Fred P. Pestello, Ph.D.
President of Saint Louis University

Fred P. Pestello, Ph.D., is the president of Saint Louis University (SLU). As president and chief executive officer, Pestello leads one of the nation’s oldest, largest and most prestigious Catholic, Jesuit universities.

A Roman Catholic and Jesuit educated, Pestello is considered a dynamic leader in higher education. He is the only person to be elected as the first lay president of two U.S. Jesuit institutions.

Pestello’s career in Catholic higher education began in 1984 at the University of Dayton, the largest private university in Ohio. During his nearly 25 years at Dayton, Pestello served as a faculty member, department chairman, associate dean and provost.

In 2008, Pestello was tapped to become the first lay president of Le Moyne College, a comprehensive Jesuit liberal arts institution in Syracuse, New York. The college experienced tremendous achievement and progress during his six-year tenure.

In 2014, Pestello made history once again when he has named the first permanent lay president of Saint Louis University. He joined SLU on July 1, 2014 and was officially inaugurated on Oct. 3, 2014, before a crowd of nearly 2,500 people in Chaifetz Arena.

Within a month of his historic appointment, Pestello launched an inclusive University-wide process to develop SLU’s first comprehensive strategic plan in years. The result is an ambitious plan that sets forth a bold path for the University.

Dubbed Magis — the Latin word for “more” and a key Jesuit focus — SLU’s new strategic plan calls for a greater emphasis on entrepreneurship, innovation and collaboration. Key objectives include increasing student scholarships, enhancing campus diversity, and strengthening support for faculty.

Notable University accomplishments under Pestello include:

- Enrolling a freshman class ranked in the top 10 percent in the nation for the first time
- Completing SLU’s second most successful fundraising year in history
- Breaking ground on two new residence halls that reflect a more than $115 investment in student housing
- Entering into a historic agreement with SSM Health that includes plans for the Catholic health care system to build a $500 million hospital and outpatient facility at the SLU Medical Center

As a lay leader, promoting SLU’s Catholic identity has been one of Pestello’s top priorities. In June 2015, he established a new Office for Mission and Identity, which has helped
organize the University’s first vocations fair, established outdoor “pop-up” confessionals for students, and created the weekly “Java with Jesuits” program. The University also has partnered with the Archdiocese of St. Louis on several new initiatives, including the Billiken Teacher Corps. Through the joint venture, students in SLU’s graduate education program teach in urban Catholic schools and live together in a faith-based community.

Pestello also has engaged the SLU community in an ongoing campus-wide dialogue around issues of diversity and inclusion following a weeklong encampment of student and community protesters that took place in October 2014. The encampment ended peacefully with the University committing to improve access and success of minority students, and to foster additional efforts that will affect change related to chronic, systematic inequity and poverty in the St. Louis region.

Nationally, Pestello serves on the boards of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, the Council of Independent Colleges, and the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. Locally, he serves on the boards of Civic Progress and the Cortex Innovation Community. He also is a founding member of the board of the Foundation for the Pontifical Institute of Theology at Posillipo in Italy.

Born in 1952 in Cleveland, Pestello was a first-generation student at the Jesuit-run John Carroll University. After earning his bachelor’s degree in sociology at John Carroll, he went on to pursue his master’s degree and Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Akron.

Pestello is married to Frances Pestello, Ph.D., also a sociologist and scholar. The Pestellos have two adult children, Freddy and Vitina, and live in the University’s presidential residence in the city’s Central West End.