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28 College Leaders Pledge 5% of Earnings to Fight Poverty

By Jack Stripling

It was the fall of 2009 when the Rev. Ann M. Svennungsen began reading a book that would change her life.

Reverend Svennungsen, then president of Texas Lutheran University, was hardly the first person to be moved by Peter Singer's *The Life You Can Save*. The Princeton University bioethicist's 2009 book is often cited by philanthropists, who find it difficult to reject Mr. Singer's argument that the failure of people who are relatively well off financially to eradicate global poverty is an unconscionable moral stain.

Reverend Svennungsen saw something of herself in Mr. Singer's book. She could give more, she thought. So, too, could other similarly situated college presidents, whom she believes have missed an opportunity to use their influence and wealth to help the 24,000 children who die every day from preventable poverty-related causes, according to United Nations estimates.

"I began to think about college presidents as a cohort of leaders with an unparalleled platform in terms of their leadership in the communities they engage. And I think almost all of them make over \$100,000 a year," said Reverend Svennungsen, who resigned from

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Texas Lutheran in 2010 with a total compensation of \$226,308.

Today, 28 current and former college leaders will publicly come forward as charter members of the Presidents' Pledge Against Global Poverty. (The site is scheduled to go live at 8 a.m.) In so doing, they commit to join Reverend Svennungsen by donating 5 percent of their total compensation this year to charities that fight global poverty.



The Rev. Ann Svennungsen, former president of Texas Lutheran U., hopes more presidents will sign the pledge.

The list includes presidents from liberal-arts colleges, religiously affiliated institutions, and a few research universities.

Kevin P. Reilly, president of the University of Wisconsin system and a graduate of the University of Notre Dame, said he saw the pledge as an opportunity to emulate some of his higher-education heroes. Leaders like the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, former president of

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Notre Dame, were involved in matters of social import, such as the civil-rights movement, in a way that Mr. Reilly sees few college presidents engaged today.

"We have tended to get so caught up in budgets and culture wars and local politics," he said. "I don't think many of us have stepped out as much as we should on these larger societal and international issues, like global poverty."

The pledge is designed to help reach the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which include halving the number of people in the world who live in extreme poverty by 2015. That goal is already on track to being met, but progress has been slower in improving nutrition and survival among the world's poorest, including children, the United Nations says.

Participants in the pledge give their donations directly to charities of their choice, under the condition that at least half of the contributions will benefit international projects. The organizers of the pledge have not tracked the total dollar amount of the contributions and said no estimate could be provided.

Most of the participants lead or have led private colleges, where the median presidential compensation is \$385,909, according to The Chronicle's most-recent analysis. A 5-percent contribution for such a president would be \$19,295. Presidents of religiously affiliated institutions, however, often earn considerably less than the median.

Mr. Singer's own scale for charitable giving, which can be found on his Web site, calls for people to give 5 percent of the first \$148,000 they earn and 10 percent of the



George Rupp, former president of Columbia and of Rice: "Calling attention to this set of issues seems to be extremely important."

remainder. Still, he calls the presidents' pledge "a good start."

"College presidents should set an example, to the students and faculty, of living ethically," Mr. Singer, a bioethicist, said in an e-mail to The Chronicle. To do so, they need to donate "something significant" to global poverty.

Yet far fewer presidents have signed on to the pledge than Reverend Svennungsen had anticipated. When she first spoke with The Chronicle about the pledge in 2011, she envisioned naming 200 participants by this time last year.

"I don't want to in any way indicate that we're unhappy," she said. "We're thrilled."

Reverend Svennungsen said she hopes the release of the charter members' names will give a shot in the arm to a campaign that has been more difficult than she expected.

The presidents' pledge received financial support from an anonymous donor and a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation. The pledge is aligned with Bolder Giving, a 501(c)3 organization

devoted to increasing charitable contributions for a variety of causes.

Going Public

At a time when so many families in the United States and elsewhere are struggling financially, college presidents are taking plenty of criticism for their increasingly hefty compensation packages. Some have responded by forgoing pay raises or donating money to scholarships, but doing so invariably invites suspicion that do-gooder presidents are really just making a contribution toward the protection of their public images.

Given the potential backlash, many presidents who were asked to take the global poverty pledge were squeamish about what going public with their philanthropy might mean. But Nannerl O. Keohane, a former president of Duke University and of Wellesley College, said presidents should not be discouraged simply because a small group might question their motives.

"It would be a very cynical observer who says they are just trying to justify themselves. Even so, what does it matter?" asked Ms. Keohane, a distinguished visiting professor of public affairs at Princeton University.

Like several others who have taken the pledge, Ms. Keohane said she and her husband, Robert O. Keohane, a professor of political science at Princeton, were already making charitable contributions that exceed 5 percent of their annual income. The pledge, however, did prompt the Keohanes to reallocate some of their donations toward charities devoted to global poverty.

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At least half of the participants in the pledge will be giving more to charities over all than they did before becoming signatories, Reverend Svennungsen said. While some presidents' contribution levels will change little, if at all, after the pledge, Reverend Svennungsen sees significance in the participants' willingness to publicize their commitments. The project hinges on the notion that publicity will inspire or even politely pressure others to follow suit.

"My apprehension is that it's a little bit of grandstanding, and I find that very uncomfortable," said George Rupp, a former president of Columbia and Rice Universities. "That's offset by the fact that calling attention to this set of issues seems to be extremely important."

Since 2002, Mr. Rupp has served as president and chief executive of the International Rescue Committee, which provides humanitarian relief to refugees of war and disaster. When he spoke to The Chronicle several days ago, Mr. Rupp was preparing to embark on a trip to the Republic of South Sudan, the war-weary African nation.

"It's not going to save the world," he said of the pledge, "but it's a little step in that direction."

Here is the list of current and former college leaders who have signed up for the Presidents' Pledge Against Global Poverty:

MaryAnn Baenninger, president,
College of Saint Benedict

Sister Linda Bevilacqua, president,
Barry University

Sister Joanne Burrows, president,
Clarke University

Gaylen J. Byker, president, Calvin
College

Nancy Cantor, chancellor, Syracuse
University

The Rev. Michael J. Garanzini,
president, Loyola University
Chicago

Tori Haring-Smith, president,
Washington & Jefferson College

Walter Harrison, president,
University of Hartford

Mark Heckler, president, Valparaiso
University

The Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider,
president, DePaul University

John J. Hurley, president, Canisius
College

Nannerl O. Keohane, president
emerita, Duke University and
Wellesley College

Steve LaNasa, president, Donnelly
College

James T. Laney, president emeritus,
Emory University

Jane Dammen McAuliffe, president,
Bryn Mawr College

Margaret A. McKenna, president
emerita, Lesley University

Mary J. Meehan, president, Alverno
College

Shirley A. Mullen, president,
Houghton College

Sister Anne Munley, president,
Marywood University

Christopher B. Nelson, president,
St. John's College at Annapolis

Lynn Pasquerella, president, Mount
Holyoke College

Sister Mary Reap, president, Elms
College

Kevin P. Reilly, president,
University of Wisconsin system

George Rupp, president emeritus,
Columbia and Rice Universities

Kenneth Starr, president, Baylor
University

Sister Diane Steele, president,
University of Saint Mary

The Rev. Ann M. Svennungsen, past
president, Texas Lutheran
University

Christopher M. Thomforde,
president, Moravian College