News



In this Dec. 26, 2019 file photo, Benedictine monks of Saint Anselm Abbey celebrate in Manchester, N.H. Monks at a Catholic college in New Hampshire have settled a dispute with the school's board of trustees over an effort which they perceived as limiting their power. (AP Photo/Michael Casey, File)

Michael Casey

View Author Profile

The Associated Press

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

November 5, 2020

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Monks at a Catholic college in New Hampshire have settled a dispute with the school’s board of trustees over the amount of influence they wield.

Saint Anselm College Board of Trustees and members of the Saint Anselm Abbey filed the settlement agreement with a Hillsborough Superior Court on Tuesday. It must be approved by a judge.

Last year, the monks filed a lawsuit against the Saint Anselm College board after it passed a motion to take away the monks’ ability to amend the school’s bylaws. The school’s charter dictated that they retain the power to amend laws governing the school, which was set up and has been run by Benedictine monks for 130 years.

The board argued that it has the authority under state law on nonprofit organizations to amend the bylaws. It also argued the move is necessary to ensure it has the required independence for re-accreditation.

In a letter to the school community last year, Saint Anselm President Joseph Favazza took pains to suggest the board was not trying to change the mission of the school — as some monks have suggested. He said the move was about meeting the standards set by the accrediting body, the New England Commission of Higher Education and that the college was “fully committed to resolving the remaining governance issues.”

Advertisement

The agreement allows for the bylaws to be written to give the monks authority over the college's mission and identify and provides the board with authority over general operations.

“This agreement provides the Board of Trustees with sufficient independence and the Members with sufficient voice in the future of Saint Anselm College," Joseph Loughrey, the board's chair, said in a statement. "We are united in our desire to provide a transformative education for our students and we look forward to working together to preserve the perpetuity of the College.”

Abbot Mark Cooper welcomed the agreement. “The preservation of our Catholic and Benedictine identity is fundamental to who we are as an institution," he said. "We

are pleased the changes to our bylaws enshrine this most important aspect of the College and we look forward to a unified effort in advancing the interests of Saint Anselm.”

For many students and alumni, the monks in their dark black habits are critical to the identity of the school. They pledge a “vow of stability” to live and work at the school their entire lives. They hold administrative posts, teach classes and form lifelong bonds with students that include officiating at weddings and baptisms.