

1993

And There Were Five

Donald L. Pieters
St. Norbert College

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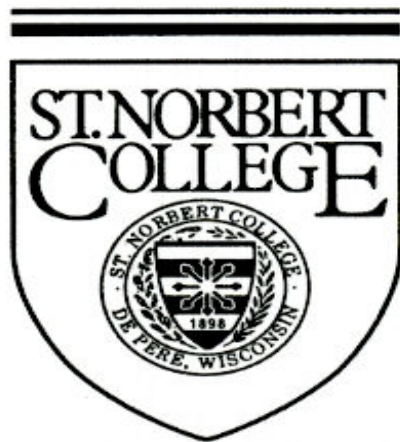
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AND THERE WERE FIVE



THE PRESIDENTS OF ST. NORBERT COLLEGE



By Donald L. Pieters ● College Archives ● St. Norbert College

INTRODUCTION AND DEDICATION

Biographical materials about the five presidents who have served in the administration of St. Norbert College appear to abound in number. Many of these, however, are scattered in various locations—some in local and Green Bay newspaper files, some in De Pere and Green Bay historical society archives, some in the St. Norbert Abbey Archives, and a goodly share in the St. Norbert College archival area.

This booklet, then, is an attempt to bring some of this material about the presidents into a composite of the 'first five'. It is also an anticipation of the centennial year of 1998 when St. Norbert College will celebrate its 100th year as a private liberal arts college. During that time I'm sure we'll be looking at the men who cared for the development of the college in their roles as president.

Founder Abbot Bernard H. Pennings, O. Praem., served as president from 1898 to 1955. His successor, Father Dennis M. Burke, O. Praem., was president during a time of tremendous building and enrollment growth. Dr. Robert E. Christin, first lay president, served a short term from 1969 to 1973. The college had financial problems at this time.

Dr. Neil J. Webb, 1973 to 1983, led the college out of its 1970s financial problems and continued a building program. The current president, Dr. Thomas A. Manion, is now leading the college into its centennial year with an emphasis on education with an international focus.

It was a pleasure for me to assemble the materials and put them into readable form for this booklet. But its final form is due in very large measure to the help and criticism of Betsy Foley, director of communications and public relations at the College, and to the Very Rev. Dennis M. Burke, O. Praem., second president and chancellor emeritus of St. Norbert.

Both of these people have been generous with their time in reading the original draft and making suggestions for its improvement. Father Burke, in particular, took great pains and time to rework the original draft so as to give nearly equal space to each president.

It is my joy to dedicate this small effort to both of these people in the hope that they enjoy the finished product.

Donald L. Pieters
Charge of Archives



DR. THOMAS A. MANION 1983 - PRESENT

Dr. Thomas A. Manion, president of St. Norbert College, took office as St. Norbert's fifth president on September 1, 1983. He succeeded Dr. Neil J. Webb, president of the College for the prior ten years.

Dr. Manion has an extensive background in higher education and community work. He comes to St. Norbert from Albany, New York, where he served as president of the College of St. Rose for ten years.

He served successively as chairman of the economics department, dean of the graduate school, academic vice president, and provost of Bryant College, Smithfield, Rhode Island, from 1960 to 1973.

Dr. Manion has a Ph.D. in economics from Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, and a business administration master's degree in management and finance from Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His undergraduate work was at St. Bonaventure University at Olean, New York.

Dr. Manion's experience in the educational field includes his chairmanship of the Empire State Foundation of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges and his trustee membership of the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities.

In January of 1991, Dr. Manion was reelected to a full two-year term on the board of directors of the National Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), an association of 300 private colleges and universities. In February 1991, he was elected to a three-year board position on the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU)—the ACCU has a current membership of 206 institutions. He was also chairman of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU) for one or two terms.

Dr. Manion is currently the representative of Region V on the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, which represents all private

higher educational institutions in the country. He serves on the International Commission of the American Council of Education.

The continued development of St. Norbert College since his presidency include the construction of the Townhouse Village Residence Hall complex built in 1988. These fourteen townhouses and adjacent carriage house are designed to house about 100 upper-class students. In 1990, the Austin E. Cofrin Hall, a new classroom building, was constructed to contain ten classrooms and some thirty faculty offices in its three levels.

A rededication of Main Hall in September of 1990 improved the campus by an extensive interior and exterior renovation of this 1902 building. It restored Main Hall's Victorian romanesque style and kept "Old Main" as the chief administrative building on the college campus.

