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St. Benedict and You
The Life and Influence of This Saint

Political Principles
For Catholic Voters
Catholic Citizenship 101

Celebrating Growth at Belmont Abbey College
Dr. Bill Thierfelder
How is it that a small Catholic college in the South has survived and thrived through times of war, depression, pandemic, and more? Reading through the stories in this issue of Crossroads magazine might give us a hint.
Our story on Phil Murphy ‘01 and Lions Services highlights the Abbey’s extended family and how God’s grace reaches far beyond our ability to anticipate.
Likewise, Stan and Jasia Dusko’s 60-year relationship with Belmont Abbey gives a fascinating and inspiring portrait of faith, service, and generosity. Father David Brown’s recent jubilee anniversary allows him to reflect on his example of fortitude and awe-inspiring dedication.
And finally, Abbot Placid’s column encourages us with the example set by the Benedictine monks who have been working and praying in this place for nearly 150 years. As I read these stories, I see the Benedictine hallmarks of stability and community woven through the lives of the people who have had such an enormous impact on our Belmont Abbey family, sending untold supplies of influence, in turn, out into the world.

The Benedictine’s sacrifice has been a catalyst for so much growth over the years. They have given all so that God may be glorified in all things. I hope you are inspired, as I am, by these remarkable individuals and their beautiful stories of faith and community. I am also most grateful for all you have done and continue to do for Belmont Abbey College. Please know that the monastic community and we at the college continue to remember you and your family in our prayers.

Belmont Abbey College
The Benedictine Hallmarks
A Path to Inner Peace

Tocqueville’s
Democracy in America
Exploring the Connection Between Faith and Freedom
ON THE COVER

Stanley Dudko and his wife Jasia have had a 60-year love affair with Belmont Abbey College, inspiring countless hundreds of students, faculty, and staff.

Cover Photography by Rolando Rivas.
Grace is Key to Our Community’s Strength
Abbot Placid Solari, O.S.B.

One of Belmont Abbey College’s most solid and enduring characteristics is its sense of community. The multiple, strong, and enduring friendships — not to mention marriages — which begin here, are one indication of this trait. This sense of community has been strikingly evident over the past two years, as the college remained open with students on campus and in class throughout the pandemic. That happened because all college community members worked together under challenging circumstances to make it a success. It has been, in my estimation, one of the college’s most remarkable periods.

One of the principal reasons for this distinguishing characteristic is that the monks and first students arrived together in 1879. The lives of the college and monastic communities have been intimately intertwined from the beginning.

Benedictine monastic life is intensely community-centered. Saint Benedict’s Rule prescribes that the monks make a vow of stability to the community — promising they will remain in the community for the rest of their lives and contribute their prayer, talent, and work to the community’s life and success.

The monks’ long-term commitment to the monastery also flows over into our college community. In most colleges, even the more stable parts of the community — the faculty and staff — change over time as people come and go, retire, or move on to other jobs. In our case, the monastic community is always here. Even after several decades, Abbey alumni returning to campus will likely encounter one or more monks who were a significant part of their college experience. This witness to stability in Benedictine life is an essential contribution to the formation an Abbey education intends to impart. The Benedictine vow of stability is a vow to persevere in conversion, to see the good work of monastic life through to the end.

When challenges arise, fidelity to promises becomes difficult. We are tempted to give up or imagine that life would be easier if we merely changed our circumstances or commitments. Stability directs us to transform ourselves into persons who can keep the good of the final goal in mind and stay the course to the end. Ultimately, life according to St. Benedict’s Rule provides an environment where, by the grace of Jesus Christ, a diverse group of men of different ages, temperaments, backgrounds, and outlooks on life can live together in harmony. This harmony is one of the most critical witnesses a Benedictine community — and an Abbey education — can offer to today’s fragmented and divided world.

A critical part of this is that the monastic community bears witness to the world of the power of God’s grace. In its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium), the Second Vatican Council reminds us that God “has, however, willed to make people holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness” (109).

The Abbey college community is so good, I suggest, because it is rooted in the most profound reality of our nature as creatures made in the image and likeness of God the Trinity — the perfect community of distinct Persons in indivisible unity. That, ultimately, is the goal for which I hope our Abbey education prepares us — eternal life with God in the Communion of Saints! 🙏


And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

The monks of Belmont Abbey, who gather six times daily for communal prayer, welcome your requests for prayers. Please be encouraged to add your prayerful intentions to their daily devotions through submission either online at prayers.bac.edu or via email at prayers@bac.edu.

BE ASSURED THAT EVERY REQUEST IS HANDLED PROMPTLY AND WITH REVERENCE.
A Belmont treasure
Stan and Jasja Dudko’s legacy of devotion and stability
By Julia Long

It’s rare to encounter a love story as timeless as a classic Hollywood film, but Stanley and Jasja have lived such a story—and it began right here at Belmont Abbey College.

Visiting Abbey legends Stanley and Jasja Dudko in their Belmont home, I had the privilege to hear the remarkable story of their life together and their unending love for the Abbey.

When asked how long they’ve been married, Stanley chuckled, “Too long!”

Jasja Horned his arm, grinning, before stating proudly, “It will be 60 years in October.”

After a brief pause, she added, “I have always said he has two wives: Belmont Abbey and me!”

Polish roots

The two sat side by side in their living room, surrounded by pictures of their children and grandchildren and heirlooms passed down from Polish relatives.

Although they had no specific childhood memories of each other, Stanley and Jasja believe they must have crossed paths several times while growing up. Born three years apart in Równo, Poland, they likely frequented the same streets, shops, churches, and schools. History, tragedy, and a transcontinental voyage, however, would intervene before Providence brought them together in 1959.

