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How long has the college presented its annual Festival of Christmas?

Mackenzie Ciske '17

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December 2021

Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings,

How long has the college presented its annual Festival of Christmas?

Mackenzie Ciske '17 (College Advancement)

Answer:

My dearest Mackenzie,

I always look forward to this favorite holiday tradition on campus! The Festival of Christmas showcases the talents of hundreds of St. Norbert music students performing Christmas compositions both old and new, followed by a reception featuring warm holiday drinks, delicious gourmet desserts and music from smaller ensembles. The evening also includes the presentation of the Christmas Angel Award, which honors friends who have made special contributions to our music programs and to the cultural life of our community.

This year's Festival of Christmas was the 28th since its inception in 1994, according to our own Michael Rosewall, professor of music, who was instrumental – if you'll pardon my pun – in creating the event as a holiday gift from the music department to the entire community. Over the years, the Festival evolved from a pair of matched concerts with themes such as “Traditional Music of the Season,” “Blessing the Animals” and “A Norbertine Christmas,” to the current trio of offerings: the traditional Festival concert in the Hall of Fine Arts; the Brass & Organ Christmas Spectacular, held in the church at St. Norbert Abbey; and Christmas With the Knights,



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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which features the Knights on Broadway performing popular seasonal favorites, usually in Dudley Birder Hall. I highly recommend all three!

In 2018, the music department partnered with our hard-working offices of admission and student affairs to take the festival on the road for the first time, delivering a sold-out performance in the Chicago area for an audience of roughly 700 people. President Bruess himself opened the concert with a Christmas welcome. The show combined music with reflective holiday readings and Bible verses with a showstopping finale from Handel’s “Messiah” (a personal favorite!) that included all 150-plus performers from four instrumental ensembles and three choirs.

Last year, not even a pandemic could stop the Festival, which was held virtually to bring much-needed Christmas cheer amid challenging circumstances. Blessedly, 2021 brought a return to the in-person performance that so many of us have come to love – especially as we near this particular Christmas Day, which will mark 900 years since the Norbertine order was founded in Prémontré, France. Much to celebrate, indeed!

Mackenzie, I wish you and all my readers a spiritually rejuvenating holiday season with an abundance of warmth, gratitude, generosity and good company of family and friends.

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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