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Saint Mary's College hires new president after a nationwide search

By Vera Kochan



Photo courtesy Saint Mary's College

After spending nearly a year conducting an extensive search to find a new president, Saint Mary's College announced last month that Roger J. Thompson, EdD is the school's new choice to take the helm.

In June 2023, SMC parted ways with its president of two years, Dr. Richard Plumb. While the college searched for his replacement, the school's board of trustees appointed Brother Thomas Jones, FSC, as the interim president.

Thompson officially becomes SMC's 31st president on July 22, bringing with him nearly 40 years of experience as a higher education executive with experience in enrollment management.

In an announcement from Eric Flowers EMBA, Chairman of the SMC Board of Trustees, and Brother Nick Gonzalez, FSC, Brother Visitor and Provincial Superior for the District of San Francisco New Orleans of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the SMC community was informed of the selection via email. "The Board of Trustees' approval of Dr. Thompson to serve as Saint Mary's next President signals a turning point for the College and a time for renewal, enthusiasm, and optimism," stated Flowers.

"Dr. Thompson is an inspiring, engaging leader with the vision and the breadth of experience to elevate Saint Mary's College and position the College as the leading Lasallian Catholic institution of higher education in the country," added Gonzalez.

Thompson's most recent experience comes from almost 14 years with the University of Oregon. His last duty

there, before coming to SMC, was as Vice President for Student Services and Enrollment Management, where he led nearly 2,000 team members while overseeing an operating and scholarship budget of more than \$250 million. He also worked to expand enrollment to record levels, in addition to improving student housing, dining, university health services, student financial wellness, and creating a student welcome center. His skills as a fundraiser surpassed a campaign goal of \$70 million by nearly \$50 million, years ahead of schedule, and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

According to SMC's press release, prior to arriving at the University of Oregon, Thompson was "vice provost for enrollment management and special advisor to the president at Indiana University in Bloomington. Under his four-year watch, the university's enrollment grew from 38,000 students to more than 42,000."

Before coming to Indiana, Thompson oversaw the enrollment responsibilities at the University of Alabama where the college set records for total enrollment, entering freshman class size, academic quality, and diversity, including a spike in African American student enrollment of nearly 50%. He was responsible for developing financial aid programs to help low- and middle-income families with college costs.

Thompson has earned a variety of awards both for himself and the colleges that he has served. SMC stated, "A nationally-recognized expert in strategic enrollment management and student services, Dr. Thompson's work has appeared in news outlets and recognized by PBS News Hour, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, The Atlantic, the College Board, ACT, and the American Marketing Association, among others."

A native of Oregon, Thompson earned a Bachelor of Arts in broadcasting from California State University, Long Beach, a Master of Science from the University of Central Missouri, and a doctorate from the University of Southern California in higher education policy and administration.

"I am profoundly honored for the opportunity to serve as Saint Mary's next president," said Thompson. "Saint Mary's won my heart as a truly student-centered learning community grounded in Lasallian heritage and guided by Christian Brothers, faculty, and staff who have a passion for transformative education, service, and commitment to student success. I look forward to getting to know the Gael community, alumni, and supporters alike. Together, we will embrace the work ahead to thrive and grow as an inclusive, diverse, and vibrant community."

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