

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SCRANTON
A JESUIT UNIVERSITY

October 21, 2008

Dear Members of the University Community,

The University of Scranton is rightly proud of our community and of the mutual respect, care and concern that lie at its heart. We are a welcoming community, one in which the Ignatian ideal of *cura personalis*, embracing the divine model of the infinite and personal significance of each individual in the eyes of God, is actively instantiated. As such, we declare publicly and with commitment that our community has no place for discrimination or harassment on the basis of ethnicity, gender, race, religious affiliation, or sexual orientation. While such declarations are essential, they must be coupled with real actions to ensure that they remain true for all.

Over the past several years, I have listened to and consulted with students, faculty and staff about the experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning members of our community. My conversations have convinced me that we need to do more to welcome and support these members of our community and to combat discrimination in all its ugliness, both subtle and overt. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops spoke passionately to these issues in their Statement: *Always Our Children*. "Nothing in the Bible or in Catholic teaching can be used to justify prejudicial or discriminatory attitudes and behaviors," but changing "attitudes and behaviors" requires commitment and knowledge. We must do so precisely because we are a Catholic and Jesuit university, called to action by the Church not just to "avoid unjust discrimination," but to accept homosexual members of our community with "respect, compassion and sensitivity."

Beginning last winter, I engaged in a more focused conversation with members of the administration, students and faculty geared toward identifying concrete steps that we can put in place at Scranton. Accordingly, I wish to announce the establishment of the **Scranton Inclusion Initiative**, an ongoing effort to focus attention to these issues. Guiding the Initiative will be a steering committee consisting of the Director of the Office of Equity and Diversity, two other administrators and two representatives from each of the senates. The committee, reporting to me, will work to make all on campus understand how we can manifest this direction from the Church:

"The teachings of the Church make it clear that the fundamental rights of homosexual persons must be defended and that all of us must strive to eliminate any forms of injustice, oppression, or violence against them." *Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2358*

In order to accomplish its charge, the committee will pursue the following objectives:

- to support LGBTQ individuals and those who may have family members who are LGBTQ by providing a campus environment that is physically and emotionally safe;
- to provide educational opportunities such as speakers, discussions and readings for the campus community to combat homophobia, discrimination and ignorance about LGBTQ issues;
- to reinvigorate The University of Scranton ALLY Program, which identifies individuals in the University community who will provide support, resources, information and a safe place for LGBTQ students and their allies; and
- to support the formation of a student group under the Office of Equity and Diversity that will collaborate with the steering committee and engage in other activities that provide avenues for LGBTQ students to gather.

Both the steering committee and student group will undertake their respective missions in ways that are consistent with Catholic teaching. It is this teaching that calls us to recognize that "every person has an inherent dignity because he or she is created in God's image" and, in a more distinct way, says to our LGBTQ sisters and brothers, "Though at times you may feel discouraged, hurt or angry, do not walk away from your families, from the Christian community, from all those who love you. In you God's love is revealed. You are always our children."

Sincerely,

Rev. Scott R. Pilarz, S.J.