount community exhibit professionalism in all their activities and interactions and maintain a sense of accountability.

## Diversity

The Marymount community welcomes and values all individuals and recognizes diversity as a source of strength.

## Respect

The Marymount community maintains and promotes an atmosphere of mutual respect, cooperation, and civility.

## Faith

The members of the Marymount community share a commitment to moral and spiritual growth and, consistent with the Catholic intellectual tradition, are committed to living examined, purposeful lives.

## Service

The members of the Marymount community actively seek to serve others and advance social justice.

## Introduction

Marymount University's identity as a Catholic institution of higher learning is at the heart of its mission. But how does Marymount's identity as a Catholic university guide what we do? What does it mean today to be a Catholic university, particularly one founded by the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM)? How can we ensure that all members of our community share a common understanding of this identity and what it means for our diverse population as we carry out our roles as students, faculty, staff, and administrators? This document intends to provide context to the search for the answers to these questions.

In 2013, President Matthew D. Shank established a committee to help lead the university through the process of articulating Marymount University's Catholic identity in light of the initiatives outlined in the university's strategic plan, "Building the Institution of Choice," and assessing its effectiveness in providing the kind of learning, living, and working environment that demonstrates its shared understanding of and commitment to this identity. What follows is a living document, developed over two years and guided by the mission, goals, and traditions of the RSHM, designed to serve as a reference point to assist all members of our community in understanding the meaning of Catholic identity at Marymount University. As a living document, the university will review and revise the document as it is used and discussed by our community and as our understanding evolves, to improve the document's usefulness in articulating Marymount's approach to Catholic higher education and to guide further exploration of how our Catholic identity can and should impact our work as students, faculty, staff, and researchers.

## The Context

As the revelation of God's Word, the Scriptures serve to guide humanity to a deeper knowledge of God. When St. Paul preached to the people of Athens, we see an example of the Christian Church's dialogue with the world (Acts 17). Through this dialogue, which we call the Catholic intellectual tradition, the world has been provided with great minds, seminal texts, advances in science and art, and continued development in wisdom and the search for truth. Since medieval times, this dialogue between the Church and the world has flourished within universities –

advancing the development of the whole person. Marymount University strives to build on the strength of the Church's Catholic Intellectual Tradition as it works with the Church to make a positive and significant contribution to the world.

Marymount University began its journey as a participant in this tradition with its foundation in 1950 by the RSHM. The RSHM is an international congregation of Catholic women religious, founded in Béziers, France, in 1849 and currently serving in 13 countries in diverse ministries. The Catholic identity of Marymount University is properly understood in light of the grace-filled models and inspirations given by the RSHM women religious of the past and present. Today, the RSHM Sisters sponsor schools at all levels of education on four continents and place themselves and their resources "at the service of those who are most in need of justice, especially women and children, enabling the powerless, the deprived, the marginalized, the voiceless to work effectively for their own development and liberation" (RSHM Mission Statement). Their mission statement further affirms that "We are called to be community, to know and celebrate God's love for us and to make that love known to others."

Mother M. Joseph Butler, RSHM (1860-1940) founded the first Marymount College in Tarrytown, New York in 1907. She stated, "The aims of a Marymount education are manifold: to educate the heart and mind, and to provide for each student's total growth, intellectually, spiritually, socially, and physically." The RSHM approach to education is centered around six goals:

1. To foster a personal relationship with God
2. To create unity through diversity
3. To instill a lifelong love of learning
4. To encourage and affirm personal growth
5. To awaken a consciousness of social justice
6. To fulfill the RSHM mission, "That all may have life and have it to the full."



These goals are reflected in Marymount's mission and values and, along with direction from the Church, form the basis for Marymount's expression of its Catholic identity.

In 1990, St. John Paul II addressed the topic of Catholic identity for higher education institutions in his Apostolic Constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*:

Every Catholic University, as a university, is an academic community which, in a rigorous and critical fashion, assists in the protection and advancement of human dignity and of a cultural heritage through research, teaching and various services offered to the local, national and international communities...(#12). Since the objective of a Catholic university is to assure in an institutional manner a Christian presence in the university world confronting the great problems of society and culture, every Catholic university, as Catholic, must have the following essential characteristics:

1. A Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such;
2. A continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research;
3. Fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church;
4. An institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life (#13).