The Shrine of Mary, blessed and dedicated on May 23, 1993, became a grotto and arbor containing a six-foot bronze statue of the Virgin Mary. Located on .9 acres at the end of Reid Street, it is a quiet place for reflection for the College community.

On May 17, 1993, groundbreaking for the Frederick and Patricia Baer Mall took place. Five months later, the dedication on September 15, 1993, witnessed a beautiful landscaped main entrance to the College from Third Street and College Avenue. The mall leads by a pedestrian walk to the north-south Roemer Mall and Main Hall in the center of the campus.

October 1993 witnessed the groundbreaking for the proposed International Center. This will be an educational resource supporting the St. Norbert undergraduate curriculum, and a momentous step forward toward the internationalizing of the college's curriculum. The study of international issues will be available to all students through this educational resource. This center, along with the newly constructed Cofrin Hall, the John R. Minahan Science Hall, and the Todd Wehr Library, will form an exciting quadrangle of educational buildings on the southwest corner of the campus. As Dr. Manion said, "We think this will support our endeavors to be one of the finest Catholic colleges in arts and sciences in the country."

Dr. Manion and his wife, Dr. Maureen O'Meara Manion, a member of the SNC political science faculty, live at the Official Presidential Residence at 935 North Broadway in East De Pere. This three-story home overlooks the Fox River and contains about 6,500 square feet of living area. Each Christmas, the Manion's open house for the College community displays the interior beauty of this home, purchased by the College in 1983.

Dr. Manion and his wife have three sons: Gregory, Andrew, and Thomas III; and four daughters: Marcella, Margaret, Christine, and Victoria.





DR. NEIL J. WEBB 1973 - 1983

Dr. Neil J. Webb, fourth president of St. Norbert College, was born in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, June 21, 1929. He graduated from Waupaca High School and then enrolled at Marquette University where he received his B.A. degree. His graduate work, leading to an M.A. and a Ph.D. degree in psychology, was completed at Loyola University, Chicago, the summer of 1959. In September of the same year he accepted a teaching assignment at St. Norbert College in the Psychology Department.

Interestingly, Dr. Webb, along with Dr. Joseph Lee and Dr. Thomas C. Kishler, was one of the first three St. Norbert College lay faculty members with doctoral degrees to have joined the St. Norbert teaching staff. All came in 1959. Many others followed in the ensuing years. Prior to that all doctoral faculty members, from 1914 to 1958, were members of the Norbertine Order.

During his 24 years at St. Norbert Dr. Webb worked as a teacher, a researcher, a practitioner of psychology and an administrator. For six years he chaired the psychology department. In 1967 Father Burke, the SNC president, appointed him to the position of administrative vice president, a post he held until 1973, the year he was chosen as president of the College.

Over the years Dr. Webb served in several off campus capacities. During the summer of 1960 he was a visiting lecturer at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. The summer of 1963 he filled the same role at the graduate school of Loyola University, Chicago. From 1960 to 1965 he was a consultant to the Brown County court system and the Brown County Hospital. In 1970 he attended the first institute for educational management at the Harvard University Business School. For a period of time also he was a member of the St. Vincent Hospital Advisory Board in Green Bay.

At St. Norbert Dr. Webb directed three major research projects in the field of psychology. He published fourteen articles and papers in scholarly journals on experimental programs in higher education. He held memberships in many professional and honorary organizations and was listed in American Men of Science.

During his tenure as president Dr. Webb faced the challenges of leadership with equanimity and confidence. With the assistance of the finance committee of the Board of Trustees and the initial transfer of funds from the St. Norbert College Foundation, Inc., he returned the College to a policy of balanced budgets. Typical of the presidencies of Abbot Pennings and Father Burke, enrollments, which had dropped from 1,714 to 1,346 in 1974, were studied and restored. Dr. Webb's revision of the aims and objectives of St. Norbert College statement was approved by the Board of Trustees. A sense of confidence was restored.

Expansion of physical facilities and the construction of major buildings on campus, which had ebbed after 1968, returned. In 1974 the Lee J. Roemer Mall was developed. The Todd Wehr Library was designed around the Grant Street Dormitory IV and completed in June of 1978. In 1979 the Riverside South Apartment complex was opened. Also the winter of 1979-1980 saw the Malcolm Schuldes Sports Center dedicated. In 1981 the VanderZanden Residence Facility was opened. The endowment fund which consisted of "contributed services" of Norbertines, and a fund of \$1,700,000, up to 1968 grew to \$10,600,000 by 1983.