Twenty years earlier, the Nazis had invaded Poland and sent both families to a labor camp in Flausen, Germany. The occupants forced nine-year-old Stanley to sweep newly manufactured tanks. Jasja was supposed to join other children in hard labor, but her mother convinced the Nazis that the small, malnourished girl was only four.

Jasja’s family immigrated to the United States several years after the war ended. Stanley’s family soon followed.

“When I came to this great country in 1949, I worked on a farm and went to school,” he said. The young man became a United States citizen, served in the Army as a short-order cook for two years, and got an early release to attend Belmont Abbey College.

“Having a hard life was my best education, but I made it,” he said.

Stanley hadn’t been on campus long before his friend mentioned a Polish girl at Sacred Heart College, just down the road from the Abbey.

“I was a lonely freshman, and Jasja was a sophomore, but she agreed to go out with me because I had a car,” Stanley joked. Their meeting and subsequent marriage began an unbreakable connection between the Dudkos and Belmont Abbey College.

Stanley and Jasja were married at Our Lady, Hope of Christendom Basilica in 1962. Jasja wore a black and white photo on their coffee table: the young, smiling couple in their wedding clothes.

“We loved the Abbey from the beginning, and it’s played a big role in many of our memories,” she said.

Joyfully generous

Stanley began teaching at the Abbey in 1963. Before long, he was coaching soccer—a role he reveled in for more than 10 years.

For Stanley, coaching at the Abbey went beyond a job. “When he began, the soccer field was gravel until he planted the grass. Then he had to tend to it,” Jasja said. “We would set our alarms to go off in the middle of the night to adjust the sprinklers to ensure the field was properly watered. I remember helping him with one arm while holding our newborn in the other.”

In addition to their children, Roma and Michael, Belmont Abbey was like a fifth family member. Years later, Roma would reflect on this unique dynamic, saying, “I feel very lucky to have the parents that I have. The Abbey always feels like home, and I think my parents’ hearts beat in unison with the Abbey’s heart.”

Joyfully generous to their extended Belmont Abbey family, the Dudkos’ energy, enthusiasm, and dedication have contributed to impact students, faculty, staff, monks, and the entire community. The Carolina Soccer Hall of Fame, the Gaston County Sports Hall of Fame, and the Belmont Abbey College Hall of Fame all induced Stanley Dudko, recognizing his outstanding contributions to Belmont Abbey College’s soccer program.

Students, faculty, and staff never tire of sharing fond memories of Stan’s flashy outfit, sense of humor, and iconic sayings like: “Everybody say, ‘Alright’!”

Alongside an inexhaustible supply of funny anecdotes is an equal number of tales of his love and dedication.

“Stan is one of the most wonderful people who have worked here over the years. He is always cheerful, always funny, and always optimistic about everything,” said Simon Donaghy, who worked alongside Stanley for several decades before the legendary coach’s retirement in 2015. “Wherever I go, people always ask after him. He is a pillar of the community.”

Stanley dismissed the praise. “At the Abbey, we’re a close-knit family,” he said, adjusting the sleeve of his bright red suit. “Each person is appreciated, loved, and known by name.”

Stanley Dudko has watched Belmont Abbey College change over the more than 60 years since it became such an integral part of his life, recognizing the monastery as the college community’s stabilizing and unifying force.

“The important things have stayed the same,” he said. “Belmont Abbey introduced changes, but what has stayed true are the traditions and the requirements in the core of a person. Belmont Abbey recognizes the goodness in people and helps them grow. This is the Benedictine way.”

Abbot Placid Solar, OSB, notes his impact on the college.

“Stan is almost an iconic figure to generations of Abbey students, and his accomplishments range from soccer to economics.”

As the afternoon sun streamed through the window at the couple’s home, Stanley told us he had a message for his beloved Abbey community. Leaning forward in his chair, he shared the prayer he recites each morning.

“I might wish you wealth, or I might wish you health. I might wish that good fortune would care for you, but wealth may bring sorrow and health you can lose even tomorrow. So I will simply say God bless. May your blessings be many and your sorrows be few. May your days bring friendships that are ever true. Joys of love and laughter and everlasting peace to those you love and you. May the soccer program prosper at the Abbey.”

Jumping to his feet, Stan pumped his fist, his soccer ball meditatively swaying with the momentum of his stance.

“Come and grow old along with me; the best is yet to be. Amen! Viva, Viva Belmont Abbey!”

Returning to his chair, he smiled and asked, “What else ya wanna know?”

Stanley and Jasja’s lives are incredible testimonies of devotion, hard work, and positivity. When asked about the secret of living an honorable life, the Dudkos answered in unison, “Pray!”

“And love one another,” Stanley added with a wink.

Wise words from a Belmont Abbey treasure.
The fingerprints of 50+ years
Father David Brown’s remarkable legacy at Belmont Abbey College
By Julia Long

Those of us outside the monastery are naturally curious about what life might be like on the inside.

After more than 50 years as a Benedictine — putting one foot in front of the other, as he describes it — Fr. David Brown, OSB, provides a glimpse into the heart of monastic life. He embodies the Benedictine hallmarks of stability and obedience, prayer and conversation, discipline, stewardship, humility, hospitality, community, and love.

Born in 1946 to a Presbyterian father and a Catholic mother in Mooresville, North Carolina, Fr. David was raised Catholic. However, not everyone accepted his faith.

“I was one of four Catholics in my high school,” he remembered, “and this was during a time when people didn’t really understand Catholics. Some of my classmates thought Catholics weren’t Christians. So it was kind of interesting to be a Catholic, to say the least.”

