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How the leaders define the mission

WHAT I'VE DONE

By Stephen Sundborg, S.J.

By far the most important thing I have done at Seattle University over the last eleven years is lead the university community in the formulation of its mission, reinforce it in multiple practical ways, and help to unify all of our efforts by building consensus around this mission. I also try to embody it personally by how I act as president, grounding what I do in daily prayer and in open access to the whole university community.

I led as many as thirty discussion sessions over the course of a year with every university constituency group, repeatedly revised drafts of the short mission statement on the basis of what I heard, checked back again and again with the trustees because of their ultimate responsibility for the mission, and retained personal authorship of the mission statement so that it spoke in an alive and united way. Then we found every possible way to make the mission statement visible and enunciated everywhere, even to the extent of having it framed at the entrance of every building on campus. I believe the process by which we articulated our mission has done more than anything else to galvanize the university, give it a sense of common purpose, and provide a pivot for our sense of community.

From the beginning of my time as president I insisted that we take one day a year, not holding classes on that day, so that the whole of the faculty, staff, administrators and some students could gather for the equivalent of a university-wide in-service day on the mission. We have discussed such issues as the spirituality of our stu-

dents, global social issues, the role of the arts in the Jesuit educational mission, collaboration for the sake of the integration in the experience of our students, issues of justice and workplace environment among us, etc. This has proven to be an effective mission renewal time.

I also persuaded the trustees to set aside about \$1.5 million from year-end surpluses for "The Endowed Fund for Faculty and Staff Development in Mission." The vice president for mission and ministry heads a committee which evaluates proposals and distributes about \$68,000 annually for a wide variety of individually proposed projects, conferences, studies and trips, which are directly connected with learning about and promoting the mission. This endowment has been critical to provide development funds especially to staff who otherwise would not have access to development resources.

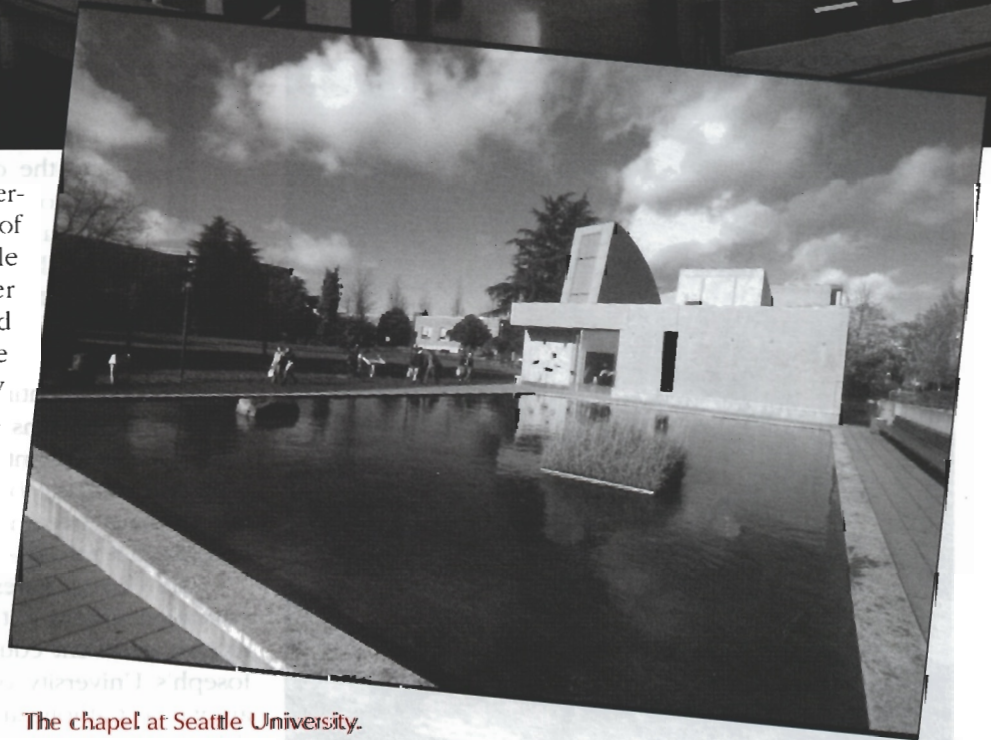
In 2005 we promoted our mission in a curious way. I and others had been impressed with *Radical Compassion*, the book by Gary Smith, S.J., about working with people on the streets in Portland, Oregon. As an educational experiment we bought 400 copies of his book and distributed them among faculty, staff, and students. We allowed various conversations to develop. What emerged was the hosting of a homeless encampment, a "tent city," on our campus for a month. Every school, college, division, department, club, athletic program, and office voluntarily engaged with our homeless guests in services provided, discussions, in classroom

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presentations, public forums, entertainment and the preparation of meals. In a unique way the whole campus was involved as never before in a practical, personal, and educational way with the people and the issues of homelessness. My stomach flipped when I was asked to okay this controversial project rather than talk about homelessness! However, like nothing else, it made our mission real.

I also jointly sponsor, together with the rector of the Jesuit community, a five-times-a-year evening of what we call "Colleagues in Jesuit Education." This grew out of evening conversations in depth, with an enjoyable dinner among Jesuits and the desire by them to expand the experience to faculty and staff. About 120 colleagues interested in learning about and embracing our Jesuit mission, gather for prayer, presentations, discussions, and a meal. It is organized by the office of Jesuit identity and has been going for twenty years. Fr.



The chapel at Seattle University.

Peter Ely, S.J., developed a more in depth year long "Anrupe Seminar" for faculty and staff who meet every other week in two groups studying the origins and history of Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit education. My office encourages participation and provides some funds for those who lead the seminar. ■