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How many U.S. presidents have visited the St. Norbert campus?

Devin Atteln

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September 2022

Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings,

How many U.S. presidents have visited the St. Norbert campus?

Devin Atteln '14

Answer:

My dear Devin,

Throughout its history, our college has hosted several candidates for America's highest office, two of whom went on to reside in the White House. On February 18, 1960, then-Senator John F. Kennedy visited campus to have lunch with campus leaders, address the college community and spend an hour in informal conversation with St. Norbert students. Many of my readers will recall the iconic photograph of the future president walking outside the venerable Francis H. Boyle Hall alongside my dear confrère Father Dennis Burke. This memorable occasion was also commemorated for the college's centennial in a striking watercolor painted by local artist Carolyn Barnard.



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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Fifty-six years later, on March 30, 2016, candidate Donald J. Trump arrived on campus for a town-hall meeting in the Walter Theatre. My fellow Norbertine, Father Jack MacCarthy, opened the event with a welcome and prayer that referenced the college's tradition of radical hospitality and respectful discourse. Indeed, these values were truly reflected that day, both by the future president's supporters and by those who demonstrated peacefully in opposition. In an event that received national media attention, I am proud that St. Norbert College represented itself in such exemplary fashion.

In addition to our college hosting two future presidents, I would be remiss if I failed to point out that our current president, Joseph R. Biden Jr., is the product of a Norbertine education. He graduated from Archmere Academy, the Norbertine preparatory high school in Claymont, Delaware, in 1961, and three of his children are also alumni. Archmere remains close to my heart, as I directed its founding in 1932 along with my Norbertine confrères.

I must admit a particular pride in the fact that both Catholic presidents thus far in American history have had a special connection to Norbertine institutions. I could scarcely have imagined such a possibility in the midst of such humble beginnings so many years ago. Dare I wonder if a graduate of St. Norbert College will someday walk the most hallowed halls of our nation's capital? Only time will tell!

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.

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