Monastic vocation

Although Fr. David remembers monks filling in for priests at his local parish from time to time, it wasn’t until his junior year at Appalachian State University that he began to contemplate monastic life.

“I began to think it might be something I wanted to look into,” he recalled. While teaching in the Charlotte Mecklenburg school system, he began to attend Mass and vespers regularly at Belmont Abbey, where the monks’ prayer became a part of his life. But after he picked up a copy of the Rule of St. Benedict, he said, “that’s when it clicked.”

Saint Benedict’s invitation to “listen,” penned in St. A17, was the impetus for a young David Brown to embrace monastic life over a thousand years after the saint’s influential writing. Today, Fr. David looks back at a life of faithful service to God and community as one of the fruits of that call.

The transition to monastic life required some adjustments, but Fr. David said he found a true home among his fellow monks and the college community at Belmont Abbey.

“I loved being around the other monks,” he said. At first, it was the Divine Office, the daily life of prayer in the monastery, that kept him there. “But in the end it was the people.”

In keeping with this love for his community, Fr. David became a welcoming and stable presence for his fellow monks. Abbot Placid Solari, OSB, said Fr. David made him feel like part of the family when he joined the Abbey.

“A favorite memory of Fr. David is our time spent together in Bavaria the summer before I entered the monastery,” he explained. “I had obtained a summer job doing unskilled labor and Fr. David, who was studying in Rome at the time, was in Munich studying German. I was able to visit with him once in Munich and we visited the Hofbräu Haus, among other places.”

One of Fr. David’s characteristic traits is his dedication to others, said Simon Donoghue, a friend and co-worker of more than 40 years.

“He has been one of the people who has absolutely made the Abbey better through his presence.”

Abbot Placid concurs.

“There are many things for which I am grateful for Fr. David. One that stands out, in particular, is his dedication and service to the liturgical life of the monastic community. He has served as a cantor for the liturgy for over four decades. His most significant contribution might well be the enormous amount of labor he has expended on arranging the Liturgy of the Hours for the monastic community. It has a nice balance and reflects well the changes in the seasons of the church’s liturgical year.”

Life of service

Shortly after professing his vows, Fr. David began teaching theology courses and serving as Registrar, through which he discovered the added joy of connecting with students. He was ordained to the priesthood...
on June 29, 1975. In an extension of his beloved monastic community over the years, he has formed lasting relationships with students and alumni, providing spiritual guidance — even after they left the Abbey.

Reflecting on the golden jubilee of his monastic profession earlier this year, Fr. David said, “This experience isn’t something I’d trade for the world. Over time, a certain degree of love develops in and among people. All of a sudden, when this person isn’t here, there’s a gap there — something is missing. That’s part of any life but monastic life, too.

“When I entered the monastery, I had an idealized picture of what a monk was. I wondered if I could measure up, but I very quickly realized monks are human beings. On some level, this realization was kind of a letdown,” he said with a chuckle.

“But that was also encouraging because I realized monks also get into mood and bark at people, so when it happens to me, then I don’t feel like I’ve let the whole thing down.”

After a quick pause, he waved his hand and said, “Not that I shouldn’t strive to be the kind of person I think a monk ought to be!”

“Particularly for monks,” he continued, “one thing that pulls us along is [thinking]. "Okay, I’m a novice, then simply professed, then solemnly professed, then studying for the priesthood." Suddenly, the long life stretches out in front of you with no more milestones, and there’s nothing more to look forward to. At this point, people start to wonder why they’re doing this. But it’s at this point that you realize it’s about perseverance and that God is calling one to this life. For me, at least, that’s what happened.”

Father David’s example teaches us that living one’s vocation is not about achieving perfection or reaching particular milestones. Rather, faithfulness requires that we live each moment as its own response to God’s call.

“Father David has been a model of stability for the community,” said Abbot Placid. “He is very much attached to the Abbey at its heart and has dedicated his life’s work to the Abbey and its college. Father David has enriched the monastic community’s life in ways too numerous to mention. To use a favorite phrase of Abbot Oscar [Burnett], his fingerprints are all over the place.”

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Julia Long
Education Board Chair
Chairman, School Board of Trustees of Belmont Abbey College
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Optimal metrics
Student-athlete and entrepreneur Chuck Solomon makes an impact beyond the basketball court
By Debbie Windley and Laura Schaffer

As Charles Solomon — Chuck to his friends and family — weighed his options for college, something he heard on a tour at Belmont Abbey helped cement his decision.

“Coach Stephen Miss [Vice President, Director of Athletics] told me that Belmont Abbey College is not a four-year decision; it’s a 50-year decision,” Chuck explained. “That conversation — plus the college’s focus on the development of mind, body, and spirit — made my decision an easy one.”

Thus began the incredible collegiate experience for the New Jersey native and Belmont Abbey senior who excels in the classroom, on the basketball court, and now as owner of Solomon Media Management, a digital marketing firm.

The summer before his junior year, the Sports Management major worked as a Fan Engagement Specialist with the Gastonia Honey Hunters.

“I noticed the team didn’t have anyone operating social media during the games,” Chuck explained. “So, I asked the team owner, Brandon Beltamy, if I could do that for the team, and Brandon gave me the go-ahead.”

The experience solidified Chuck’s interest in digital marketing.

After the summer experience with the Honey Hunters, Chuck secured his first independent digital media client — a Superior Court judge candidate. After completing the work for that client, he continued to look for opportunities to make connections and grow his network.

During lunch at a local pharmacy counter, Chuck struck up a conversation with Phil Cherry, a local business leader and Belmont Abbey alumnus. Phil soon hired Chuck to do digital marketing for both his company and the Gaston County Sports Hall of Fame.

