

# Strengthening Catholic Identity

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## 11TH OF A SERIES: STEWARDSHIP & CAMPUS OPERATIONS

Campus operations and the stewardship of financial and material resources generally fall within the domain of non-academic leaders on campus: vice presidents of finance and administration and those responsible for areas such as human resources, purchasing, investments, and the physical plant. It is their charge to model the Catholic identity of the institution within policies, procedures, and general operations.

The idea of *stewardship* is an organizing principle in the Christian tradition that guides how the goods of the earth are utilized. It takes seriously how resource use is balanced with the legitimate claims of the future. Several areas deserve special attention, including the management of finances, the care of employees, proper stewardship of natural resources, interactions with the immediate community, and relationships with donors.



**Investments:** College and university endowments may represent a significant opportunity to manifest Catholic values and ethical discernment. With the engagement and support of the investment committee of the board of directors, a university's financial officers may focus on investments in firms whose products and business practices align with the social goals of the Church. In addition to screening processes that affirm, for example, pro-life values, a campus may also consider shareholder activism and management engagement to encourage policies and practices that advance the good of society.

At the same time, colleges and universities have a fiduciary responsibility to generate returns that keep pace with underlying inflation and endowment spending policies. Further, because endowments generally comprise many individual gifts, each fund must be managed in accordance with donor expectations and laws concerning fiduciary responsibilities in this area. And while socially responsible investment strategies may require more effort, some studies have shown that they may generate returns consistent with those of the general market.

*Do our investments take a view that understands financial return as well as a broader sense of justice and the common good?*

**Human Resources:** Colleges and universities at their core are human places. At Catholic institutions, the human resources policies should allow employees to meet their human needs and

thrive as persons. Policies should not only treat individuals fairly, but also promote the solidarity of the entire staff in service to the institution's mission. Each person should receive respect and have his or her contributions recognized. Those who work on campus should be justly compensated for their work within an environment that is free of bias and discrimination. Evaluation processes need to be fair, with opportunities for improvement when needed. In addition, every campus employee should have a chance to learn about the tradition of the sponsoring order and to grow in their spirituality, regardless of religious affiliation.

*How does our institution help employees understand the tradition and values that guide it?*

**Business Practices:** Many Catholic institutions recognize the influence that their operations have on the local community and society at large. Subsequently, they may adopt policies that consider factors such as the ethical choices of business partners and the deployment of resources in support of social justice. This might require vendors to pay a living wage or certify that imported goods are not produced in sweatshops.

*In what ways do our business practices implement the principles of Catholic Social Teaching?*

**Sustainability:** Our campuses exist within the natural world of God's creation. The human needs of the campus require the thoughtful use of natural resources that takes account of sustainability and stewardship. Efforts to incorporate LEED design standards in construction and renovation projects, reduce food waste, use sustainably grown forest products, ensure that obsolete equipment is properly recycled, and reduce carbon emissions are all examples of campus commitments to respect God's creation.

*Faith ... helps us to devise models of development which are based not simply on utility and profit, but consider creation as a gift for which we are all indebted.*  
**Pope Francis, Lumen Fidei**

*In what ways does our college or university consider and communicate its commitment to environmental sustainability?*

**Town and Gown:** Catholic colleges and universities are integral to the fabric of their local community. Campuses can help shape the quality of life in a region in a number of ways: as significant employers, by making athletic facilities available to children from low-income families, through community service, and by engaging with local parishes and schools. Cooperation with local Catholic and public school districts—involving teacher education, summer learning experiences, or dual-enrollment opportunities for local students—can significantly benefit the community. Town and gown issues also may involve consideration of “payment in lieu of taxes” with the local government and university policies regarding student behavior that take community sensitivities into account.

*Are we truly good neighbors?*

**Development:** Every campus needs to secure financial resources to ensure that the institution meets student needs, particularly by helping students of limited economic means have access to

Catholic education. The university development office needs high levels of integrity in managing donor relationships—that is, forthright presentation of need coupled with strong stewardship that assures donors their contributions will be used as promised. Just as Catholic higher education seeks to help students contribute to society, so must institutional advancement efforts center on support for students who could not otherwise afford Catholic higher education.

*Do our development efforts begin with an understanding of how students benefit from others' gifts?*

**Budgets:** There is a common saying that budgets reflect what is valued by an institution. Given this, a Catholic college or university's allocation of resources should demonstrate a commitment to its core values: student formation, teaching, research, and service.

*Do our budgets express our priorities and reinforce our values?*

Our identity as Catholic institutions is lived out profoundly by what our institutions *do*, as well as what we profess. Choices both great and small can engage Catholic values and underscore the prophetic nature of Catholic higher education. Those responsible for these choices, whether through policy or daily operations, help ensure that the Catholic character of the institution is visible to all.



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