

A photograph of President Michael Hemesath, a man with short, light-colored hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He is seated at a wooden table in a room with brick walls and wooden chairs. He is looking slightly to his right with a thoughtful expression. A stack of papers is on the table in front of him.

Inside Quad 136

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President Michael Hemesath listens to a presentation regarding admission at a cabinet meeting. The presentation was given as if to an incoming student.

A university president is the face of an institution. Beyond that, many daily happenings of university presidents go unnoticed by general campus populations. The Record explores a day in the life of St. John's University's own President Michael Hemesath. See page five to read part one of a two part series. The next installment will feature College of St. Benedict's President Mary Hinton.



Left: St. John's President Michael Hemesath arrives to his office at 8 a.m. and prepares for a weekly cabinet meeting. Right: Hemesath addresses staff at faculty social at the Renner house



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Many people know of him. They've seen him. They know what he looks like. They know his name and that he's an important man on campus. But that's where people's knowledge typically ends.

Michael Hemesath just completed his first three-year term as president of St. John's University and has been approved for another. But he is no stranger to SJU. Long before

BEHIND THE SCENES

MICHAEL HEMESATH: the man behind the presidency



being appointed president of the University he lived in Mary Hall on the third floor. It was there that he started his journey that would decide who he might one day be and what he might want to do.

"I just remember we were in Fr. René's [McGraw] room," Hemesath said. "It was not uncommon for [Hemesath and his friends] to drop down there when we were finished studying for the evening and we would sit around and just talk to each other. We were growing up at that time...We would talk about silly stuff like 'how come none of us have girlfriends? What's wrong with us? We're a bunch of losers!'"

Since he's been a student, Hemesath's life has changed quite a bit. He has three

children: Two one-year-old twin boys, and a five-year-old boy. He also has a wife, Elizabeth Gallbraith, who spent time teaching theology at St. Olaf. And now he's the president of the university that he once attended. Beyond that, he's the first non-monastic member to hold the position. For some, this change was refreshing.

"I've had faculty say to me when I got the job 'it'll be nice to have a president that has the same kind of family responsibilities and challenges,'" Hemesath said. "Now, I think that's a little unfair to the monks that have held this role beforehand because they have their own set of responsibilities and they've got the ability to imagine those challenges. I don't think that you have to live every single challenge to know what it's like."

The family challenges that many faculty members experience every day require Hemesath to work on balance in his life as much as they do. He says that, like faculty members, there are ups and downs in the process.

"The upsides of parenting while you are a president far exceed the downsides but I think it's probably good in some ways to have kids to show that," Hemesath said. "Other faculty and staff can look at us and say 'oh they're dealing with the same sorts of things we're dealing with.'"

The process that Hemesath goes through looks something like this. He goes to work at 8 a.m. but before that, he tends to his kids Alexander (1), Sebastian (1) and Cameron (5) which includes breakfast and sometimes watching "SpongeBob Squarepants". Afterwards, Hemesath leaves home with Cameron to drop him off at Kindergarten in St. Joseph.

Gallbraith, Hemesath's wife, stays at home to watch the twins and takes classes at the School of Theology where she studies monasticism. Though she already has a Ph.D. in theology, she has an interest in monasticism.

Once at work, Hemesath gets rolling right away. With the assistance from his executive staff and student workers, his packed schedule features visits from anyone from a vice president of Institutional Planning and Research to a faculty member to a student.

Hemesath says there have been big changes in his presidential transition such as less time spent with students. But dealing with a packed schedule was one of the biggest changes.

"You pretty much have to have your calendar open to the people that want to meet with you," Hemesath said. "It took me a while to get used to giving up control of my calendar life in a way that I'd never given a thought to as a faculty member."

Hemesath says that he tries to catch up on college and professional sports, movies, TV shows and books. His family can have an influence on this too. He's seen a few movies lately but most have been kid's movies. "Inside Out" has been his most recent watch.

Ultimately, Hemesath attempts to balance experiencing family life with his professional life. Life with his family requires him to be present for his children's growing moments. His professional life requires him to be conversant in sports and popular culture.

Hemesath says that his job breaks down to internal and external categories. For

internal events, he focuses on the future of the university. This includes meetings that involve predicting the school's financial future given the changing landscape that is enrollment numbers. In addition, Hemesath will be teaming up with CSB President Mary Hinton to teach a class next semester.

External events include working on alumni relations and asking for donations. Hemesath recently traveled to China for an event that celebrated the relationship between St. John's and a university there. On less rare occasions however, he travels to anywhere from Chicago to New York in order to make time for the vast Johnnie alumni network that incoming students read about in flyers.

When he's not traveling around the country and world to ensure financial stability for the university, Hemesath often forgoes lunch and maintains a blog and personally answers emails he receives from alumni, faculty and students.

As is the case with most jobs in life, Hemesath says there are downsides. There are many times when not everyone agrees with the decisions he and the university make. Most commonly though the complaints deal with the extent to which the university is Catholic.

"We're too Catholic in some ways. We're not Catholic enough in some ways," Hemesath said. "My view is that as long as I'm getting roughly equivalent numbers of complaints on both sides, we're probably being Catholic in just about the right way that I think we should."

Between his internal, external and family duties Hemesath says he has to figure out how to spend his time wisely. As might be expected from the former economics professor, his problem is answered simply and with hundreds of years of economic theory to back it.

"As an economist, it's all about opportunity cost," Hemesath said. "There are 24 hours in a day and you try to figure out the best way to use those times to meet all of your obligations."

In a regular day, Hemesath ends his day at approximately 4:30 p.m., after spending hours in meetings, answering emails and phone calls, writing speeches and blog posts or just planning his schedule for the next week. Hemesath enters his home and is welcomed by his wife (who has usually picked Cameron, his oldest, up from school) and three children. At this moment, play time and casual family chatter ensue which eventually makes way for the children's bed time.

"That schedule doesn't allow for a lot of time for playing in the evening," Hemesath said. "But a little bit. And then we make sure that we read a story before they go to bed. More stories if Cameron gets to choose the number. He will often opt for more if possible."

Finally, Hemesath and his wife send their kids to bed. If all goes well, the one-year-old twin boys "go down quietly." A normal day in the life of a university president concludes only to begin again with more meetings, phone calls, emails and trips around the world to ensure that St. John's University continues on and appreciates in value for those who have come before. If there is anything to be said about a normal day in the life of a university president, it's that there isn't one.