

Final Report of the Committee to Establish Principles for Renaming

Preamble

The University of St. Thomas is an institution dedicated to the unflinching pursuit of truth. Our founder, Archbishop John Ireland once said, “I believe God intends the present to be better than the past and the future to be better than the present.”¹ In fidelity to this spirit, the Committee to Establish Principles for Renaming presents the enclosed recommendations. Like the St. Thomas mission and convictions, the recommendations seek to promote two core values: honest inquiry in pursuit of truth, and promotion of the dignity of our community and its members.

The University’s understanding of its own history requires the pursuit of truth and a willingness to act when that truth is in conflict with our values. At St. Thomas, our history speaks with two voices. It states the objective record of the University’s past, which must be protected from erasure or alteration. It also shares our commemorative memory, where the honorees of the university’s past are a reflection of who we aspire to be at a particular moment in time. When who we honor from our past no longer reflects who we are called to be now as a university, we must reconcile that difference.

This process of reflection and reconsideration must be animated by the educational ideals and Catholic identity of the University of St. Thomas. Pursuit of truth requires the collection and interpretation of evidence done in the spirit of transparency. The process of investigating whether a University asset should be renamed or otherwise reconsidered must mirror the scholarly ideals that the University upholds in

¹ John Ireland, *The Church and Modern Society: Lectures and Addresses* (Chicago: D. H. McBride, 1896), 66.

its academic practice. The input of students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, and other stakeholders must inform both the deliberations and the outcome of any renaming process. Furthermore, those making decisions must represent the diverse perspectives that enrich the St. Thomas community through their varied worldviews and experiences. Particular attention should be paid to including the perspectives of those whose identity or experiences have been historically marginalized within the St. Thomas community or beyond. In this way, St. Thomas lives out its core convictions: pursuing truth and modeling academic excellence while embracing the dignity of each member of its vibrant and diverse community.

Who and what the University of St. Thomas chooses to honor and enshrine in the commemorative memory are important, and the Committee to Establish Principles for Renaming hopes these recommendations are also helpful to those tasked with naming assets in the future. But the Committee also emphasizes that while the objective record cannot be changed, the commemorative memory can be and is populated by more than mere names: it is the sum of all actions we take to honor, challenge, contextualize, and educate our community about our shared history, even when it is difficult. Let these actions be a reflection of our identity and commitment to the unyielding pursuit of truth.

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Scope of Renaming Policy

Renaming Policy Applies to Named University of St. Thomas Assets

This renaming policy applies to all assets of the University of St. Thomas that are designated by a namesake as an honorific title for an individual person, a family, a group of identified persons, a corporation or other business association, a foundation, a philanthropic organization, or other entity. The policy applies to buildings, portions of buildings, internal plazas and streets, professorships, scholarships, statues, portraits, and other university assets that are designated by a name. The policy does not apply to assets that are not designated by a name but which may be accompanied by a plaque or other record identifying a person or persons who contributed toward or donated the asset, as to which changes would not need approval by the Board of Trustees.

General Considerations on the Occasion of and Principles for Renaming

A. Renaming on account of values should be an exceptional event

There is a strong presumption against renaming a University of St. Thomas asset on the basis of the values associated with its namesake. Such a renaming should be considered only in exceptional circumstances.

There are many reasons to honor tradition at a university. Historical names are a source of knowledge. Tradition often carries wisdom that is not immediately apparent to the current generation; no generation stands alone at the end of history with perfect moral hindsight.

Moreover, names produce continuity in the symbols around which students and alumni develop bonds with the university and bonds with one another. Those bonds often help to establish lifelong connections of great value to members of the St. Thomas community and to the University of St. Thomas.

A presumption of continuity in campus names helps ensure that the University of St. Thomas does not elide the moral complexity often associated with the lives of those who make outsized impressions on the world. The presumption against renaming would not in itself decide any such case. But it embodies the good reasons for giving continuity substantial weight. Holding all else equal, it is a virtue to appreciate the complexity of those lives that have given shape to the world in which we live.²

B. Principles to be considered to decide whether renaming on the basis of values is warranted

Did the namesake make major contributions to the University of St. Thomas?