He was instrumental in effecting the admission of St. Norbert College to the Midwest Athletic Conference, which includes such Wisconsin colleges as Ripon, Lawrence, Beloit and Carroll, plus other private colleges from Illinois and Iowa. President Webb also served terms as president of the Wisconsin Foundation of Independent Colleges, vice president of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges, and director of the boards of the Wisconsin Public Service Corporation and Peoples Marine Bank in Green Bay.

After announcing his plan for retirement as president of the College at the end of ten years, Dr. Webb wrote in "Reflections on a Decade of Progress," his president's report, "The dreams and aspirations of a young Dutch Norbertine, who, 85 years ago, called the kitchen of the Priory building a college, are being fulfilled in 1983 in the highly respected institution we call St. Norbert College."

In his original plan for retirement as president, Dr. Webb intended to return to the classroom. During a sabbatical year that followed, however, he attended the advanced management program at Harvard University and worked with the higher education research institute of the University of California at Los Angeles. He then went into business with Imperial, Inc., in Green Bay for a brief period of time. The call back to the academic world resurfaced. He accepted an invitation July 1, 1987, to become President of Dominican College in San Rafael, California.

But tragedy followed soon after. On December 7, 1987, Dr. Webb and his beloved wife Mary were killed in a fiery airline crash as they were returning from Los Angeles to San Francisco. A disgruntled former employee of the commuter line had created the episode. All 43 persons aboard the plane were killed. Their mangled bodies and the disintegrated plane were strewn on a hill-side in the area of Paso Robles, about 175 miles north of Los Angeles.

A concelebrated memorial Mass was celebrated at St. Norbert Abbey in De Pere, December 12, 1987, in the presence of members of the Webb family and the entire college community. The Webbs are survived by six children. The family has established a memorial fund for St. Norbert College at Peoples Marine Bank in Green Bay, now known as Bank One. St. Norbert College has named its Little Theatre in the Abbot Pennings Hall of Fine Arts in memory of the Webbs, Neil and Mary.



DR. ROBERT E. CHRISTIN 1969 - 1973

Dr. Robert E. Christin, third president of St. Norbert College and its first lay president, was the choice of an 18-member presidential search committee composed of members of the Board Of Trustees, faculty, alumni, and students. A field of 41 candidates, including some Norbertines, was studied. The eight-month search, begun in June 1968, came to a close on February 27, 1969, with a press announcement, a personal presentation of Dr. Christin to the college faculty and students, followed by an Elks Club dinner introduction for the alumni and general public.

His term of office began July 1, 1969. The interim leadership of the College was assigned to Dr. Neil Webb, administrative vice president.

Dr. Christin was born in Detroit, Michigan June 25, 1921. During World War II he served as a naval officer in both the Atlantic and the Pacific operations. He received his B.A. degree from Ohio State University in 1947, his M.A. in 1949, and his Ph.D. in 1958, also from Ohio State. Between 1949 and 1965 he taught as a graduate assistant at Ohio State; from 1949 to 1952 as an instructor at St. Ambrose College; and from 1952 to 1953 as an assistant professor. He was Director of Freshman English at Notre Dame University from 1953 to 1958. He was an associate professor there from 1958 to 1965.

In 1965 Dr. Christin moved to Washington, D.C., to become Director of the Institute for Services to Education under contract with the Office of Economic Opportunity. In 1967 he became president of Educational Associates, Inc., in Washington, while continuing as Director of ISU. One of the major projects of Educational Associates, Inc., was providing assistance to the National Upward Bound Program at nearly 300 colleges and universities, reviewing grant proposals and making recommendations to the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Dr. Christin, a doctoral major in English, was recognized as a leading public speaker, giving lectures and workshops throughout the country. In 1969 he

was a featured speaker at a week-long conference sponsored by the president's committee on higher education held at Tuft's University. In 1967 he was speaker and panelist at the president's institute on teaching the disadvantaged.

Before arriving on the SNC campus in April of 1969, Dr. Christin wrote, "I'm convinced all education is behind where it should be—resistance to change in education is in teachers as a whole—I think all of the private colleges in this country face a pretty risky future—I don't think that any college should ever make the attempt to avoid controversy". Not long after his arrival on campus, on November 13, 1969, the St. Norbert Times newspaper carried a headline '**Christin Blasts Tradition Before Faculty Meeting: Demands Immediate Reform For Next September**'. Among other things, Christin called for the initiation of divisional studies, an end to departmental majors, the start of a voluntary pass-honors system, and the end of failing grades. The college newspaper carried the full text of the address.