This inspiring document explicitly outlines the characteristics of what it means to be a Catholic institution of higher learning and reminds us that a university is an "incomparable centre of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity" and is "dedicated to research, to teaching and to the education of students who freely associate with their teachers in a common love of knowledge" (#1). Throughout the document St. John Paul II reminds us of the importance of integrating knowledge in teaching and research, and of fostering the dialogue between faith and reason. Referring to the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," he challenges students "to continue the search for truth and for meaning throughout their lives, since 'the human spirit must be

cultivated in such a way that there results a growth in its ability to wonder, to understand, to contemplate, to make personal judgments, and to develop a religious, moral, and social sense.’ This enables them to acquire or, if they have already done so, to deepen a Christian way of life that is authentic” (#23).

In 2000, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published “The Application of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* for the United States,” a set of guidelines for the application of these principles for Catholic institutions of higher education.

## The Committee’s Work

The University Catholic Identity Committee began its work by reading and discussing these documents which outline the chief characteristics to be considered in Catholic institutions of higher education. It examined the university’s mission and core values in light of these requirements and gained additional information and understanding about the mission, foundation, history, and activities of the RSHM.

The Committee used the four characteristics and eight qualities of Catholic identity as outlined in “The Application of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*” as a prompt for a discussion of how well we as a university are currently meeting these guidelines. The Committee integrated and reorganized these statements into five guidelines to frame our discussion of Catholic identity. The committee then conducted focused interviews with a sample of members of the Marymount community, using a condensed list of statements to assess the degree to which they are present in the life of the community. From these interviews, as well as previously conducted institutional surveys, the Committee found that there was a strong interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the term “Catholic identity” and strengthening connections at all levels of the university to its identity and mission. The Committee designed this document to help to meet this need.

## The Five Guidelines

The university's statement of Catholic identity focused on these five guidelines which are briefly explained. These are followed by suggestions for incorporation into the culture of the university with questions to facilitate discussion around the guidelines. The document concludes with an addendum of all references cited.

We hope that all members of our community use this document in four ways: 1) to make the topic of Catholic identity a focal point in discussions and interactions; 2) to assist in developing a richer understanding of our Catholic roots and foundation in the RSHM tradition; 3) to seek practical opportunities to apply the guidelines of Catholic identity to each dimension of university life; and finally, 4) to reflect on how the university's Catholic identity impacts the actions and initiatives to implement the university's strategic plan. These include:

- a. developing Marymount's understanding of Catholic identity through continued ecumenical and interfaith dialogue;
- b. strengthening the emphasis on ethics and the Catholic intellectual tradition inside and outside the curriculum;
- c. partnering with local dioceses and other Catholic organizations;
- d. expanding collaborative, ecumenical, and interfaith programming related to worship and service;
- e. promoting hiring to mission through dialogue and consultation (Building the Institution of Choice, 2016-2017 revision)

These guidelines, descriptions and questions often repeat common ideas, themes, and values. That is intentional. They are not isolated ideas, but together create a comprehensive picture, a tapestry to reveal Marymount University's culture. They can guide us as we continue to create a climate of understanding and dialogue. Rooted in the Gospel and the Church's teaching and informed by the heritage, tradition, and living spirit of the RSHM, this document seeks to clarify and call all to a richer understanding of what it means to be a Catholic institution so that we may continue to fulfill all that our university mission calls us to be and to do, "that all may have life and have it to the full."

## Guideline 1:

*Commitment to be respectful of the teachings and fundamental values of the Catholic Church.*

### **This guideline calls us to:**

- Recognize that respect grows from a place of understanding;
- Be informed of the teachings and values of the Catholic Church, regardless of our personal religious affiliation or beliefs;
- Reflect on how to demonstrate courtesy toward the values and the teachings in the various roles we play;
- Provide the community, especially students, with opportunities to explore and discuss these teachings and values respectfully and critically.

### **For discussion:**

- How do we create an awareness of documents, teachings, values, and history and mission of the RSHM and make resources available and accessible for all?
- In what ways can we create opportunities to dialogue with one another about these teachings and values and our work?
- How do we make clear that students, faculty, and staff need not be “experts” in the Catholic faith?
- How can people of other faiths and no faith honor their own beliefs while still showing respect for the teachings and values of the Catholic Church?
- Through dialogue and consultation, how can we promote hiring to mission so that all who are hired become knowledgeable and respectful of this commitment regardless of their faith?

## Guideline 2:

*Commitment to Catholic ideals, principles, and attitudes in carrying out research and teaching, and to provide courses for students on Catholic moral and religious principles and their application with due regard for academic freedom and the conscience of every individual.*

### **This guideline calls us to:**

- Continue to provide students and faculty with opportunities to examine Catholic ideals and principles through the university's liberal arts core curriculum and within each discipline;
- Encourage multidisciplinary approaches to learning and research that seek to understand the inter-relationships and dependencies between subjects;
- Encourage research throughout the university and consider its relation to Catholic principles since research is about exploration, inquiry, and, most of all, the search for truth;
- Apply these ideals and principles to modern social justice; the tradition of the RSHM explicitly highlights service to others, which should be connected to students' academic experience wherever possible.