Over the past year, Chuck has continued to push himself, interning last summer with Omnicom Media Group in Manhattan, one of the world’s largest marketing firms. Getting up at 5:30 a.m. to make the commute in from New Jersey where much of his family lives, Chuck arrived each morning at Omnicom, eager for whatever challenges might be in store.

Marketing is a fast-moving industry, full of exciting opportunities. Chuck said he relished the chance to connect...
with leaders in the field, learn how major companies spend their marketing dollars, work with people actively pursuing excellence in customer experience, and explore the analytical foundations of industry standards and strategies.

Beyond disciplining him to a strict, daily routine, Chuck’s internship invited the kind of growth that only comes with learning from experts in the field. By the time he returned to Belmont Abbey in August, Chuck had so expanded his knowledge of the analytical side of marketing that he found himself not only able to engage with the creative side, to which he’s always gravitated, but also to understand the data and use it to articulate a narrative vision.

This internship has been “one of the greatest experiences of my adult life,” Chuck said, and attending Belmont Abbey College has been “maybe the best decision of my life.” Each has confirmed in some way what he aspires to do and to be, he said.

Chuck is one of those individuals who makes an impact wherever he is and whatever he is doing.

“Chuck is a leader on our team, but not just in terms of scoring,” explained teammate Bolko Bejovic. “He encourages us to be the best version of ourselves and leads by example. Our team’s core value is ‘we over me’ and Chuck exemplifies that in everything he does. We are lucky to have him on the team.”

As for the future, Chuck plans to pursue an MBA after graduating from the Abbey next year and continue growing his digital marketing business.

“The beautiful thing about this life and this career is that it’s taking me to new places,” Chuck said.

An ambitious problem-solver and someone always looking for ways to help others, Chuck is eager to climb and build a network of like-minded people who can change the world. We look forward to watching the career of this student-athlete entrepreneur unfold, wherever the Lord takes him.

DEBBIE WINLEY, Director of Corporate and University Relations
LAURA SCOFIELD, Director of Communications for the Office of College Relations

BELMONT ABBEY CRUSADERS

CROSSROADS I 15
Phil Murph’s visionary leadership

‘They know him by his footsteps’

By Laura Schaffer

If you’ve ever enjoyed the privilege of an official, Phil Murph guided tour of Lions Services in Charlotte, North Carolina, I’d be willing to bet you won’t see the world the same way again.

Walking out of the office after my tour — and into 90-degree sunlight with the sprawling 60,000 square-foot facility behind me — I had to shade my eyes and look back one more time before climbing into my car.

As a sighted person, I could pull out of the parking lot and navigate the ongoing road work between Lions and the freeway. I could merge onto I-85 and drive myself north to my office in Stowe Hall.

Belmont Abbey connection

Today, Phil’s vision, which improved as a child and young adult, has plateaued at a level of legal blindness. With the help of corrective lenses, he can read magnified print or track the familiar shapes of the people in his life. In the years before he began working at Lions, his disability all but obliterated his job prospects because he didn’t qualify for a driver’s license.

Yet sitting with me in his office and explaining optic nerve hypoplasia, the grown-up Phil just grinned his mild but irresistible grin and joked that he ought to go buy a lottery ticket on those one-in-ten-million odds.

When Phil visited Belmont Abbey College as a high school upperclassman in the late 1990s, he remembers hearing Abbot (then Father) Placid Solari speak. Though he’d be hard pressed to repeat precisely which words most moved him, he left that day with a warm conviction of what this education and this community could mean for him.

BAC was not specifically equipped at the time to accommodate blind or visually impaired students. Still, I suspect that Phil — although certainly engaging and good natured — has always been quietly fearless in pursuit of the good, and he gently pushed outside his comfort zone as he adjusted to life at Belmont Abbey.

Looking back 20 years later, he enjoyed recounting the memory of learning to be an active participant in the BAC community, which meant growing more capable and more self-confident while also learning to accept, and even ask for, others’ help.

A formative part of Phil’s BAC education was the contemplative reflection on what is good, true, and beautiful — especially in his continued conversations with Abbot Placid. His college experience firmly grounded him in the liberal arts tradition — and it led to him discovering his vocation when he met his wife, Tiffany (née Whaley) (BAC ’01), on campus.
Vision and community

Lions Services, which specializes in manufacturing and textiles, is a military contractor. The company crafts a variety of quality products, including backpacks, chin straps, helmet bands, hydration carriers, physical training pants, and Humvee seat cushions.

As president and CEO, Phil is not only able to give a full account of the company’s products, organization, and goals, but also a sense of the vision and the community that Lions Services embodies. In fact, for Phil and his employees, vision and community are actually so intertwined as to be effectively inseparable.

Above everything else, Lions Services has a mission to “provide vocational rehabilitation and employment opportunities to individuals who are blind or visually impaired and to provide eye care for those within our community who need financial assistance. We intend to provide these individuals with lifelong opportunities and choices that promote personal and economic independence for an enhanced quality of life, while respecting their dignity and right of self-determination.”

“Tam want to help blind people,” Phil explains.

That was the first thing that came to mind when Phil’s career counselor asked what he wanted to do. Even before articulating a major or a career path — or knowing what it would mean to try and do what he was suggesting — Phil had a mission. When pressed, he added, “I want to study computers and help blind people.” In the years that followed, he would gradually realize that computers were not his calling, but he never wavered from this deeper sense of purpose.

Today, Lions Services partners with the National Industries for the Blind to create as many jobs as possible for the visually impaired. If a machine can be outfitted to enable a blind person to complete what was once a sighted job, the company makes the change. If Phil recognizes a community need — like improving the crossword in front of Lions Services to protect his employees on their way to work — he won’t stop until he has resolved the problem.

