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SLU names first lay president

by Brian Roewe

NCR Today

St. Louis University announced Friday it has named Fred Pestello the university's 33rd president. He is the first permanent lay president in the Jesuit school's 196-year history.

"I am humbled and honored to follow in the footsteps of the Jesuit presidents who have come before me, and I am deeply committed to carrying on the mission they have fostered so well," Pestello said in a press release.

Pestello, 61, comes to SLU from Le Moyne College, a fellow Jesuit college located in Syracuse, N.Y., where he served as its first lay president since 2008. Before that, he spent nearly 25 years as a sociology professor and also held several administrative roles at the University of Dayton, in Ohio. He has spent his entire career in Catholic higher education.

A Cleveland native, Catholic, and father of two adult children, Pestello will officially become the school's president July 1. William Kauffman will continue to serve as interim president until then.

"I am looking forward to working with everyone in the Saint Louis University community to ensure that SLU will continue to offer students a rigorous, transformative education based on the Jesuit tradition of forming students to be men and women for and with others," Pestello said.

Pestello will replace Jesuit Fr. Lawrence Biondi, who retired in September after 25 years at SLU amid a period a turmoil on the midtown St. Louis campus.

In August 2012, faculty objected to a proposed revising of the university's tenure system that would review tenured faculty every six years. The discord led to a vote of no confidence in the provost who proposed the restructuring, which was ultimately abandoned, and three votes of no confidence in Biondi --

one from the College of Arts and Sciences, one from the Faculty Senate and one from the student government.

The St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* has a full timeline of the campus dispute.

?I have decided it is time for a transition in leadership for Saint Louis University -- time for me to move on to the next phase of my life,? said Biondi, 75, at a May gala celebrating his 25th anniversary at the university where he also announced his retirement.

Biondi's tenure at SLU coincided with a period of tremendous growth for the university that saw its size more than double -- including the construction of a state-of-the-art research center and an on-campus sports and entertainment arena -- and its enrollment increase nearly 30 percent to about 14,000 students.

[Brian Roewe is an *NCR* staff writer and an alumnus of St. Louis University. Follow him on Twitter: @**BrianRoewe**.]

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