Francis to Speak at Meharry Commencement

NASHVILLE, TN — The classic student of Xavier University of Louisiana is someone who has heart, an appreciation for diligent work, the determination to use his/her talents to the fullest and the courage to ask for help when it is needed. Nobody has embodied those qualities more so than Norman C. Francis, whose administrative career at Xavier has spanned a half-century.

A 1952 graduate, Francis returned to his New Orleans alma mater in 1957—following Loyola Law School and two years in the U.S. Army—to begin his administrative career as dean of men. Since his appointment as the University's first lay president in 1968, Xavier has more than tripled its enrollment, broadened its curriculum, expanded its campus and received national attention for its award-winning academic initiatives. The tradition of academic excellence is consistent with the dreams of its founder, Saint Katharine Drexel and her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament religious order.

Admired for his sharp mind, revered for his modesty and praised for his dedication, Dr. Francis enjoys a prestigious national reputation. In December 2006, he received the nation’s highest civilian award — The Presidential Medal of Freedom — from President George W. Bush. Francis has served in an advisory role to five U.S. presidents including the historic National Commission on Excellence in Education, whose findings, published in the groundbreaking work A Nation at Risk, created a sense of urgency for bringing about educational reform in the nation's school system.

He has served as chairman or board member for numerous councils and foundations including chair of the President’s Council for the United Negro College Fund; American Association of Higher Education; The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; The College Board, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; Educational Testing Service and the Southern Education Foundation.

In 2007, the secretary of the U.S. Department of Education appointed Dr. Francis to chair the Historically Black College and University Capital Financing Advisory Board and, in 2005, Governor Kathleen Blanco appointed Francis to serve as chairman of the Louisiana Recovery Authority, helping to oversee the state’s recovery following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita while he led the University’s own recovery and rebuilding effort. He served in that capacity for three years. In New Orleans, Francis serves as chairman of the board of Liberty Bank and Trust; co-chair of the Committee for a Better New Orleans; member of the advisory board of The Times-Picayune Publishing Company; The Fleur de lis Ambassadors Program, as well as other local organizations.

Norman C. Francis’ legacy as the first African-American lay president of Xavier University of Louisiana is epitomized in his unwavering commitment to educational and social equality, spiritual enlightenment and community service.