As Phil led me and my College Relations colleagues on a tour of the Lions’ facilities, we recognized the mission and the vital sense of community at every table and under every pair of working hands, 75 percent of which belonged to blind or visually impaired men and women.

The mutual respect and affection between Phil and his employees grew clearer and clearer as he introduced us to one person after another. We met office personnel, floor supervisors, and employees who are actively engaged in production tasks.

We met Eric, who had just run his second 100-mile marathon in Vermont — finishing in 26 hours and exhausting five sighted partners along the way. We spoke with Bruce, who serenaded us and Phil with his signature tune “Daddy’s Home.” We tried, without much success, to feel the difference between two sides of an adhesive strip, something which Laurie, Phil noted, could do with flawless accuracy before sewing down the correct side.

Each of these individuals greeted us with warm openness; each had severe or total vision impairment; and each demonstrated, along with their obvious competence, an equally assured belonging. The more we saw inside this massive facility, the clearer it became just how much everyone — not only Phil, but each person we met — took their roles to heart.

One big, happy family

Lions Services’ mission statement — along with the vision and value statements — was crafted by the employees themselves. The company is truly a community with a shared mission, a family pursuing much more than the most recent military contract. That sense was repeatedly confirmed a few weeks later when we gathered for Lions Services’ open house.

“We’re in the business of hope restoration,” said Rufus Crawford, a charter member of the North Carolina Lions Club, Lions Services employee, and Phil’s friend for 18 years. After asking us to join him in praying daily for Phil and the company, he told us, “These are truly crucial times through which we are passing, and we’ve got to stick together. ... We’re one big happy family here.”

When Phil himself addressed the open house a few minutes later, he spoke proudly of this family as one that aims to “do better tomorrow than we do today.”

“We are looking for the future,” he said, promising that “NIB [the National Institute for the Blind] and Lions will serve this underserved community” with the mental and spiritual vision necessary to life and flourishing.

As the event was ending, Phil’s father stood to offer a prayer and bless the barbecue lunches prepared for the whole community. It was a prayer that addressed and included the Belmont Abbey delegation, a narrative prayer, and one that filled his body with conviction.

“They know him by his footsteps,” he prayed, thanking God with a father’s emotion in his son’s vocation.

And it’s true. The men and women at work on the manufacturing floor greet Phil by name before he even speaks. They know him by his footsteps.

Phil said Belmont Abbey taught him both to depend on others and to empower himself, affirming community in its most authentic sense of giving and receiving love. This reality, moreover, with its roots firmly in the living Benedictine tradition, remains fully alive between the raised yellow lines running up and down the floor of Lions Services — and amid all the clutter of machines sewing or singing or pressing garments into place.

I recognized it when Phil demonstrated the special computer he’d brought into the common break area. On it, any employee could magnify a letter and have the words read aloud to them. It’s the only one of its kind in the country.

The Benedictine hallmarks of community, stewardship, love, humility, and stability — all are visible in the men and women working here, in Phil himself, and the way he speaks about his wife and two sons, his Lions Services family, and their children. This community, whose needs he hopes to meet far into the future through growth and diversification, is at its core a Benedictine one.

LAURA SCHAEFFER
Director of Communications
for the Office of College Relations

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CROSSROADS 18
Coming home to the Honors College

By Laura Schaffer and Jenny Ryan ’06

Those of us blessed to belong to the Belmont Abbey community—alumni and friends alike—have come to know and love this remarkable place as more than the sum of its parts. Beyond clear-carrying bells or inches-thick books, beyond the aspirated stride of monks’ robes, the seminars in Grace Auditorium, or crepe myrtle and Carolina wrens, we share that mission-graced more that rests in the knowledge that God has brought us together here.

Dr. Thomas Varacalli ’11 and Christine Bazi ’07 first joined us as freshmen in Fall 2007, the same semester that Dr. Eugene Tuott established the Belmont Abbey Institute, from which today’s Honors College, led by Dr. Joe Wysocki ’04, originates.

Tuott had envisioned a program that would cultivate a love of learning, inviting students to engage with Truth, with each other, and with the great texts of the Western tradition. The outcome: thoughtful, analytical, and compassionate men and women. Not only would Varacalli and Bazi become founding members of this new program, but they would also come to embody and embody the enduring value of its particularly Benedictine character.

To the life-affirming liberal arts, BAC’s Honors College adds a Benedictine emphasis on the depth of life in community. Pursuing education in this active, communal form—and within the stability of an intellectual and spiritual tradition—Belmont Abbey’s Honors graduates become lifelong learners, good spouses, and responsible citizens (or, in other words, thriving human persons capable of authentic community). They go on to enrich countless families, vocations, and fields—from academia to agriculture—having learned to think clearly, communicate effectively, and love the Truth.
Embarking on this reality, Basil and Varacalli not only remain friends and members of the Belmont Abbey alumni family more than a decade after graduation, but with Varacalli’s installation as full-time faculty this semester, they are now also colleagues within the Honors College itself.

In shifting from student to professor at his alma mater, Varacalli expected to find the transition challenging, as most significant changes are. He’d taught political science at Texas State since earning his Ph.D. However, the prospect of moving through loved, familiar spaces from the vantage of a new vocation, with new responsibilities and expectations, felt unnerving. In mid-August, he even found himself preparing to move into his former Latin professor’s office. The space where Dr. Gerald Mabry’s desk and couch had stood was all too familiar. He wondered how he might fill the office with his own literal and metaphorical furniture. But where Varacalli had anticipated a difficult adjustment, he found himself marvelling, instead, at the warmth sense of coming home.

