

Tom Monaghan steps down as CEO at Ave Maria University

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Tom Monaghan



Nick Healy

Ave Maria University's board of trustees announced today that Jim Towey will be the university's next president. Towey will be responsible for the day-to-day operations as president when his term begins on July 1, 2011. Thomas S. Monaghan, who currently serves as Chancellor and CEO of AMU will remain Chancellor, but will relinquish the responsibilities of CEO and hence the oversight of the daily operations of the university.

The board of trustees voted on the appointment of Towey at its regularly scheduled meeting earlier this week. Chairman of the board of trustees, Michael T. O. Timmis, made today's announcement on behalf of the board. Timmis praised the incredible vision of Monaghan and the solid foundation that he has set in place for AMU. He also talked about the confidence the board has that Towey is the right person for AMU at this stage of its development.

"This is a huge win for Ave Maria University," Timmis said. "We retain the vision and experience of our pioneers, while seamlessly handing over the reins to the next generation of leadership. It is the belief of the Trustees that Jim Towey is the most desirable Catholic university president in America today. And I am thrilled to announce that he is going to be our president."

Monaghan echoed Timmis' enthusiasm and addressed the opportunities presented by the new administrative structure.

"This decision was a result of ongoing discussions that I've had with the board throughout the last couple of years in terms of developing and implementing a succession plan," Monaghan said. "This new structure will enable me to spend more time working with university supporters both locally and nationally. It will also free me up to do more public speaking to promote awareness of AMU among high school students and potential benefactors. I'll also be able to work on some special projects and a book I have wanted to write for some time."

In addition to remaining Chancellor of AMU, Monaghan, who will turn 74 next month, will also remain on the board of trustees. Monaghan noted that not only does Towey have the full support of the board, but Monaghan's personal support and confidence, as well.

“I have known Jim for more than 10 years and am very excited about the new stage of growth and development that AMU has to look forward to under his leadership. He is a man of high moral character and professional competence,” he said.

While showing admiration for the accomplishments of both Monaghan and Healy, Towey identified what he sees for the future of AMU and the great optimism he has for the school’s success.

“It is a new day at Ave Maria and I am excited about its future,” Towey said. “The start up phase is over, a strong foundation is now in place, and now we must go about the difficult work of building the best Catholic liberal arts university in America. We will attract more of the best students available, continue to recruit and retain the very finest professors, and secure the financial resources necessary to fulfill the University’s potential. Tom Monaghan has devoted all of his wealth and energy to get us to this point and now it is time for the rest of us to ask what we can do to help Ave Maria transition to self-sufficiency and new excellence.”

Towey comes to AMU after serving as president of Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Penn., from 2006 until June 2010. While serving as president at Saint Vincent, the school achieved record enrollment, multi-year fiscal surpluses and undertook extensive campus-wide construction and renovation projects.

Prior to leading Saint Vincent, Towey served four years in George W. Bush’s administration as the Assistant to the President of the United States and director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Towey was a member of Bush’s senior staff, reporting directly to the President on all matters relating to church and state relations, religious liberty issues, charitable giving, various civil liberties and a variety of other federal programs.

Among his many personal accomplishments, Towey founded a national non-profit organization dedicated to providing assistance to individuals and their families during times of serious illness. The organization, Aging with Dignity, was founded in 1996.

From 1985 until 1997, Towey functioned as the legal representation in the U.S. and Canada for Mother Teresa. During that time he spent two years as a full-time volunteer in Mexico and traveled with Mother Teresa on many occasions.

Towey holds a bachelor’s degree from Florida State University and a Juris Doctor from Florida State University College of Law. He has received six honorary doctoral degrees and has been awarded the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice Papal Cross from Pope John Paul II, the Omicron Delta Kappa Grad Made Good Award from Florida State University and the Archbishop John Carroll Award from the Archdiocese of Miami.

A published author, Towey has contributed to The Washington Post, USA Today and the Wall Street Journal. He also has appeared on 60 Minutes, Today, Fox News Sunday and Good Morning America.

On behalf of the board of trustees, Timmis expressed the board's heartfelt appreciation to current president, Nicholas J. Healy. Healy has served AMU as president since its founding in 2002 and will retire after the current academic year. Healy plans to work to support the efforts of the university in various ways and will do so as President Emeritus. He will also continue as president of the Ave Maria Foundation for the Arts.

Healy addressed both his experiences as president and optimism for the future of the school saying, "It has been a singular honor to be the first president of Ave Maria University, and to work closely with a man of Tom Monaghan's extraordinary integrity and commitment to Catholic higher education. The honor is enhanced by being succeeded by someone of Jim Towey's stature, experience and devotion to the Blessed Mother."

Timmis praised Healy's continued commitment to AMU and the successes Healy achieved as president.

"The board is very grateful for President Healy's service over the last decade. Nick has worked tirelessly during this pioneering process of not only establishing Ave Maria University in Florida, but also through the move to its permanent campus, which at one time was little more than tomato fields. Nick is a man of great creativity and resilience, and both qualities have done much to help the university get where it is today."

The entire university community received the announcement with great optimism and confidence in Towey's ability to be an advocate and champion for AMU and the ideal leader to transition into the next phase of the school's history.

"A crucial moment in an institution's life arrives when the founders reach the decision to turn over leadership to the next generation," said Michael Waldstein, AMU Max Seckler professor of theology. "The dangers of fracture, strife and the failure of the original guiding vision are acute. With Jim Towey, Ave Maria University has found a president who knows our founding, who supports its direction, who honors our founders and is tied to them with bonds of friendship. He will work harmoniously and effectively with them in the transition."

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