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I am the proud father of two sons who both attended St. Norbert College. Is it really true, as I have heard, that at one time 11 brothers from the same family studied at the college?

Kevin DeCleene '12

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May 2020

Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings:

“I am the proud father of two sons who both attended St. Norbert College. Is it really true, as I have heard, that at one time 11 brothers from the same family studied at the college?”

Kevin DeCleene M.T.S. '12 (College Parish)

Answer:

My dearest Kevin,

It is always a delight to hear from you and most particularly to be reminded of your dear boys. Ah yes! Adam and Arik, the twins – fine students both and members of our Class of 2011, if my memory serves me correctly. I do hope you and all in your family are flourishing, and send my best wishes to you, your dear wife and the boys.

Bless my soul, yes, the Schmitt boys! Another fine family, to be sure. There were 11 brothers and six sisters all told and, yes, indeed, all 11 of the boys passed through the college in their day, one following hard upon the heels of the other. Those were the days of larger families, indeed, but all the same I cannot believe that there are many colleges who can boast of a similarly unbroken run of fraternal enrollment! I believe I can call the boys each to mind, one by one, even to this day: Bernard, Sylvester, Raymond, Francis, Joseph, Paul, James, Aloysius, Henry, Leo and John. Well now!

Henry, Leo and John would in their turn enter the priesthood, I remember, along with a cousin and, in the next generation, one



Ask the Abbot

As the founder of St. Norbert College, and having a prime seat in the center of campus throughout the years, I, Abbot Bernard Pennings, hold the answers to many of your burning questions about the college.

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of the nephews.

The boys' sainted mother, Mrs. Henry Schmitt, also is dear to my memory. (Of course in those days we addressed one another more formally. Her given name was Anna, as I recall.) Mrs. Schmitt has her own particularly special place in our history: in 1957, she was, in fact, the very first to be honored with our esteemed Alma Mater Award. She was known as a fine Christian mother, a fact to which our own college's second president, Father Dennis Burke, alluded when he preached at her funeral in 1963. In fact, I believe I have here in my desk ... yes, here it is: a news clipping, somewhat yellowed with age by now I'm afraid ... which mentions that, in all, some 85 clergymen attended the funeral Mass, including the dear bishop and our own Abbot Killeen. The Schmitt Brothers Quartet – Francis, Joseph, Paul and James, I do believe – sang the Mass and Henry celebrated. It was really a most affecting tribute from a very well-regarded family.

Dear me, dear Kevin, how the memories do come flooding back!

Responses to "Ask the Abbot" questions are penned by St. Norbert College staff in the name of Abbot Bernard Pennings, who founded St. Norbert College in 1898.

St. Norbert College

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