Even beyond recognizing the friendly faces of staff members over the first few weeks, Varacalli said he found Belmont Abbey still to be the homeplace of stability and prayer he remembered. And like all true homes, it embraced him in his new role as fully as it had in the old, offering fresh means of participation in the familiar Honors College. Now, as Varacalli enjoys his first semester of teaching at Belmont Abbey College, he joins Basil once more in what amounts to an active, innate invitation to the kind of community that engages the whole human person. Already, his eager and joyful enthusiasm for “truth brings something more than knowledge to the classroom, and he looks forward to further cultivating that authentic, Benedictine community among a new cohort of students.

At least once a quarter since returning to her alma mater as a professor, Basil opens her home to students for a home-cooked dinner and an evening bonfire. Sitting around Basil’s table, students feel at home. Hearts and minds are opened. Real conversation and community emerge. The community aspect of the Honors College doesn’t end with the bonfires. Students and professors attend the Charlotte Symphony, conferences, and cultural events together. Basil hosts women’s office hours for tea and conversation. Impromptu frisbee games and dinners are a common occurrence.

“When you share more than just time in the classroom, you have a shared way of thinking and talking.”

“The classroom times and the social times combined enable you to know the other person so much more—to have deeper conversation and understanding of the subjects and texts we are studying. When you share more than just time in the classroom, you have a shared way of thinking and talking. It becomes a gaze of love upon the Truth and upon one another,” Basil said. As the students cook and eat, sing, and laugh together, a community grows and blossoms. Lifelong friendships are solidified, and suddenly, Aristotle’s lesson on friendship doesn’t feel so distant or ancient.

Benedictine hallmarks pulse through Belmont Abbey’s Honors College. As students graduate and move into the workplace, they take what they have experienced here and share it with the world. They not only share the wisdom of Plato’s Gorgias with its clarity of movement toward the objective and the true, or even the conviction of that “dearest freshness, deep down things” sprung bright from great poetry, but also that communion at the heart of community, a rooted space of rest, of table and shelter, of Abbey home.

LAURA SCHAFFER, Director of Communications for the Office of College Relations; JENNIFER RYAN, Associate Director, Office of College Relations.
Schola at the Abbey: Finding true community

By Dianna Nganga

John Carlson, an animated and personable freshman, excitedly started his first semester at Belmont Abbey College this fall. From an early age, John had contemplated coming to the Abbey. He received a classical education through high school, which sparked his appreciation for the Great Books, and his big sister graduated from Belmont Abbey ahead of him.

Belmont Abbey College’s Schola is a week-long summer program for high school students to read classic works of philosophy and literature, engage in group discussions with Honors College faculty, and experience the local culture and recreation of Charlotte, North Carolina.

In the summer of 2021, John’s mother discovered the program and suggested that he go. John considered the thought of leaving his home in Douglasville, Georgia, to stay for a week in Charlotte without his family. With only a week’s notice, he took a leap of faith and went.

John remembers Schola fondly—especially playing ultimate frisbee! “They found a really healthy balance between work and play,” he said.

Not only did John enjoy sailing at the U.S. National Whitewater Center and hiking in the mountains, but he also revelled in the Socratic learning style of Schola. This experience recollected his earlier education. He enjoyed the juxtaposition of diving into the Great Books with exploring new places each day.

But out of all his experiences, John’s favorite part of Schola was the community. As a self-proclaimed “family guy,” he said that finding the right community is important.

Reminiscing on his time at Schola, John said, “If I can find good roots and friends and teachers, that makes my life easier as a family guy.” He said he highly recommends Schola, noting that the program pushes each student to expand his community.

Now that John is a freshman at the Abbey and a student in the Honors College, he’s already finding himself inspired by his classes with Mrs. Christine Bal and Dr. Joseph Wysocki. According to John, the two instructors have a way of “always keeping you on the edge.”

John looks forward to life at Belmont Abbey and to deepening those Schola friendships for years to come.

James W. Crawford III, BAC ’79, a former Navy officer and judge advocate general, was named the sixth president of Felician University last year. He’s the first Black president and the first male to hold the position at the Catholic school.

Tell us about Felician.

Felician University is one of 23 Franciscan universities in the U.S. Ranked among the top private colleges in New Jersey, Felician was founded as a Normal School for women and girls for religious service as a Felician sister. The university now engages more than 2,300 undergraduate, graduate, and adult education students in over 60 degree programs. The university’s enduring purpose is to promote a love for learning, a desire for God, self-knowledge, service to others, and respect for all creation.

What attracted you to Felician University?

My parents poured into me the values of faith, family, and service. Through their example, they taught me that contributing to the welfare of others is more of a measure of value than are personal achievements. During my time at Belmont Abbey, I experienced the teachings of my parents every day in the boundless generosity of the Benedictine brothers. They instilled within me humility and self-sacrifice as a personal ethos. These early formative experiences attracted me to Felician, as the objective of the university is to put God’s good news into action and, through the education of the whole person, to build a better world.

After serving in the Navy you could have retired. Instead, you’ve taken on this leadership role. What inspires you in this dedication to the service of others?

It was a great privilege to serve the citizens of this nation as a member of the U.S. Navy. I believe if you have the capacity and opportunity to serve in big or small ways, you should take the opportunity to serve. The late Father Ted Hesburgh, the long-time president of Notre Dame, said, “the Catholic university must be a crossroads where all the intellectual and moral currents of our times meet and are thoughtfully considered.” Catholic universities, like Belmont Abbey College and Felician University, are doing essential work for the nation, different from the important work of the Navy, but important nonetheless. I felt the call to be a part of that important work.