### **For discussion:**

1. How do we provide students with opportunities to examine Catholic teachings in research and the classroom at an academically rigorous level across disciplines?
2. Are there any conflicts between what is required by faith and what is required by academic research?
3. How do we foster familiarity with the Catholic Church's position on the relationship of faith, education, and science?
4. How does your university unit encourage exploration and inquiry?

5. How can we strengthen the emphasis on ethics, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, and the mission of the RSHM inside and outside the curriculum?
6. How can we strengthen and build upon our partnerships with other dioceses and Catholic organizations?

### Guideline 3:

*Commitment to provide personal services and pastoral care for students, faculty, administration, and staff to help create a campus culture that is expressive and supportive of Marymount's Catholic identity, with due regard for academic freedom and the conscience of every individual.*

#### **This guideline calls us to:**

- Promote the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of each individual in our community with services that reflect Catholic values;
- Support a work environment that is built on respect and dignity of all persons and readily acknowledge the inherent gifts that they offer to the Marymount University community and beyond;
- Engender compassionate care, aligned with the mission of the RSHM, for the broader human family in all community members;
- Foster respect and support of the university mission in the activities of officially recognized student and faculty organizations and associations.

#### **For discussion:**

1. Given our diverse population at Marymount University, how can we foster authentic dialogue about our differences while remaining true to our commitment to be respectful of the teachings of the Catholic Church?

2. How is the mission of the RSHM, to serve those in need and throughout the world, evident at Marymount University today? How can it be enhanced?
3. How can each unit and academic program of the university grow in its understanding of Marymount's rich Catholic heritage and mission, and how can this ongoing discovery better inform the responsibilities entrusted to each?
4. How do the teaching, learning, and work environment and policies promote the respect and dignity of the individual?
5. How can we integrate Marymount University's Catholic identity with continued ecumenical and interfaith dialogue?

## Guideline 4:

*Commitment to fostering a climate of trust and dialogue, grounded in the university's Catholic identity and mission, where both Catholics and those of other beliefs can explore spirituality and faith.*

### **This guideline calls us to:**

- Instill in the members of our community an awareness of the teachings of the Catholic Church and the Catholic ideals, attitudes, and principles that serve as the foundation for Catholic higher education;
- Support a climate of discourse, debate, and trust where the religious beliefs of all people are treated with respect and members of our community feel welcome to discuss and share their spiritual experiences and perspectives;
- Promote the dialogue between faith and reason, the integration of knowledge across disciplines, an ethical concern, and the pursuit of truth while recognizing the necessity for academic freedom and acknowledging the religious liberty of all people;
- Support education of the whole person as stated in the university mission, including individual academic, social, moral, ethical, and spiritual growth.

## **For discussion:**

1. What does a climate of trust and dialogue look like?
2. What are our responsibilities to build and maintain such a climate?
3. How can the university best encourage spiritual growth and a strengthening of our community members' relationship with God?
4. How can we expand collaborative, ecumenical, and interfaith programming in the spirit of the RSHM?

## **Guideline 5:**

*Commitment to serve others, particularly the poor and vulnerable.*

### **This guideline calls us to:**

1. Observe the charism of the RSHM, embodied in the RSHM Mission Statement, and the goals of this international community of women religious by "responding to the needs of our times, fostering evangelical justice, giving voice to the voiceless, enabling the powerless...";
2. Promote the life and dignity of all of our brothers and sisters as we place ourselves and our resources at the service of those most in need of justice;
3. Provide formative programs to Marymount University students, faculty, and staff that offer ways to study and implement the RSHM Mission Statement;
4. Promote the RSHM commitment to service and social justice in teaching, research, administration, and university life as an expression of faith.



## For discussion:

1. How can we address the Catholic identity of the university throughout the admissions process?
2. How do we promote programs, including faculty and staff development, which offer ways to study and implement the mission of the university and the mission of the RSHM?
3. How do we promote dialogue among and between all members of the community concerning the relationship of service and social justice?
4. What are the ways members of the university community serve those in need? What more can we do locally, nationally, and globally?
5. How does our commitment to service express the inclusive nature of the Catholic tradition?
6. How will we continue to define and promote Marymount University's Catholic identity in the light of the unity that exists between the Gospel, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, and the heritage of the RSHM?





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