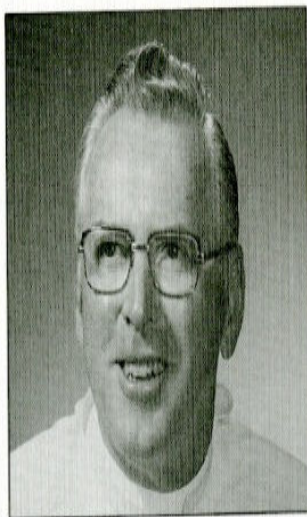
During the inaugural year ceremonies a series of seven essays provided the content of the "The Inaugural Year Papers." They were written by the chairman of the Board of Trustees, college faculty members, and a team of graduating religious studies students.

In September 1971 the St. Norbert Times, under the headline '**Christin Raps Catholic Schools**', quoted the entire text of a Christin article in America magazine of September 18, 1971. The article began with these words, "The news seems to be widespread now that all colleges and universities, private and public, prestigious or little known, are either in deep financial trouble or heading for trouble—the same is true of the current difficulties in Catholic colleges and universities—I am optimistic about the future of colleges committed as institutions to religious values."

Nevertheless, Dr. Christin remained confident about St. Norbert. In an interview with Bob Woessner of the Green Bay Press-Gazette in the January 23, 1972 issue, Christin stated, "People should know that schools are in trouble. But they should also know that St. Norbert College is doing things and will be around for a long time." In the interview Christin admitted that costs are up, enrollment is down. He added that faculty members sort in groups—some are confident—others criticize—many berate the administration for excess spending—others adopt a wait and see attitude. "Running a college has never been easy," he said. He concluded the interview saying, "We have a strong faculty. It is unusual for a place this size to have a faculty as good as this one. They really do care. That's enough to insure the school's survival."

In spite of his apparent confidence and approach to the problems, Dr. Christin offered his resignation the Spring of 1973. The Board of Trustees accepted the decision. No presidential search program was set up. Dr. Neil J. Webb, vice president for administration, was chosen to succeed the College's first lay president.





REV. DENNIS M. BURKE, O.PRAEM. 1955 - 1968

Father Dennis M. Burke, O. Praem., was appointed by Abbot Sylvester M. Killeen as second president of St. Norbert College, effective August 28, 1955. He succeeded the founder and first president, the Rev. Bernard H. Pennings, O.Praem., who had served in that office for 57 years, from October 10, 1898 until his death March 17, 1955.

Father Burke graduated from St. Norbert College with a bachelor of arts degree in 1926. He studied in Europe from 1926 to 1932, where he earned a doctorate in theology from the Gregorian University, Rome, and a doctorate in canon law from the "Angelico" or University of St. Thomas, Rome, also a certificate in archivistics from the Vatican Library. Returning to De Pere in July he joined the College faculty in September of 1932 as a member of the philosophy department and the St. Norbert Abbey seminary department where he taught canon law and moral theology. Later he was appointed chairman of the department, a position he held until 1947.

In July 1934 Abbot Pennings named Father Burke prior of St. Norbert Abbey and vice president of the College, positions held until December 1947 when he was appointed pastor of St. Willebrord Church in Green Bay and president of the Norbertine Fathers Corporation in Green Bay. In 1933 Bishop Paul P. Rhode selected him as a member of the Green Bay Diocesan Tribunal, where he still serves as a prosynodal judge.

Following his resignation as president of the College in June 1968 the Board of Trustees named Father Burke Chancellor of the College. He served in this position for nine years and in 1977 assumed the title of chancellor emeritus. In 1971 Abbot Jerome Tremel proposed him as a Norbertine member of the College's Board of Trustees, where he still serves.

