



**Belmont Abbey**  
COLLEGE

*That in all things God  
may be glorified*

**For Immediate Release**

Contact: Rolando Rivas

P: 704-461-6561 E: rolandorivas@bac.edu

## **Belmont Abbey College Names Recipient of 2023 Benedict Leadership Award**

**Belmont, N.C. (February 27, 2023)** – The Benedict Leadership Institute at Belmont Abbey College is thrilled to recognize Nina Shea as the recipient of the 2023 Benedict Leadership Award. This award highlights the incredible achievements of men and women whose lives reflect the heroic leadership of St. Benedict.

Belmont Abbey College founded the Benedict Leadership Institute in 2016 to develop Catholic leaders and inspire them to transform society in light of their faith. Mrs. Shea is the sixth recipient of the Benedict Leadership Award and has been a human rights lawyer for over 30 years. She works extensively for the advancement of individual religious freedom and other human rights in US foreign policy as religious freedom confronts an ascendant Islamic extremism, and other authoritarian regimes. She advocates in defense of those persecuted for their religious beliefs and identities and advocates on behalf of diplomatic measures in order to end religious repression and violence abroad, whether from state actors or extremist groups.

Mrs. Shea was appointed by the US House of Representatives to serve as a commissioner on the US Commission on International Religious Freedom seven times from 1999 to 2012. During the Soviet era, Mrs. Shea's first client before the United Nation's was Soviet Nobel Peace Laureate Andrei Sakharov. Since then, she has been appointed as a US delegate to the United Nation's main human rights body by both Republican and Democratic administrations. She also served as a member of the Clinton administration's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad. In 2009, she was appointed to serve as a member of the US National Commission to UNESCO.

Mrs. Shea lead the effort of building grassroot support for the adoption of the International Religious Freedom Act (1998). For seven years ending in 2005, she helped organize and lead a coalition of churches and religious groups that worked to end a religious war against non-Muslims and dissident Muslims in southern Sudan. In 2014, she initiated and helped lead a coalition of hundreds of prominent American religious leaders to issue *The Pledge of Solidarity for Persecuted Iraqi, Syrian and Egyptian Christians and Other Minorities*, which was released by a bipartisan congressional panel on May 7, 2014. In summer 2014, she met with Pope Francis to discuss the persecution of Christians in the Middle East.

At Hudson, she has organized conferences for Nigerian schoolgirls and others who survived Boko Haram attacks, Christian converts formerly imprisoned in Iran, Coptic bishops from Egypt, Catholic bishops from China and the Gulf, Muslim scholars, and many others. Mrs. Shea advocates on behalf of a broad range of persecuted religious minorities around the world. For such work, she was honored by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA with the Community's inaugural "Ahmadiyya Muslim Humanitarian Award."

She has authored or edited four widely acclaimed reports on Saudi state educational materials that promote extremist views and in 2011 had an opportunity to travel to Saudi Arabia and speak directly about her findings with the ministers of Education, Justice and Islamic Affairs. Her reports include: *Ten Years On: Saudi Arabia's Textbooks Still Promote Religious Violence* (2011), *Update: Saudi Arabia's Curriculum of Intolerance* (2008), *Saudi Arabia's Curriculum of Intolerance* (2006), and *Saudi Publications on Hate Ideology Invade American Mosques* (2005), all of which translated and analyzed Saudi governmental publications that teach hatred and violence against the religious "other."

She is the co-author of *Silenced: How Apostasy & Blasphemy Codes are Choking Freedom Worldwide*, with a foreword by Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid, the former President of Indonesia and head of Nahdlatul Ulama, the world's largest Muslim organization (Oxford University Press, 2011). Her most recent book, which she also co-authored, is *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2013). She regularly presents testimony before Congress, delivers public lectures, organizes briefings and conferences, and writes frequently on religious freedom issues in leading publications.

For the ten years prior to joining Hudson, Mrs. Shea worked at Freedom House, where she directed the Center for Religious Freedom, an entity which she had helped found in 1986 as the Puebla Institute.

Mrs. Shea is a member of the bar of the District of Columbia. She is a graduate of Smith College, and American University's Washington College of Law.

**About Belmont Abbey College:** Founded in 1876, Belmont Abbey College is a private, Catholic baccalaureate and liberal arts institution. Our mission is to educate students in the liberal arts and sciences so that in all things God may be glorified. Guided by the Catholic intellectual tradition and the Benedictine spirit of prayer and learning, we welcome a diverse body of students and provide them with an education that will enable them to lead lives of integrity, to succeed professionally, to become responsible citizens, and to be a blessing to themselves and to others. Our beautiful and historic campus is conveniently located just 10 miles west of Charlotte, N.C., and is currently home to more than 1500 students. For more information, visit <https://belmontabbeycollege.edu/>.

**About Benedict Leadership Institute:** The Institute was founded in 2016 by Belmont Abbey College to develop Catholic leaders and inspire them to transform society while remaining true to their faith. The Institute accomplishes this goal through publications, events and through the awarding of The Benedict Leadership Award, presented annually to an outstanding Catholic leader. For more information, please visit <https://benedictleadershipinstitute.org/>.