Changing a name where a particular namesake played a relatively modest role in the University is more likely to be appropriate, while a more compelling case must be made before changing a name where a different namesake, even with a similar legacy or behavior, played a substantial role in the University of St. Thomas.³

Is a principal legacy of the namesake fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University of St. Thomas?

Determining the principal legacies of a namesake obliges the University of St. Thomas to study and make a scholarly judgment on how the namesake's legacies should be understood.

As examples, the principal legacy would be fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University of St. Thomas if it contradicted the message of the University's founder, Archbishop John Ireland, that racial inequality was shameful to him as a

² This language, redacted, is borrowed from the Yale University Report of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming at 18 (2016).

³ This language, heavily redacted and changed, is borrowed from the Yale University Report of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming at 19 (2016).

person, as a citizen, and as a Christian;⁴ if it directly undermined the founding purpose of the University of St. Thomas to ensure educational opportunities for immigrants and the disadvantaged; or if was scandalously inconsistent with the Catholic Church's teaching on the sanctity of human life.⁵

Was the relevant principal legacy significantly contested in the time and place in which the namesake lived?

We must acknowledge the moral fallibility of those who aim to evaluate the past. Paying attention to the standards of the time also usefully distinguishes those who actively promoted some morally odious practice, or dedicated much of their lives to upholding that practice, on the one hand, from those whose relationship to such a practice was unexceptional, on the other.

Renaming is more likely to be warranted when insistent and searching critiques of the relevant legacy were available at the time and place in which the namesake lived.⁶

Did the namesake personally engage in odious behavior in a persistent or grievously harmful manner?

The case for renaming is most compelling when personal odious behavior was exhibited on a sustained basis as part of the namesake's public life, rather than an isolated incident. The case is likewise weaker if the namesake demonstrated deep and consistent contrition and attempted to rectify the behavior. Grievous harm, such as personal violence against innocents and sexual abuse of another person, especially a child, presents a compelling case for renaming, even if that harm was limited to a single event.⁷

⁴ Archbishop John Ireland, Sermon, St. Augustine's Church, Washington D.C., May 5, 1890; See Joseph Connors, *Journey Toward Fulfillment: A History of the College of St. Thomas* (St. Paul, MN: The College of St. Thomas, 1986), 82.

⁵ This language, both redacted and revised to emphasize University of St. Thomas principles, is borrowed from the Yale University Report of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming at 19-20 (2016).

⁶ This language, heavily redacted, is borrowed from the Yale University Report of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming at 20-21 (2016).

⁷ This language is borrowed in part from the George Washington University, Naming Task Force Renaming Framework: Guiding Principles at 3 (2020), with additional original material.

Is the honorific recognition of the namesake having a significantly adverse impact on members of our current University of St. Thomas community or the community at large?

The case for renaming is strongest when the principal legacy or odious moral behavior of the namesake has a significant negative effect on the core University of St. Thomas missions of pursuing knowledge and receiving an education. Thus, the case for renaming is strong to the extent that retaining a name creates an environment at St. Thomas that impairs the ability of students, faculty, or staff of a particular gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, national origin, or other characteristic protected by federal law or university policy, to participate fully and effectively in the missions of the University. The case for renaming is stronger where the name is prominent and encountered in a personal or intimate setting (e.g., a student residence) or in a facility where a student is focused on learning and studying (e.g., classroom).⁸

C. Decisions to retain a name or to rename may come with obligations of nonerasure, historical contextualization, and education

In considering whether to retain a name, remove a name, or alter a name, the University of St. Thomas should consider whether any harm can be mitigated and historical knowledge preserved by recognizing and addressing the individual’s wrongful behavior. When a feature is renamed or when the name is retained but the University considers it a close question, the University should consider describing the history in a prominent way—at the feature, where practicable, or in some other suitable location.⁹

⁸ This language is borrowed in substantial part from the Florida State University President’s Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognitions at 3 (July 12, 2018) and Stanford University Principles and Procedures for Renaming Buildings and Other Features at Stanford University, with additional original material.

⁹ This language, substantially redacted, with the addition of the word “education,” and restated in non-passive voice is borrowed from the Yale University Report of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming at 22-23 (2016).

When a name is altered, the University of St. Thomas is obliged to ensure that the removal does not have the effect of erasing history.

