Christian Brothers University named a new president Thursday.

Dr. John Smarrelli Jr., special assistant to the president of Le Moyne College in Syracuse, N.Y., will take the helm of the Catholic university on July 1.

“"What I want to do at CBU is move it to even greater levels of excellence," Smarrelli said.

Smarrelli, 55, has 30 years of experience in Catholic higher education and is the first permanent lay person to lead the school, which has an enrollment of 1,850 students.

He succeeds Brother Vincent Malham, who was killed in a Louisiana car crash in May.

Since then, Lance Forsdick, past chairman of the Christian Brothers High School board and 1961 CBU graduate, has served as interim president.

“"Enrollment and donations," Forsdick said, are the key challenges facing the university's new president.

"It's a business. You have to give the corporate world a reason to support you," he said.

Forsdick said 80 percent of the university's graduates will likely stay in Memphis, making it an asset for local businesses.

Willis H. Willey, chairman of the board of trustees for CBU, said Smarrelli is an "absolutely wonderful fellow" with a great combination of "experience, talent and vision that is exactly what Christian Brothers needs to get us going again."

Smarrelli served as interim president of Le Moyne College from 2007 to 2008, where he was the first layman to lead the Jesuit College.

His résumé also includes serving as provost and guiding the college through the reaccreditation process as well as setting priorities for its largest capital campaign.

A scientist by training, he was a catalyst behind the construction of Le Moyne's new science building.

His wife and three children will be relocating from Syracuse in July.

But Smarrelli plans to be spending a lot of time between now and then getting to know the area, he said.

"We really want to be invested in the Memphis community," said the new president, who plans to move his family close to the Midtown university.

"We want to be spokespersons for Christian Brothers University."

John Smarrelli Jr.
Age: 55

Position: New president of Christian Brothers University

Start date: July 1

Current position: Special assistant to the president of Le Moyne College in Syracuse, N.Y.

Hometown: Syracuse

Family: Wife, Eloise; three children, Kristina, Nicholas and Elizabeth

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