

Religious Inclusion at StFX – Draft Action Plan (Summary for Consultation)

Many Canadian universities have roots in one or more religious traditions. St. Francis Xavier University's heritage is Catholic, with particular emphasis on values of hospitality, compassion, and social justice. We are also a public institution, where students, staff, and faculty bring a range of religious, spiritual, and non – faith or philosophical world views. The draft Religious Inclusion Action Plan is designed to ensure that all community members are welcomed, respected, and supported while advancing the four Objects identified in the StFX University Act and aligning with the By-Laws of the university. The plan reflects our understanding that the search for truth and meaning extends across faith and culture, and that welcoming diverse traditions is an expression of StFX Catholic roots.

4. The objects of the University are to

- (a) provide students with a post-secondary education that is intellectually stimulating and personally enriching within an atmosphere of inclusiveness for all students, Faculty and staff;*
- (b) promote academic excellence, service to society and innovation in teaching and research;*
- (c) provide opportunities to enrich the cultural, spiritual, social and recreational life of students; and*
- (d) respect the Catholic heritage and character that have formed a vital part of the University's history.¹*

Excerpt of relevant University By Laws

Article XV. (a) The University takes pride in the Catholic heritage and character that have formed a vital part in its history.

(b) The Board in its policies shall continue to foster that Catholic heritage and character in a manner so as to preserve the traditions of the University and in particular by the commitment to excellence in the pursuit of truth and knowledge, by its involvement in the cause of social justice, by making available various programs of Catholic studies, by providing for Catholic chaplaincy activities, and by the encouragement of ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue.

(c) At the same time, the Board shall respect any applicable legislation and its contractual obligations with its students, faculty and other employees, particularly as these provisions relate to non-discrimination and academic freedom.

University Chaplain:

Article I. The University Chaplain shall be responsible for the spiritual welfare of the students.

Article II. (a) In consultation with an Advisory Committee the Chaplain shall plan a program to ensure that Christian witness will be an effective force in University life.

(b) At the beginning of each academic year the Chaplain shall submit to the Senate for approval the names of three Faculty members and three students as members of the Advisory Committee to assist them in their charge.

(c) The Chaplain may recommend to the President the appointment of assistant chaplain(s) of various denominations.

Article III. Specifically the University Chaplain shall

- (a) arrange for religious services for the University community;

¹ St. Francis Xavier University Act, Office of the Legislative Counsel, Nova Scotia House of Assembly, 2014.
https://nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/62nd_1st/1st_read/b050.htm

- (b) be responsible for student retreats, conferences, and services of a religious nature;
- (c) be responsible for the provision of faculty advisors to religious organizations on the campus.

Draft Action Plan

The plan is organized into four main areas:

1. Teaching, Learning, and Research Environment

- Introduce a Religious Accommodations Policy so students and faculty can observe important holy days without academic penalty.
- Enhance Coordination and Strategic Alignment of Religious and Spiritual Initiatives
- Build religious literacy into teaching and co-curricular activities to foster intellectual inquiry and cross-cultural understanding.

2. Working and Organizational Environment

- Provide training for faculty and staff on religious inclusion (including on racialized religious discrimination like antisemitism, Islamophobia, and residential school denialism).
- Develop policies for staff accommodation and inclusive holiday observances.
- Improve communications and awareness through an Inclusive Communication Plan.

3. Living and Social Environment

- Expand support for ecumenical, interfaith, and multifaith/pluralistic programs to complement existing Catholic spiritual life on campus.

• Ceremonial Inclusion:

Develop a Ceremonial Policy to guide how religious and spiritual elements are included in campus events.

The intent is to:

- **Affirm** Catholic heritage and ceremony as foundational to StFX's identity, consistent with the University's 4th Object, and provide clarity and context to those outside the Catholic tradition when expressions of Catholic heritage are included (for example, participation by the Vicar of the Founder).
- **Continue to evolve** major university ceremonies — such as X-Ring and Convocation — to be inclusive and welcoming to all members of the community. This evolution should honour the University's Catholic heritage while also reflecting the diversity of today's campus.
 - Ensure** that participation in all religious ceremonies is always voluntary.
 - Protect and highlight** inclusive practices already being modeled in StFX ceremonies. (For example, remarks by the Vicar of the Founder often speak to universal themes that resonate across traditions.)
 - Avoid tokenism** by ensuring that any additional elements are authentic, community-rooted, and connected to genuine partnerships.

- Strengthen residence life and peer mentoring programs to support spiritual wellness.
- Ensure food services and campus events provide inclusive options (e.g., halal, kosher, vegetarian).

4. Community Environment

- Deepen partnerships with Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian communities to integrate local spiritual traditions and advance reconciliation and social justice.
- Increase interfaith/multi-faith and service-learning opportunities so students can learn from and contribute to diverse communities, as “engaged citizens” (Strategic Plan 2023-2028).
- Embed institutional sustainability for the religious inclusion and pluralism already functioning within University structures and roles (i.e., document and institutionalize existing best practices undertaken by Catholic Chaplaincy, Chaplains Advisory Committee, Wellspring Advisory Committee, and the cycle of academic programs, research, and public lectures that sustain STFX’s Catholic heritage).
- Complement and expand existing Catholic, ecumenical, interfaith, and cultural supports with thoughtful inclusion of additional spiritual and religious supports that:
 - draw from expertise in campus multifaith life;
 - enhance current programming (but not overburden existing units)

Next Steps

This draft summary is derived from internal and external data-gathering, including; scans of Canadian campuses; reviews of literature; industry standards (e.g. CAS Standards in Higher Education); Strategic Plan 2023-2028; and seasons of consultation with internal stakeholders such as Wellspring, Chaplaincy, Ceremonial Office, and students, faculty, and staff. It is now being shared for input from students, faculty, staff, Board, and community partners before finalizing the plan. Feedback will help refine the action plan so that it best reflects the diversity of our campus and best honours the specific Catholic heritage and character that formed the University.