

Fargo Forum editorial

December 12, 2008

Reprinted with permission

Today's issue: University of Mary names its sixth president.

Our position: The Rev. Shea looks to be well qualified to take the helm of the school.

The selection of the Rev. James Shea to be the sixth president of the University of Mary is a bold and inspirational move by the Bismarck-based private Catholic school. Shea, a North Dakota native, was chosen last week by trustees and introduced to the campus and community last Friday.

At 33, Shea is believed to be one of the youngest university presidents in the nation, if not the youngest. He was one of 22 applicants for the job being vacated at the end of June by Sister Thomas Welder. He has big shoes to fill.

Welder expanded the university's reach beyond Bismarck. The school has a significant presence in Fargo and other locations. Indeed, Fargo entrepreneurs and business people are among the school's most generous benefactors.

Demand for the school's course offerings is high and growing. The quality of the university's education and flexibility of its curriculum have made it one of the most popular choices for students who already are in the work force.

Welder, who endorsed the trustees' selection of Shea, said he has "remarkable people skills." She will assist him in the transition from parish priest to university president.

Shea is lucky to have her at his side for the start of his new career. Welder has been a formidable force in North Dakota higher education. She focused on growing the school's enrollment, diversifying curriculum and establishing satellite campuses. The University of Mary's programs have answered a need for specialized education across the region.

Welder was recognized for her good work in higher education with North Dakota's highest honor: the Theodore Roosevelt Roughrider Award.

Shea seems to have the tools to build on the university's recent successes. His focus in his pastoral work has been education. His own education is steeped in his faith, which is a vital element of university life. His roots in North Dakota run deep, so his understanding of the state's educational priorities and cultural uniqueness further equip him to preside over a growing, dynamic Catholic university.

We wish him success at a university that has become an integral part of higher education in North Dakota.

Forum editorials represent the opinion of Forum management and the newspaper's Editorial Board