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## The Editorial Board: It was job well done by newly retired Canisius College President John Hurley

**News Editorial Board**

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John J. Hurley, who retired this week as the 24th president of Canisius College, attends his final commencement ceremony on May 21.

Robert Kirkham / Buffalo News

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News Editorial Board

**C**anisius College President John J. Hurley has officially retired – his last day was Thursday – passing the torch after 12 years to his successor. Hurley has met challenges on campus and off. Along with his wife, Maureen, and seven other Catholic lay people, he formed the Movement to Restore Trust following the Diocese of Buffalo’s sexual abuse scandals.

A Buffalo native and graduate of both Canisius College and the University of Notre Dame Law School, Hurley was named president in 2009, succeeding the Rev. Vincent M. Cooke. With that, he became the college’s first lay president. Steve K. Stoute has officially taken the helm of the 150-year-old college, becoming its 25th president.

For Hurley, it has been a remarkable ride. Indeed, the last decade, in particular, has been extremely challenging for all of higher education in the United States and especially around the Northeast. Declining enrollments in a region packed with private and public institutions has added severe stresses.

Hurley views the situation as evolving and, with that, demanding new and creative thinking. Higher education is undergoing tectonic change. Canisius is among those institutions. It faced a \$20 million deficit in a \$75 million budget for 2020-21. Such revenue losses stemmed from enrollment declines and were exacerbated when Covid-19- forced the campus to close.

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Canisius' trustees agreed to Hurley's plan of major layoffs and program cuts, which were met with loud objections from students, faculty and alumni. The Faculty Senate at the college sent a vote of no confidence in Hurley and the trustees.

But the objections, heartfelt as they no doubt were, did nothing to address the economic tsunami colleges and universities are experiencing as enrollment declines. Hurley predicted a "shakeout" in higher education. In the Northeast, that is likely to produce consolidations. That will take different forms, he predicted, but will include letting go of traditional boundaries.

For example, he said, Buffalo has seven Catholic colleges, the third highest of any diocese in the country. "Does it make sense to have a shared administrative structure governing the seven Catholic colleges that would look something like the Catholic Health System?," he asked.

"Maybe it wouldn't be a full-blown merger ... we're not going to let go of that Canisius-Niagara basketball game, but could there be other things that would cause the Catholic colleges to work together and should we take a page from the playbook of the Catholic Health System?"

They are good questions that must be urgently addressed among educational leaders.

The newly retired Canisius College president is confident that the Board of Trustees will continue to think creatively and boldly and take on opportunities. Meanwhile, Hurley plans to stay engaged on the issues and chief among them is the continued work on the Movement to Restore Trust.

Hurley has served Buffalo well for many years. The community should be pleased that this dedicated Buffalo native will continue lending his voice and expertise on issues vital to the area.

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