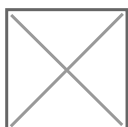


Jesuit Fr. Kevin O'Brien, in a 2018 file photo (NCR/Dan Morris-Young)



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Editor's note: This story has been updated to include a quotation from O'Brien's personal resignation letter.

Jesuit Fr. Kevin O'Brien has resigned as president of Santa Clara University in Northern California, after [a leave of absence](#) that began in March following unspecified allegations involving Jesuit graduate students.

O'Brien, a longtime personal friend of President Joe Biden, celebrated a private Mass on the morning of the presidential inauguration at Washington's Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle.

A May 12 [letter](#) from the chairman of Santa Clara's Board of Trustees states that O'Brien will "enroll in a four- to six-month therapeutic outpatient program, which he has now begun, to address related personal issues, including alcohol and stress counseling.

"Father O'Brien engaged in behaviors, consisting primarily of conversations, during a series of informal dinners with Jesuit graduate students that were inconsistent with established Jesuit protocols and boundaries," wrote board chair John Sobrato [in a letter](#). "The Province also advised the Board that alcohol was involved and that no inappropriate behavior was found in any settings outside of these dinners."

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Acting President Lisa Kloppenberg will continue to serve in her post as the university begins a search for O'Brien's replacement.

In his personal resignation letter, O'Brien said that following a successful completion of treatment, he is expected to return to active ministry as a Jesuit priest, although not as the university's president.

"I am at heart a teacher and an educator, so I wish to close with a message for our students. It is important to have friends in your life, as I do now, who can speak honestly when they are concerned about you," he wrote. "Equally important, no matter the success or positions you achieve in life, everyone needs help at times, and it is OK to ask for help when you need it, and to allow others to care for you."

O'Brien [joined the Jesuits](#) in 1996 at age 29 and holds a master's in philosophy from Fordham University, a master of divinity and a licentiate in sacred theology from the Weston Jesuit School of Theology. He met the Biden family when he was serving at another Jesuit institution, Georgetown University, and celebrated Masses for both of Biden's inaugurations as vice president.

In 2019, he [described](#) his unexpected journey into the priesthood and eventually academia, in an interview with NCR.

"God," said O'Brien, "has a way of getting our attention and sending the right people at the right time. The problem is we often don't realize it at the moment."

A version of this story appeared in the **May 28-June 10, 2021** print issue under the headline: Biden family friend resigns as president of Santa Clara University.