

# SHU Celebrates 60 Years of Catholic Education

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Thinkers, writers and artists lead conversations on Catholic higher education (photo not available)

Sacred Heart University recently marked two significant milestones: the Second Vatican Council's 60th anniversary and the 60th anniversary of the University's founding in the spirit of Vatican II.

The University celebrated these moments in the history of Catholic higher education and the Catholic intellectual tradition by assembling a three-day conference of thinkers, educators and writers to offer deep, creative and interpretive reflections on Vatican II's impact on Catholic higher education.

Directed by Michelle Loris, associate dean of SHU's College of Arts & Sciences and chair for the department of Catholic studies, the conference featured keynote speakers Massimo Faggioli from Villanova University, Grant Kaplan from St. Louis University, Susan Reynolds from Emory University and Patricia McGuire from Trinity Washington University.

Loris believes that by sponsoring this conference, SHU has taken a leadership role in a worldwide conversation about the significance and impact of Vatican II in Catholic higher education and in the Catholic Church today. "We know that this conference was just the beginning, and we will need to have subsequent conferences, symposia and meetings to continue the very important conversations we have started here," said Loris.

The speakers' presentations examined and imagined how Vatican II could lead and move Catholic higher education forward. According to Loris, the University is trying to explore how the reading and understanding of Vatican II documents and work from the formative thinkers of Vatican II and the Catholic intellectual tradition can deepen and expand the vision of Catholic higher education, addressing new and old challenges.

Faggioli's presentation, "Vatican II and the Catholic University in a Time of Social and Political Disruption," discussed the "robust relationship between

theology and academia.” He noted the way Catholicism has shifted to reflect the “generational phenomenon” of vocalizers and influencers.

Reynolds’ presentation, “What, for the Catholic University, is Solidarity? Catholic Higher Education and the Unfinished Reception of *Gaudium et Spes*,” questioned the “role of a university in the face of injustice.” Focusing on a revised narrative of the relationship between the world and the Church, Reynolds discussed the many challenges universities face during moments of uncertainty.

Kaplan spoke about the complexity of handing down the Catholic intellectual tradition in light of Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* which emphasizes not just what is handed down but how it will be handed down. In McGuire’s talk she asked if Catholic higher education is responding to Vatican II’s call to educate and help the poor and marginalized.

[Brent Little](#), an associate professor in SHU’s department of Catholic studies, was impressed by participants’ enthusiasm and engagement. “The conference’s topic clearly struck a nerve. There is much concern about the future of Catholic higher education, given the demographic challenges of the future (especially in the Northeast),” Little said, “but the participants were uniformly dedicated to the Catholic mission of their respective institutions and committed to deepening and enriching their schools’ Catholic identities.”

A grant from the Lilly Fellows Program sponsored the conference, with support from the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities.

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