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Has the college held fundraising campaigns like [the Support What Matters campaign] from the beginning?

Gracey Bediako

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June 2022

Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings,

I enjoyed the May kick-off event for the Support What Matters campaign. Has the college held fundraising campaigns like these from the beginning?

Gracey Bediako '24

Answer:

My dearest Gracey,

Thank you for providing me an occasion to reminisce about the generations of philanthropy that enabled St. Norbert College to transform from its humble beginnings into the institution we know today. Your query is especially timely, as next year, 2023, will mark three milestones on campus: the 125th birthday of St. Norbert College, the scheduled completion of the Support What Matters campaign to raise \$125 million, and the 50th anniversary of the launch of the



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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college's first comprehensive fundraising effort, the Priorities Campaign.

For its first 75 years, St. Norbert College raised funds for specific projects or buildings individually as needs or opportunities arose. Some of these efforts appealed broadly to the surrounding community for support, while others succeeded on account of naming gifts from individual philanthropists and their families – several of whose names still grace our buildings. No doubt our alumni can recall a few!

In 1973, President Webb launched the Priorities Campaign and announced a goal of \$9.4 million, modest by today's standards but substantial for its time. That goal was surpassed at \$9.9 million within five years, with nearly a third directed to endowment for student aid, and substantial portions funding construction of the Todd Wehr Library and the Schuldes Sports Center. Both of those facilities replaced spaces that had become too small to meet the needs of an increasing student population – a recurring theme as the college has continued to grow!

The success of the Priorities Campaign provided a blueprint for fundraising across multiple areas at once – endowment, financial aid, academic programs, buildings and grounds, student life, and others. Under President Manion, the Campaign for St. Norbert College unfolded in four distinct phases, culminating in the final phase, Fulfillment of the Vision, which raised \$40 million to top the \$100 million mark in conjunction with the college's centennial. During his tenure from 1983-2000, President Manion oversaw the construction or renovation of 29 buildings, a truly remarkable feat. I can recall the days when "campus" was simply Old St. Joseph Church and its rectory!

President Hynes ushered in the 21st century at St. Norbert by launching the Strategic Funding Initiative: The Next Ascent. Active through 2008, this campaign raised nearly \$81 million toward endowment, academic and student support programs, and facilities and grounds. Its crowning achievement was securing the funds to build the Miriam B. & James J. Mulva Library, which opened its doors in 2009.

My longtime readers may recall the many achievements of Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead under President Kunkel. Full Ahead shattered its original goal of \$90 million, raising \$105.5 million from 2009 to 2015. Its legacy is still quite fresh on campus in the form of the Gehl-Mulva Science Center, Schneider Stadium, Michels Commons, the Ariens Family Welcome Center, Birder Hall, the Cassandra Voss Center, and the Mel Nicks Sports Complex. This campaign also established the Donald J. Schneider School of Business & Economics, the Sturzl Center for Community Service & Learning, and the Norman Miller Center for Peace, Justice & Public Understanding. These years were truly a time of transformative growth!

The college's fifth and current comprehensive campaign, Support What Matters, began in 2016 under President Bruess and launched publicly in May 2022. This campaign focuses on endowment in the form of scholarships and financial aid, strategic innovation, mission, and contemporary student experiences. Support What Matters has raised \$84.1 million as of mid-June toward a goal of \$125 million, and has maintained forward momentum in the face of adverse global circumstances – much like our college throughout its history.

Finally, I would be remiss if I failed to mention the tireless fundraising efforts of my dear confrère, Father Dennis Burke, from the 1930s through the college's centennial anniversary in 1998, the same year that he passed. Father Burke combined a natural affinity for fundraising with a perceptive vision of how St. Norbert College would adapt to growth and change. Like the trees that Father Anselm Keefe once planted, the ambitious work of Father Burke continues to bear fruit for future generations, owing to the generosity of our donors who, indeed, support what matters.

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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