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Franciscan Fr. David Pivonka, the newly elected president of Franciscan University in Steubenville, has assumed his leadership duties immediately, and his formal inauguration will take place later this year.

The friar, who graduated from the university in 1989, is a nationally known preacher and evangelist who for the past seven years has been director of Franciscan Pathways, an evangelistic outreach of his Franciscan community. He also has senior-level administrative experience from holding various posts at the university from 1996 to 2008.

Ordained a priest in 1996, he is a solemnly professed member of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Province of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Penance, which founded and operate the university.

"It's both humbling and an honor to be chosen to lead Franciscan University of Steubenville," Pivonka said in a statement. "Over 30 years ago, I first arrived at Franciscan as an undergrad and received an outstanding education as well as life-changing spiritual formation as part of a dynamic, Catholic intellectual and faith community.

"A lot has changed in our culture in the last 30 years, but Franciscan University continues its mission to provide a superior education in a vibrant faith community

where students and parents alike can be confident in their choice of Franciscan University," he said.

In a unanimous decision May 21, the university's board of trustees elected Pivonka to succeed Franciscan Fr. Sean Sheridan, who served as president since 2013. He resigned in April but stayed on as president until his successor was named.

"As Franciscan's first alumnus president, (Pivonka) brings a unique array of perspective, experience, and qualifications to this role," said Franciscan Fr. Malachi Van Tassell, chairman of the board of trustees and minister provincial of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Province.

Van Tassell assured the new president "of the support and prayers of his Franciscan brothers" in the province.

In describing the search process, David DeWolf, vice chair of the board of trustees and chair of the board's Governance Committee, said the entire board was resolved "to find a president who was led by the Holy Spirit, a champion for dynamic orthodoxy, and an exceptionally strong executive who understands and values the unique culture and demands of academia and the importance of strong collaboration between the president and the faculty."

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"After significant prayer and a robust interview process, it quickly became clear that Fr. Dave Pivonka possesses all of these qualities as well as meeting all the requirements of our job specification," DeWolf said in a statement.

"We are confident God has prepared him well to lead Franciscan, and we are excited about his presidency and what it means for the future of the university -- a future full of hope," he added.

In his role as director of Franciscan Pathways, Pivonka has hosted and produced "The Wild Goose" video series on developing a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit; a documentary on St. Francis of Assisi titled "Sign of Contradiction"; and "Metanoia," a new series on conversion that will be released later this year.

Pivonka preaches at approximately 50 events annually, including retreats, workshops, pilgrimages, parish missions, and Franciscan University's youth, young adult, and adult conferences.

While at Franciscan University from 1996 to 2008, Pivonka held a number of pastoral, leadership and administrative positions. He also served on the faculty as an adjunct professor of theology from 1996 to 1998.

Pivonka worked as vice president for mission and planning (2003-2005), serving on the president's Cabinet; he led a team of faculty, staff and students in strategic plan development, and building mission awareness on campus and off.

He also was director of household support (1996-1998), assistant to the president under Franciscan Fr. Michael Scanlan (1998-1999), director of youth outreach conferences (1999-2003) and director of the study abroad program in Austria (2005-2008).

From 2008 to 2012, Pivonka served as director of post-novitiate formation for the Franciscans, Third Order Regular, in Washington, forming student friars in their spiritual, educational and psychological development.

A native of Durango, Colorado, he graduated with his bachelor of arts degree in theology from Franciscan University in 1989 and went on to earn a master of divinity degree and a master of arts degree in theology from Washington Theological Union in 1996. He wrote his master of arts thesis on the indissolubility of Christian marriage.

He earned a doctorate in education from the Graduate Theological Foundation in 2005, with a doctoral project focused on Catholic education in a post-modern world. He also earned an executive juris doctorate from Concord University School of Law of Purdue University Global in 2011.

He has written six books, the two newest being "Breath of God: Living a Life Led by the Holy Spirit" (Ave Maria Press, 2016) and "Sign of Contradiction" (4PM Media, 2018).

Since 2008, he has served on the board of Renewal Ministries. He was a member of the board of trustees for St. Francis University in Loretto, Pennsylvania, from 2000 to

2012, and is a past board member for the National Service Committee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.