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To:

Mr. William P. Donnelly, Chair of the Board of Directors
Dr. Michael D. Johnson, President
Dr. Steven T. Herbert, Provost
John Carroll University
1 John Carroll Boulevard
University Heights, Ohio 44118

April 3, 2021

Gentlemen,

I've been following the decision by the JCU Board of Directors to revise the JCU Faculty Handbook. As you know, I spent 27 of my 34 years in higher education as a faculty member and academic administrator at JCU. I have worked both sides of the fence and understand the challenges facing JCU through my service at JCU and my recent experience working for an association in the higher education sector.

This letter was not easy for me to write. To be blunt, I am saddened to see that the actions taken by the Board, aimed at addressing budgetary hardship while protecting tenure, in effect diminish tenure protections and academic freedom, while also eroding the trust needed for collaborative governance at JCU. I worked under the provisions of the handbook and I was part of several successful efforts to revise it. I am well aware of the strengths and at times challenges posed by the document. Oftentimes these challenges led to tension between the faculty, administration, and the JCU Board of Directors. No matter the challenge, the faculty and administration could rely on using the provisions outlined in the handbook to collaboratively revise the document. Was this process easy? Not always. Was the process occasionally fraught with procedural barriers that would lengthen the task of amending the handbook? Yes, it was. Through all of this, however, the JCU faculty and administration found ways to work together, preserve the integrity of the document, and act in the best interest of the institution. In the end, it was the commitment to collaborative governance that defined the way ahead. At no time was there ever consideration of revising the handbook without collaboration between the faculty, the administration, and the Board. Furthermore, there was never discussion of diminishing or eliminating tenure as a consequence of handbook revisions.

Since my retirement from John Carroll University, I have been working for the Society for College and University Planning as their Senior Director for Learning Strategy. In this role, I have

the opportunity to speak with dozens of higher education leaders concerning how the sector has been damaged by the confluence of powerful environmental forces including the pandemic, social and racial inequities, and the fragile business model of higher education. I have spent my time leading workshops, giving conference presentations, writing about these volatile times, and providing coaching for higher education leaders focused on leveraging integrated planning as the solution to the wicked problems they face as they guide their institutions to a sustainable future. One of the most important lessons I've learned is those institutions that have created pathways to a sustainable future did so through a commitment to mission, equitable practices, and collaborative governance. The faculty, staff, and administrative leadership at these institutions worked together to achieve difficult ends, including the elimination of programs, reductions in force, and salary give-backs, all in the name of ensuring the institution would first survive, then thrive post-pandemic. Those institutions that made the process more difficult typically did so without consideration of the importance of collaborative governance and imposed decisions arrived at without substantial, meaningful consultation and a commitment to the democratic process of collaborative governance guided by the mission of the institution.

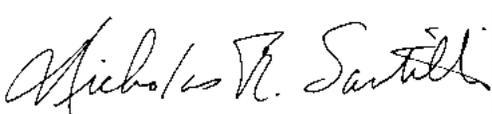
Others have commented on the consequences of these changes to the handbook to tenure and academic freedom, and I agree with those assessments. It is a radical path, diminishing tenure and academic freedom to recover from financial hardship. Yes, JCU's reputation will suffer and will struggle keeping talented faculty and recruiting new faculty for the programs imagined in the new strategic plan. In addition, the work of the institution, such as program development and advising, fueled by a robust faculty and staff will suffer. My thoughts, instead, turn to how JCU will live up to the mission of Jesuit higher education articulated by people like Fr. Kolvenbach and Fr. Locatelli. Fr. Kolvenbach's speech in 2000 at Santa Clara University is often pointed to as the seminal work outlining the work of Jesuit Colleges and Universities in the 21st century. Here, he outlined the goals of Jesuit higher education, the education of tomorrow's whole person. Specifically, Kolvenbach asserted that *"Tomorrow's 'whole person' cannot be whole without an educated awareness of society and culture with which to contribute socially, generously, in the real world. Tomorrow's whole person must have, in brief, a well-educated solidarity."* Kolvenbach went on to articulate the purpose of a modern Jesuit higher education. An education that exposes students to the *"gritty reality"* of the poor and marginalized in the real world. An education that asks faculty to adopt, *"The point of view of those who suffer injustice, seek the truth and share their search and its results with our students. A legitimate question, even if it does not sound academic, is for each professor to ask, "When researching and teaching, where and with whom is my heart?"* An education that, in paraphrasing the words of Ignacio Ellacuria, Kolvenbach asserts, *"It is the nature of every University to be a social force, and it is the calling of a Jesuit university to take conscious responsibility for being such a force for faith and justice. Every Jesuit academy of higher learning is called to live in a social reality and to live for that social reality, to shed university intelligence upon it and to use university influence to transform it."* In 2005, Rev. Paul Locatelli, speaking at John Carroll, doubled down on what it means to be Jesuit Educated, *"The Ignatian aim for Jesuit education remains the same: to form well-educated, morally-responsible and reflective humanists who will leaven their communities with knowledge, wisdom, and virtue. The formation of contemplatives*

in action is the ideal. Love is the end of contemplation, and love is seen more in actions than words."

This is a liminal moment for John Carroll University, one that will define the institution for the next decade or more. The institution intends to implement a new strategic plan with some ambitious goals. This plan has high expectations for the work of the faculty and staff. In my opinion, reaching the ambitious goals of this plan has been made more difficult as a consequence of the handbook revision. Moreover, for this plan to be realized within the boundaries of what is a truly distinctive Jesuit education, it will require faculty to take the intellectual risks needed to provide students with opportunities to experience the "gritty reality" necessary to be formed with "a well-educated solidarity." The protection of tenure and academic freedom affords faculty the assurance that they may engage in the work of transforming their students and John Carroll without fear. I know the Board has assured the faculty that this will not happen. But if faced with a choice between exploring areas of study on the edge, such as human sexual development, the institutional church's role in perpetuating systemic racism, or the health and wellness of members of the LGBTQ+ community, faculty are faced with a critical choice, namely, do I move forward because it is the right thing to do for my students and my discipline, or will I choose the safe route, avoid controversial areas of study, and not jeopardize my position at JCU? Should JCU's faculty be put in the position to make this choice? I would hope not.

I strongly urge the JCU Board of Directors, senior administrators, and the faculty work toward a resolution that does not include the financial hardship provision in the Faculty Handbook. I firmly believe that there is a resolution that will keep tenure whole and provide the relief necessary to lead John Carroll through these difficult financial times. These are the moments when inspired leadership is needed to create a more sustainable future for JCU. A future centered on student success and institutional thriving worthy of a Jesuit institution.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicholas R. Santilli". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned to the left of a vertical line.

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