During Father Burke's presidency of St. Norbert College enrollments grew from 714 to more than 1,700 in 1968. With the growth in student numbers the St. Norbert College physical plant expanded accordingly. New major

buildings were dedicated: 1956 the Frank J. Sensenbrenner Residence and Classroom Hall; 1956 the Abbot Pennings Hall of Fine Arts; 1959 the Joseph M. Conway Library; 1961 the Frank J. and Margaret Sensenbrenner Memorial Union; 1963 the Madelaine and Lorraine Residence Halls for women; 1963 the Victor McCormick Residence Hall for men; 1963 the St. Joseph Priory for Norbertine Faculty members; 1964 the Clementine Devroy Infirmary; 1965 the Mary Minahan-McCormick Residence Hall for women; 1967 the Gertrude S. Bergstrom Hall for women; 1967 the Grant Street Dorm IV, later remodeled and enlarged into Todd Wehr Library; 1967 the Dr. John R. Minahan Science Hall.

During these years of rapid expansion Father Burke was active in the North Central Association and NCATE examining teams. He served terms as president of the Wisconsin Association of Presidents and Deans of Institutions of Higher Education, president of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and served terms as a member of the executive committee of the American Association for Higher Education. As Chancellor he also served on the Wisconsin Governor's Commission on Education. St. Norbert College conferred on him an honorary LL.D. in 1968.

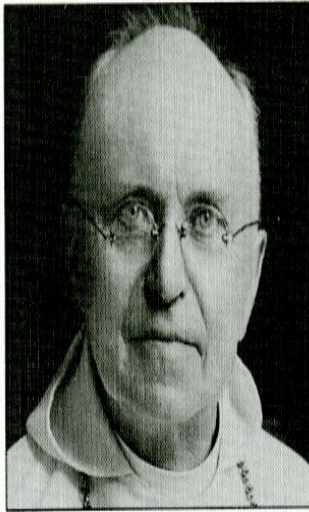
During his years as vice president Father Burke directed appeals to the public for needed funds. His first major undertaking was in 1940 when he headed a fund raising effort that resulted in the erection of the first college residence hall for men. The hall was dedicated October 4, 1942, and was known simply as "Residence Hall" until 1954 when it received the name "Berne Hall". In 1979 the Board of Trustees renamed the building "Dennis M. Burke Hall" on the occasion of Father Burke's 50th anniversary as a priest.

At this time most St. Norbert students were enlisting or being drafted into the service for World War II. The St. Norbert Times in jest dubbed the building "Burke's Folly" in view of the rapidly declining student body numbers. But on the contrary it proved to be "Burke's Foresight", since it provided much needed dormitory space for the ASTP and ASTRP programs which sent U.S. military troops to the College for academic programs. As many as 400 soldiers were assigned to the campus at one time.

Campus area expansion, beginning in the mid-thirties, was largely promoted by Father Burke. Nearly all the homes and adjoining lots between the Fox River and Third Street were acquired and paid for in his time. Included in these acquisitions were St. Joseph School and sister's convent; St. John's Lutheran Church and parsonage; and the Congregational Church and rectory.

The year 1994 witnesses Father Burke's 75 years' association with the St. Norbert campus. He came to St. Norbert as a high school freshman in 1919 when the college was only 21 years old, and registered as a college freshman in 1923. The 75 years of devoted labor passed only too quickly!





REV. BERNARD HENRY PENNINGS, O.PRAEM. 1898 - 1955

Bernard Henry Pennings, founder and first president of St. Norbert College, was born June 9, 1861 in Gemert, North Brabant, Holland. After his graduation from Gemert Latin School, he joined the Norbertine Order at Berne Abbey in Heeswijk in 1879. His philosophical and theological studies were completed at Berne. He was ordained to the priesthood June 19, 1886.

For the ensuing seven years Father Pennings taught in Berne Abbey's "Gymnasium", or university preparatory school, became director of the abbey choir, master of novices, and professor of moral theology. When the call came from Bishop Messmer of the Green Bay Diocese for missionaries to work in his Wisconsin area, Father Pennings, Father Lambert Broens, and Brother Servatius Heesackers volunteered. Father Pennings was designated superior of the small group. They left Holland November 1, 1893, with two major objectives in mind, to work among the Belgian immigrants on the Wisconsin Peninsula, and ultimately to found an institution of higher learning somewhat patterned after Berne Abbey's "St. Norbert Gymnasium."

The fulfillment of the latter goal became a reality when Bishop Messmer assigned St. Joseph Parish in De Pere, on the banks of the historic Fox River, to Father Pennings and his Norbertine companions on September 28, 1898. On October 10, 1898, Father Pennings taught Frank VanDyke his first latin lesson in the parish rectory. Three more freshmen registered to form the student body. St. Norbert College was born!!

