

## Agreement establishes close ties between St. Thomas and new archbishop

During my past 17 years as president of the University of St. Thomas, I had the good fortune of working closely with Archbishops John Roach and Harry Flynn. Both understood and appreciated the complex and delicate role of a Catholic university. They believed in our mission, shared many good ideas on how we might more effectively carry it out, were always available to discuss difficult issues and time and time again provided wise counsel.

As I begin my 18th year in this job, I very much look forward to working with Archbishop John Nienstedt, who succeeded Archbishop Flynn as ordinary of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis on May 2. I have found Archbishop Nienstedt to be an exceptionally good listener as well as a wise and thoughtful leader imbued with the same characteristics as his predecessors when it comes to St. Thomas. He deeply appreciates our work and wants to work closely with us to help us maintain our vital Catholic mission.

St. Thomas has much of which to be proud. As I described in my "[Up Front](#)" column in the spring issue of St. Thomas magazine, "we have made remarkable progress in establishing a more vibrant Catholic community through a number of rich academic, co-curricular and community initiatives." This evolution has occurred because faculty, staff, students, parents, trustees, alumni, benefactors and Catholics from throughout the region see great value in our mission, and they support efforts large and small to make it more relevant.

Archbishop Nienstedt led one such initiative during his year as coadjutor archbishop. Beginning last September, he convened in our university chapel a series of monthly prayer sessions for college-age men and women called "Lectio Divina" (the literal Latin for which is "divine reading"). It is a prayer form based on "spiritual reading." The sessions attracted hundreds of participants who mixed the reading of the scriptures with prayer to gain deeper insight into, and appreciation of, the presence of God in one's life. I am deeply grateful to Archbishop Nienstedt for leading this monthly campus prayer, and I look forward to his participation again this year.

He also has worked with the university on issues related to the St. Paul Seminary and St. John Vianney Seminary, and is present on a monthly basis for Mass and prayer services at the two seminaries. Enrollment at St. John Vianney has doubled in the last five years, and there has not been room in the seminary building to house all of the students. Archbishop Nienstedt asked us to examine alternative arrangements so the seminarians could live on campus instead of in neighborhood houses or parish rectories. We were able to free up and renovate the apartment building at 2085 Grand, and it will now be known as "SJV Grand."

On several occasions this past spring and this summer, Archbishop Nienstedt and I discussed how he might become more involved in the

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**Father Dennis Dease**  
President

life of the university and the work of our Board of Trustees. I am pleased to report that the board and Archbishop Nienstedt, who graciously hosted a reception at his residence in June for our trustees, have reached an understanding on how they will collaborate in the years ahead. (You can read his comments about this in today's [Catholic Spirit](#).)

The board, as you may recall, voted last October to change its bylaws to elect its chair and vice-chair, and subsequently elected Archbishop Flynn to a five-year term as chair. He had served *ex-officio* as chair since 1995. The board's intent was to involve him more in the life and leadership of the university after his retirement in May, especially in light of his commitment to serve as honorary co-chair of our Opening Doors campaign and his interest in having a more pastoral presence among students, faculty and staff.

At Archbishop Nienstedt's request, our board this summer elected as a member his newly appointed vicar general and moderator of the curia, Father Lee Piché. He is a 1980 alumnus of St. Thomas, a 1984 alumnus of the St. Paul Seminary and taught philosophy at St. Thomas in 1987-88 and again from 1994 to 1997. He knows the university well and has a clear understanding of our mission. He will undoubtedly carry Archbishop Nienstedt's voice and vote to every matter discussed by the board.

In addition, members of the St. Thomas board will meet annually with Archbishop Nienstedt to discuss issues of common interest, especially those involving our Catholic mission and nature. He also will meet at least twice a year with the chair of our board's executive committee (U.S. 8th Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Diana Murphy), key trustees and senior administrators. The board will consult with Archbishop Nienstedt before taking any action regarding Catholic identity issues at the university.

I am hopeful this mutual agreement will address concerns about the relationship between St. Thomas and the office of the archbishop. It is unfortunate that some people have used this issue as an excuse to question the university's commitment to its Catholic mission and to challenge the integrity of a number of its trustees. Those efforts, based on a mixture of some falsehoods and distortions, only clouded the real issues that we were trying to address, including how all of those with responsibility for, and interest in, St. Thomas could continue to work in the best interests of what all of us believe is one of the most Roman Catholic of this country's colleges and universities.

Our trustees' commitment to maintain a strong presence of Catholic clergy and religious leaders on the board is stronger than ever. The newest members are Cardinal Pio Laghi, prefect emeritus of the Congregation for Catholic Education at the Vatican and founding chairman of our School of Law Board of Governors, and Father John Malone, vice president for mission at St. Thomas, a long-time business law professor here and former pastor of Assumption Catholic Church.

Other religious leaders serving on the board are Father Kevin McDonough, until recently the vicar general of the archdiocese; Sister Carol Keehan, president of the National Catholic Health Association; Father Edward Malloy, president emeritus of the University of Notre Dame; Sister Maureen Fay, president emerita of the University of Detroit Mercy; and myself. In addition, the Catholic lay men and women who serve on our board are among the most informed and committed Catholic leaders one could find who also provide inspiring leadership within the archdiocese.

I invite everyone in the St. Thomas community to join me in warmly welcoming Archbishop Nienstedt, who as the seated archbishop of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis will undoubtedly influence our work in many positive ways in the years ahead.

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