

SHAWNEE — St. Gregory's University students were called to an emergency meeting Wednesday afternoon and told the school will close at the end of the fall semester. With great sadness, the Board of Directors of St. Gregory's University voted today to suspend operations effective at the close of the fall semester 2017, the Rev. Don Wolf, board chairman, said in a statement posted Wednesday on the university's website. Our main concern at this moment is for our students, staff, and faculty who will be profoundly impacted by this decision. The University is working with several colleges to facilitate student transfers in an attempt to minimize disruption in our students' lives. Please keep them in your prayers, Wolf said. The board made the difficult, but necessary, decision following the denial of a loan application to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, according to the announcement. Without this component in the financial plan, the ability to sustain the university at this point is not possible. The Board of Directors continues to work actively to resolve financial difficulties and to explore possible partnerships in order to move forward. Established in 1875, St. Gregory's is a private liberal arts college and Oklahoma's only Catholic university. Michael Scaperlanda became the 16th president in May 2016, after serving on the board of directors for seven years. He immediately took steps to decrease debt and increase enrollment. Like many small colleges we've had financial challenges, some severe challenges recently, Scaperlanda said in July 2016. My heart breaks for the profound disruption in the lives of our wonderful students, staff, and faculty, Scaperlanda said in Wednesday's announcement. We will do everything possible to ease the transition as we work with other colleges to place our students. My heart also breaks at the suspension of Catholic liberal arts education in Oklahoma. The monks of St. Gregory's Abbey are deeply concerned by this turn of events. We are especially concerned for the families who will be impacted by this development. Our community has made one of our highest priorities the mission of education since coming to Indian Territory in 1875, the Rev. Lawrence Stasyszen, abbot and chancellor, said in the announcement. We are grateful to

the countless people who have been partners with us in this ministry, especially the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and many dedicated colleagues and donors," Stasyszen said. The Abbey will continue serving the Catholic community, he said. In August 2015, the Citizen Potawatomi Nation agreed to provide \$5 million to St. Gregory's University in exchange for full scholarships to 60 tribal members. The university planned to use the \$5 million to pay operational costs, refinance assets and expand fundraising activities, according to then-President Greg Main. Main stepped down the next year due to poor health and died this year. In April 2016, the university announced a strategic plan "Vision For Our Next Century" which identified \$143 million of capital needs. Scaperlanda said he expected the capital campaign to begin with the start of the academic year in August 2016, but no announcement was ever made.