News

Dennis R. DePerro, president of St. Bonaventure University in New York, died March 1, 2021, as a result of complications from COVID-19. He was 62. (CNS photo/courtesy St. Bonaventure University)

by Catholic News Service

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St. Bonaventure, N.Y. — March 3, 2021

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Dennis R. DePerro, the 21st president of St. Bonaventure University, died of COVID-19 complications March 1. He was 62.

"Words simply can't convey the level of devastation our campus community feels right now," said Joseph Zimmer, who is provost and vice president for academic affairs at the Franciscan university in in western New York. He was named acting president in late February while DePerro was in recovery.

"I know when people die it's become cliche to say things like, 'He was a great leader, but an even better human being,' and yet, that's the absolute truth with Dennis. We are heartbroken," he said in a March 1 statement.

DePerro was admitted to a Syracuse, New York, hospital Dec. 29 after testing positive for the coronavirus on Christmas Eve. He had been placed on a ventilator in mid-January.

The university flag will fly at half-staff in his honor through the end of March.

A funeral Mass will be celebrated March 6 at Most Holy Rosary Church in Syracuse. The Mass will be livestreamed on DePerro's tribute page at tjpfuneralhome.com.

"His humanity, his insight, his ability to listen to all sides, his sense of humor — all of that made him a great leader," said Tom Missel, chief communications officer. "What I'll miss more than anything was his uncanny ability to make you feel better even on your worst days. He had a unique gift. I loved that man with all my heart. I know there are thousands of people who would say the same thing."

The board of trustees selected DePerro as president in November 2016. He assumed the post June 1, 2017, and in less than four years oversaw the university welcoming its three largest incoming freshman classes in the past 11 years.

He implemented new enrollment and marketing strategies and championed new academic program development. Under his watch, the university's online graduate initiative saw significant growth, up 329% in enrollment since fall 2017.

He encouraged collaboration and opened the lines of communication with faculty, students, staff and alumni.

DePerro launched a comprehensive capital campaign to build "A Bolder Bonaventure"; many of the financial gifts helped make the university's new School of Health Professions a reality.

He formed a number of campus-based presidential commissions to examine critical issues, including a group devoted solely to mission integration. The university hired a vice president for mission integration in 2019.

In 2020, he reconstituted the Presidential Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Prior to his appointment at St. Bonaventure, DePerro was vice president for enrollment management at Jesuit-run Le Moyne College in Syracuse for 18 years before becoming the inaugural dean of the School of Graduate and Professional Studies in 2013. He also was a professor of management in Le Moyne's Madden School of Business.

A native of Buffalo, New York, and a graduate of Bishop Timon High School in Buffalo, DePerro spent his entire 39-year career in college administration; for eight years in admissions and alumni relations at his alma mater Jesuit-run Canisius College (1982-1990) and for five years as dean of admission and financial aid at Marietta College in Ohio (1990-1995) before going to Le Moyne in 1995.

During his 18 years as vice president for enrollment, Le Moyne's undergraduate enrollment grew from 1,680 to 2,400, while graduate enrollment rose from 390 to 650 over the same period.

DePerro was predeceased by his parents, Jennie, and Peter DePerro. He is survived by his wife, Sherry; sons Andrew and Matthew; brothers Peter (Susan) DePerro and Richard (Marsha) DePerro and a sister, Rose Giambone; along with several nieces and nephews.

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