Twelve students registered in 1899. Twenty-two in 1900. The first St. Norbert College building, a three-story structure, namely a Norbertine convent and a college classroom facility, was built and opened for classes in September 1899. In 1903 Main Hall, still an important campus administrative building, was ready for use, "Making it one of the most complete institutions of its kind in the midwest," in the words of a contemporary journalist.

Between 1893 and 1912 twenty-one Norbertine priests came to America from Berne Abbey. Fifteen taught at the newly founded college in De Pere, some for only a year or two, some for several years. Many, like Fathers VanHeertum, Van-

den Elsen, Gloudemans, Rybrook, Dobbelsteen, and Kirkfleet were talented linguists, artists, musicians, mathematicians, and writers. Father VanHeertum was rector or academic dean from 1903 to 1913. He was succeeded by Father Wm. M. J. Millay, an American born teacher from Notre Dame University who had joined the faculty in 1903 and entered the Order in 1905.

Like so many early American colleges, for example Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Georgetown, Notre Dame, Marquette, and Lawrence—St. Norbert originally included preparatory courses or a high school department, and college liberal arts programs leading to a bachelor's degree. As early as 1901, the De Pere program included a commercial or business department. It was only in 1930 that president Pennings separated the administration of the high school from that of the college. Finally, in 1959, the high school moved to its own campus and became Abbot Pennings High School.

President Pennings encouraged Father VanHeertum to visit Dartmouth and other eastern colleges to study their organization and methods of operation. The first by-laws of the College were modeled after those of Dartmouth. Even the college colors were copied after those of Dartmouth. Lay teachers have been on the faculty of St. Norbert from the beginning. Even in 1898, Prior Pennings hired a Mr. McDonald to assist him with early classes. After World War II, with the increase in enrollments, the number of lay professors has continued to grow.

St. Norbert College enrollments grew gradually. The highest number of college students, apart from the high school, was reached immediately before World War II, a total of 341. After the War, college enrollments reached 840, of whom 500 were veterans.

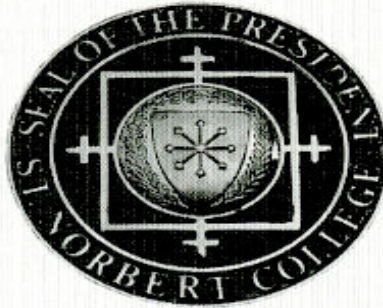
Norbertine faculty members with higher academic degrees increased after World War I when president Pennings began sending young Norbertines to Rome, the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and the University of Chicago for doctoral and master degrees. It was not until 1959 that the first lay doctors were added to the staff.

Father Pennings, president for fifty-seven years, began his life in America as a missionary, moved to De Pere within five years, was blessed as the first American Norbertine Abbot in 1925, witnessed the growth of the College into a fully accredited American institution of higher learning, and in his declining years in a press and radio conference stated, "The best thing 'we' ever did was to found St. Norbert College."

At the age of 93 his eyes had dimmed but his vision had remained steadfast. Kind, humble, with indomitable courage, Abbot Pennings accepted any and all honors in the name of his men, "Without whom and with God's help this dream would never have been realized."

On March 17, 1955, after a brief illness and with a broad smile on his face, he quietly passed away at St. Vincent Hospital in Green Bay. Four of his confreres were present—coadjutor Abbot Sylvester M. Killeen, Father Neal McLaughlin, Father Dennis M. Burke, and Father Richard Mulroy. His remains lie in the crypt of the new St. Norbert Abbey dedicated in June 1959. His memory lives on at St. Norbert College.





The Seal of the President of St. Norbert College symbolizes the responsibilities of the President to provide leadership to the academic community, to insure the continuation of the tradition and heritage of the College, and to represent the College to other constituencies.

The circle connotes responsibility, as there is an encompassment and integration of what is within.

The square symbolizes the academic community: administration, faculty, student body, and alumni.

The crest in the center symbolizes the heritage of the College.

The cross extensions suggest the emanation of Christian values.

All are within the outer circle, within the aegis of the president.

ST. NORBERT COLLEGE PRESIDENTS AND THEIR TERMS

Dr. Thomas A. Manion	1983 - Present
Dr. Neil J. Webb	1973 - 1983
Dr. Robert E. Christin	1969 - 1973
Rev. Dennis M. Burke, O.Praem.	1955 - 1968
Rev. Bernard H. Pennings, O.Praem.	1898 - 1955