Names communicate historical information, but they often confer honor as well. These two features of a name can be disentangled if renaming is accompanied by creative and substantial efforts to mitigate the possible erasure of history. Changing a name is thus not synonymous with erasing history.

In many instances, renaming an asset will make it incumbent on a university to take affirmative steps to avoid the problem of erasure. Such steps may include conspicuous museum-like exhibits; architecturally thoughtful installations, plaques, and signs; public art; or other such steps.¹⁰

When a name is retained, the University of St. Thomas may be obliged to provide educational context and ensure that preservation does not have the effect of distorting history.

When the University determines that a contested name should remain rather than be changed, it should consider the potential educational value to the University community of contextualizing and addressing the namesake's legacy or behavior. When the University decides to retain the name but there are strong arguments for and against renaming, the University will be best served by exploring educational opportunities to address the history in a deliberate and visible manner.¹¹

Procedure and Sensibilities in Evaluating a Particular Renaming Question

A. Making a Renaming Request

Any member of the University of St. Thomas community may submit a written request for renaming to the Office for Mission. While no particular format is required and the request may be

¹⁰ This language, substantially redacted, with the addition of the word "education," and restated in non-passive voice is borrowed from the Yale University Report of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming at 22-23 (2016).

¹¹ This language is adapted from Stanford University Principles and Procedures for Renaming Buildings and Other Features at Stanford University.

stated in ordinary language, the requester should (1) identify the subject of the request; and (2) explain the reason for the proposed renaming. Requestors may also wish to discuss how the proposed renaming is supported by the *General Considerations on the Occasion of and Principles for Renaming*.

B. Office for Mission Consideration

The Vice President for Mission shall acknowledge receipt of the request within seven days. The Vice President for Mission shall conduct such preliminary investigation and evaluation as deemed appropriate. The Vice President for Mission shall consult with the Associate Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and with the University Archivist, and may consult with other offices or persons at the University of St. Thomas. The Vice President for Mission shall then refer the renaming request with a recommendation regarding future action to the President. The referral and recommendation of the Vice President for Mission ordinarily should occur within 30 days.

C. Initial Presidential Review

The President shall review the renaming request and the recommendation of the Office for Mission. In the President's discretion, the President may:

- a. Deny the request with such explanation to the requester as the President deems appropriate.
- b. Decide the request needs further evaluation and appoint an ad hoc committee for that purpose, notifying the requester of this decision.

The President's decision ordinarily should occur within 30 days.

D. Ad Hoc Renaming Committee

If the President exercises discretion to appoint an ad hoc committee to investigate and evaluate a renaming request, the committee shall include appropriate representation from the University of St. Thomas faculty, staff, students, alumni, and trustees, with attention to diversity of background and expertise in the committee's membership. Preferably within 90 days after creation of the committee, the committee shall submit a final written report to the President, which shall also be made public to the St. Thomas community. The report shall provide a recommendation and rationale for affirming the name, removing the name, or altering the name, and may include suggest additional action.

In its work, the committee shall be guided by the *General Considerations on the Occasion of and Principles for Renaming*. The committee should also demonstrate the following sensibilities:

- a. Following the St. Thomas mission to be morally responsible and to think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully, the committee shall thoroughly examine the evidence, be contextually sensitive in evaluating the evidence, exhibit intellectual rigor, and demonstrate compassion for those impacted by the decision.
- b. Affirming the St. Thomas mission to advance the common good, the committee shall act on behalf of the entire St. Thomas community and seek out and listen to those reflecting a wide range of views regarding the potential renaming decision.
- c. Upholding the St. Thomas conviction of respecting the dignity of each person and creating a caring

culture, the committee shall keep the St. Thomas community informed about progress in its work.

- d. Carrying out the St. Thomas educational mission, the committee shall conduct itself as a teacher, presenting its report and recommendation in a manner that does not ignore or erase the past.

E. Presidential Review of Ad Hoc Committee Report

After the ad hoc committee has delivered its report and recommendation, the President may accept, deny, or modify the committee's recommendation before bringing the matter to the Board of Trustees for final action.

F. Final Action by the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees maintains the ultimate authority to rename an asset. The Board of Trustees may accept, deny, or modify any recommendation made by the President. The Board of Trustees will act on the matter according to its regular governance policies and procedures.