How do you aim to carry out the mission of Felician University?

Carrying out the mission is a natural outgrowth of my learning experiences at Belmont Abbey, my service in the military, and my Catholic faith. At Felician, we seek to bring each student to their highest potential while instilling competence, character, and compassion. Like Belmont Abbey College, Felician University is a pre-eminent Catholic and forward-thinking institution preparing students for a rapidly changing world.

In what ways do you continue to support the mission of the Abbey or derive value from the College?

I try to offer some measure of my time, talent, and treasure to the Abbey’s mission to “educate students in the liberal arts and sciences so that in all things God may be glorified.” My offerings are meager, but I was blessed with the great and enduring gift of a Belmont Abbey College education in the fullness of mind, body, and spirit. I try to give back so that others may also experience the goodness that is the Abbey.
The Book of Kells illuminates hearts and minds
Belmont Abbey College acquires replica of famous ancient manuscript

Before our beloved campus had Stowe Hall, St. Leo’s, or any of the Abbey landmarks we admire today, it had books.

When Father Herman Wolfe, OSB, and his first two students arrived in April 1879, they brought their books and began classes. Even with the tremendous growth over the past century and a half, the importance and tradition of books remain strong at the College. Even beyond the ubiquitous textbooks found across classrooms, dorms, Holy Grounds, and any number of outdoor spaces, the Abbey’s rare books collection boasts over 12,000 titles—many of which are early books and manuscripts dating back to the 15th century.

One recent addition to the library’s collection has Don Beagie, Director of the Abbot Vincent Taylor Library, particularly excited. With funds raised during the 2021 Founder’s Day Campaign, the library purchased a complete replica—or facsimile—of the famous ancient manuscript, The Book of Kells.

“High-quality, yet reasonably affordable facsimiles are a product of modern technology with high-resolution scanning and reproduction printing,” Beagie explained. “Yet I find it interesting that this very distinctly echoes the role of a medieval monastic scriptorium, where monks would faithfully reproduce treasured originals.”

much of Western education as they faithfully copied books and beautifully illuminated manuscripts in scriptoriums, preserving art and language. Now, in the 21st century, our Benedictine college continues that tradition, albeit in a new and modern way.

Dr. Patrick Wadden, Chair of the History Department, noted that “seeing these beautiful objects in the person brings students into direct contact with the world of the medieval monks who created them, bridging a gap of time and space.”

Beagie concurs.

“Facsimiles play a role that serve both instruction and preservation. Original texts, often centuries old, are typically too fragile and too valuable for classroom instruction.”

By making facsimiles available, originals like The Book of Kells can stay safely stored for preservation while students study their content.

The Abbey’s rare books collection preserves history while carrying on an essential monastic tradition. Acquiring manuscripts and facsimiles “illustrates the dual roles that an academic library plays,” Beagie explained, “as both a repository of rare collections and a resource for instruction. It positions the library at the heart of the learning process,” where students have hands-on access to the traditions on which their culture and society stand.

The library welcomes visitors who would like to catch an up-close glimpse of this piece of history now accessible to all at the Abbey.

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Save the Date
2023 Events at Belmont Abbey

Campaign Launch
February 18, 2023

Benedict Leadership Institute Award
March 30, 2023

Founders Day
April 21, 2023

Graduation Reception
May 12, 2023
CHRIS JOHNSTON ’73
When Chris attended college here, his uncle was the priest who later became Abbott Benedict McDermott, O.S.B. Chris went on to enter the seminary but left after earning an MA. He added a MSW before a 35-year career in developing and managing affordable housing. He recently retired.

STEVE OHMISIONE ’79
Steve retired from Channel 3 WROC in Rochester. He has won several awards over the years from the Associated Press, United Press International, and was selected as the 2001 North Carolina Reporter of the Year. He is a multiple regional Emmy winner and a national Emmy nominee.

JIM KIRBY ’83
For the last 35 years (except for during COVID), Jim has organized the Belmont Abbey Day at the Races in July at the Monmouth Park Racetrack in Oceanport, New Jersey.

THOMAS R. HANLEY JR. ’85
Tom retired in 2018 from the Corporation for National and Community Service (AmeriCorps) as Chief Information Officer. Today he’s Chief Technology Officer at The Green Technology Group. He’s been married to Abby almum Donna (White) Hanley for 32 years. They have three children.

JOSEF SCHMID ’88
Joe retired as a Major General in the Air Force Reserve after 35 years of service. He continues as a full-time NASA Flight Surgeon and is the lead for Medical Operations for the Orion vehicle program, which will take humans back to the Moon and on to Mars. In October 2021, Josef was the first human “Holoported” off the earth to the international space station.

FR. RICHARD SUTTER ’91
Father Sutter served in the U.S. Army after graduation. After entering the seminary and being ordained to the priesthood in 2009, he served in the dioceses of Atlanta and Savannah. He is now pastor of St. Gabriel Catholic Church in Charlotte.

MARK MATTHEWS Honors ’93
Mark is a solo attorney in his 23rd year of practicing law, currently representing veterans and their families who seek benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. He is a certified executive coach providing leadership coaching, financial coaching, and coaching for young people who feel lost in the modern world. A few years ago, he took a three years leave to homeschool his children, relying on his Honors program education to teach them the history of Western civilization.

CATHERINE (RUMORE) HAHN ’02
Catherine and her husband, Jeff, have been married for 18 years and were blessed with 10 children, eight on earth. They homeschool through high school. Catherine is grateful for her time at the Abbey and the lessons she learned in and outside the classroom through various people and opportunities.

