

To my Trustee friends and colleagues:

Deb and I cherished our time at St. Norbert College and always will. It was probably the happiest decade of our lives, in no small part because of the friendship, support and camaraderie of virtually all of you.

But as you know, true friends have to be honest with one another, and when I saw the sad news from President Bruess the other day I was as shocked and disappointed as I can ever remember. The Trustee actions that brought things to this point were baffling to me, and they simply don't square with the board that I know.

Presidents work at the pleasure of their governing boards, of course, and we all know that sometimes even effective presidents get sideways with their Trustees despite everyone's best intentions. It's an inherently tricky relationship. But any president has the right to expect that Trustee concerns about him or her will be addressed forthrightly and clearly, and that just didn't happen here. The "process," such as it was, was suspiciously secretive and abrupt, marked by widespread confusion, misinformation, disinformation, bad faith, and in one conspicuous case a personal conflict of interest so egregious that it beggars belief.

Beyond that, the mutual transparency you have always rightly aspired to with the college's leadership team was nowhere to be found. That the complaints against Brian hit so many Trustees as a complete surprise, and sprang from such a small number of your group, should have been a flashing red warning as to their origin and validity. But even if they had merit, how is a sitting president not even afforded the opportunity to make his own case or confront his accusers? How does that not violate fundamental principles of governance? Of fairness? Of Norbertine values? And all done by secret ballot, to boot.

I consider Brian a friend and to all outward appearances he seems to have done very well in his first few years – including handling some dreadful crises not of his making. Still, I do realize it's not my place to tell Trustees their job any more than I would presume to tell Brian his. You get to have the president you want. But as with so much in life, how you go about it means everything.

As you know I have assiduously stayed out of campus affairs since leaving in May 2017. Having said that, I am aware that many people in the community still connect me to the college and its well-being, and so in the most unhappy circumstance I didn't want any of our Trustees, present and past, to misinterpret silence on my part as implicit approval of what has happened here.

I have not spoken with Brian about your meeting, his decision or anything else since, and I'm quite sure he would not have wanted me writing this note to you. I guess mostly I just felt compelled to register my profound sadness and disappointment, and to send up a prayer that the many grave decisions now before you will be undertaken with a generosity of spirit and with the utmost honesty, transparency and care. You and I and Brian and so many others have worked too hard in advancing St. Norbert College to now put it all at risk – though I fear perhaps you already have.

Respectfully,

Thomas Kunkel, President Emeritus