BETSY KEEFER SHORES ’02
Betsy has served as Town Clerk in the Town of Davidson since 2015. She recently obtained the North Carolina Municipal Clerks Certification through the School of Government at UNC-Chapel Hill.

MATTHEW PAUL FERRANTE ’93
Matt and Jessica (George) ’04 welcomed their ninth child, Caterina Marguerite-Marie in 2021.

1990s

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2000s

ESTHER (VISHAL) CAMARATA ’11
Esther and Vincent Camarata ’12 welcomed their third child, Benedict Placid Camarata, in 2021.

THOMAS PARKER HOLAND ’13
Thomas received the Ministries Award at the Election Center’s national conference in Scottsdale, Arizona. He is a former county elections director and Lee County Board of Elections’ staff.

SHARON KAREL ’13
Sharon recently accepted a position as librarian for Organon & Co., a pharmaceutical company that specializes in women’s health.

KARA (MICHAELS) BECKER ’15
Kara and her husband Michael ’14 welcomed their third child, David Augustine, in August.

JOANNA (RUEBESIEL) COLCLOUGH ’15
Joanne recently started working at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. She is a reference librarian in the newspaper and current periodical reading room where she helps researchers navigate newspapers, magazines, comic books, and government documents.

2020s

ADRIANNA HODGES ’20
Addie Hodges accepted a 60 percent scholarship and is in the process of completing her first year of law school.

JACQUELINE MARIE ADAMS ’20
Jacque is currently working on her Master’s in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Divine Mercy University and is engaged to be married later this year.

JOSEPH YELLOCO ’21
Joseph is studying for the priesthood in Rome. It was not until the end of his time at Belmont Abbey College that his vocation took hold of him. At first, Joseph discovered a vocation with the monks at Belmont Abbey but was eventually drawn to the life of a parish priest.

EMILY ROSE (CARLSON) COLLIE ’17
Emily and her husband welcomed their second daughter last year.

LAURA (CARLSON) BRENNER ’17
Laura married Alex Brenner in June.

GRACE BRUNO ’17
After graduating from the Honors College, Grace moved to Washington, D.C., where she works for Senator Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.) as a Legislative Assistant, specializing in health care policy. She recently began her advanced degree with Belmont Abbey College and is pursuing a Master’s in Healthcare Administration.

ELISA (TORRES) NEFF ’17
Elisa earned her MA in Philosophy from the University of Dallas and married Alex Neff this past summer. Both Elisa and Alex are working as visiting instructors in the Honors College as they finish their doctoral dissertations.

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#GivingTuesday is your chance to make a difference

G
iving Tuesday is a global initiative that encourages people to donate their time and money to charitable causes on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving — this year, Nov 29.

Athletics

This Giving Tuesday, you can prepare Abbey athletes to compete at the highest level.

Sports have long played an important role in campus life at Belmont Abbey College. Over 800 Abbey students — two-thirds of our student body — are participating in our 41 programs.

On Giving Tuesday, you can be the reason our student-athletes can pursue their passions and grow in virtue through playing sports at Belmont Abbey College. Your gift will have an immediate impact on our sports programs as the coaches have compiled lists of immediate needs that will directly enhance their team’s abilities to succeed.

Check out the sports teams’ Giving Tuesday wish lists:

bac.edu/giving

Please consider supporting your favorite Belmont Abbey College team as we collectively strive to reach the $300,000 Giving Tuesday goal.

When you make a gift of $25 or more to one of our Abbey Athletics teams, you become a member of the Crusaders Club. The Crusaders Club is a group of supporters who are dedicated to the success of Belmont Abbey College Athletics. As a Crusaders Club member, you will get a custom keychain and thunder sticks to show your school spirit and cheer on your favorite Abbey team!

If you make a gift of $1,000 or more or support any of our Abbey Athletics with a monthly donation, you join our exclusive Champions Club. Champions Club members receive a limited-edition sports jacket with a Champions Club member patch, as well as custom content from our Sports & Virtue Institute, discounts at our sponsor establishments, and much more.

This Giving Tuesday go all in #ForTheRed

Greatest needs

This Giving Tuesday, invest in the mission of Belmont Abbey College.

You can support students for a successful professional career, built on a foundation of sound moral and spiritual virtues. Most importantly, you can prepare students to be a blessing to themselves and others for the rest of their lives.

This year, you have the greatest opportunity to impact the most students in the history of Belmont Abbey College. Why is that?

Because this year, we have more students learning and growing at the Abbey than ever before — 1,500 strong. But with more students come growing needs. This is where you can make the greatest difference. Your gift today will make an immediate impact by providing funds for:

- Classroom & campus improvements
- Academic program investments
- Faculty enrichment

Most importantly, your gift will have an immediate and lasting impact on the lives of many students — ensuring they go on to a great career and a life built upon a sound moral and spiritual foundation.

This can only be accomplished through generous financial support from donors like you.

Make your gift to Belmont Abbey College today!

bac.edu/gt

The Abbey You Know and Love

Get a Master’s Degree with us and take your career to the next level.

We are thrilled to add a Master of Business Administration, Master of Arts in Leadership, and Master of Science in Strategic Analysis to our Master’s Degree offerings. Advance in your career and develop as a transformational leader under the guidance of your favorite faculty and spiritual mentors.

Plus, our affordable online programs deliver the same Abbey quality you experienced as an undergraduate. Whether you’re looking for a Master’s in Healthcare or a Master’s in Business, we’ve got you covered.

Learn. Seek. Thrive.
“Our faculty do more than teach. They serve as supportive mentors, steadfast cheerleaders, and exceptional role models to our students.”

- Dr. Travis Feezell, Provost

Find out how you can secure a Master’s degree from our #1 rated professors.