

THE MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF THE COLLEGE | SUMMER 2025

BELMONT ABBEY

MADE STRONG

The Abbey honors Dr. and Mrs. Thierfelder, who conclude 21 years of faithful service to Belmont Abbey College as President and First Lady.





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Since embarking on the Made True Campaign, we have been overwhelmed with gratitude. This journey has led to new heights and an increased goal of \$150 million. With more yet to accomplish, we ask for your further help to achieve our needs for:

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Belmont Abbey
COLLEGE

FROM THE PRESIDENT

In Gratitude for more than Twenty Years at the Abbey

DR. BILL THIERFELDER

President

IN MEDIEVAL TIMES, a “moment” was defined as ninety seconds.

7, 364,160. That is the number of moments that I have been blessed to be the President of Belmont Abbey College. Each of those moments, the miraculous and the mundane has taught me the perfection of the present moment. To say, “Thank you, Jesus,” in every one of them and mean it.

Even so, words alone seem inadequate to express my thoughts and overwhelming gratitude to you and everyone who holds the Abbey dear. As beautiful and meaningful as the iconic gothic brick buildings on our campus may be, it is the love, friendship, fidelity, sacrifice, excellence, and virtue of Abbey men and women that make it a special place and a little slice of Heaven.

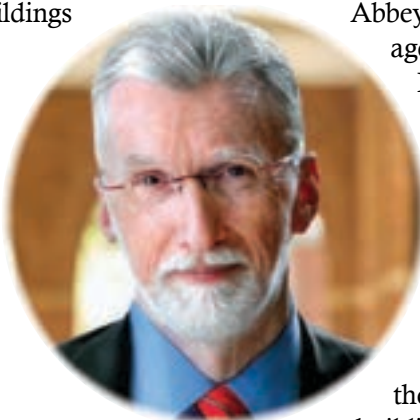
I think Cardinal John Henry Newman was envisioning Belmont Abbey when he described the characteristics of a College; he wrote: *“Moreover, it is the shrine of our best affections, the bosom of our fondest recollections, a spell upon our afterlife, a stay for world-weary mind and soul, wherever we are cast, till the end comes. Such are the attributes*

or offices of home, and like to these, in one or other sense and measure, are the attributes and offices of a College.”

Divine Providence brought us to our Abbey home twenty-one years ago, and I hope and pray that Providence will keep us here always...till the end comes. As Oblates of the monastic community and honorary alumni of the College, Mary and I look forward to spending the rest of our lives here, at our Abbey home, deepening the friendships born here and building new ones with those called here.

Thanks again and again for all you have done and continue to do for the Abbey.

God bless,



Bue

BELMONT ABBEY MAGAZINE

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ABBEY COLLEGE

MISSION STATEMENT of BELMONT ABBEY COLLEGE:

Our mission is to educate students in the liberal arts and
sciences so that in all things God may be glorified. In
this endeavor, we are guided by the Catholic intellectual
tradition and the Benedictine spirit of prayer and learn-
ing. Exemplifying Benedictine hospitality, 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.

SUMMER 2025 ISSUE

Trustful Surrender to Divine Providence

*Looking back on
twenty-one years
of excellence and
virtue* **PAGE 30**

COLUMNS

**PRESIDENT
BILL THIERFELDER**

In Gratitude

PAGE 1

**BR. BEDE MCKEON,
OSB**

**Abbot Haid's
Vision**

PAGE 4

**ABBOT PLACID
SOLARI, OSB**

**Made Strong in
Mind and Heart**

PAGE 5

BELMONT ABBEY NEWS

Caring for Our Community

The Opening of CaroMont Regional Medical Center **PAGE 6**

Dignified Care

Nursing Program Earns Full Accreditation **PAGE 8**

Community Game-Changer

A New Visual and Performing Arts Center **PAGE 9**

Hurricane Helene

Students respond to community need **PAGE 10**

Vocation and Mission

The vision behind new Belmont House initiative **PAGE 12**

The Fight for Religious Freedom

Alumnus interns with Human Rights Activist **PAGE 16**

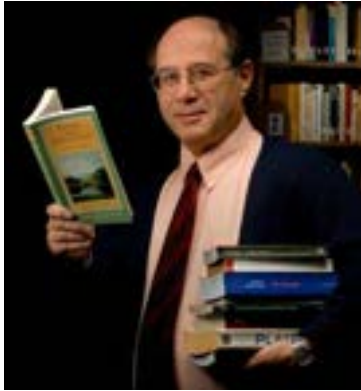
STRENGTH *and* GENEROSITY

FEATURES

A LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE

*Abbey Honors celebrates
Dr. Eugene Thuot*

PAGE 18



FROM SEMINAR TO ABATTOIR

*An Education in
the Good Life*

PAGE 56

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

*The Man behind
Belmont Abbey's new
Endowed Chair*

PAGE 22



A GOLDEN JUBILEE

*Br. Paul Shanley
celebrates 50 years
as a monk of
Belmont Abbey*

PAGE 42

Effective
Leadership for the
Common Good

PAGE 26

Preparing to
Live Well

PAGE 28

Abbey Alumni,
Future Priests

PAGE 38

To be with
Christ

PAGE 40

Faith, Family,
School, Soccer

PAGE 46

The Task
Ahead

PAGE 48

Chuck Muller,
Sr.

PAGE 52

Celebrating
40 Years of
Excellence

PAGE 60

Shared
Language,
Shared Life

PAGE 62

Abbey Alumnus
Reimagines
Apologetics

PAGE 65

Fun, Fellowship,
and our Abbey
Future

PAGE 66

Three Sisters
Find a Home

PAGE 68

ABBEY LANE UPDATE **PAGE 70**

Class Notes & In Memoriam

Abbot Haid's Vision: Made Strong by Founding Principles

BR. BEDE MCKEON, OSB

Adjunct Professor, English

THE FIRST PHOTO IN BELMONT ABBEY'S pictorial history, *Blessing the Years to Come*, depicts the fire of 1900 that incinerated two-thirds of the College Building, leaving the structure a smoldering and desolate shell. This may seem a jarring prologue to our history, but since the building was swiftly restored and still stands to this day, it is rather a testament to our longevity, to the strength that has allowed us to persevere for nearly one hundred and fifty years. It symbolizes the principles that strengthen both the Abbey and the College, granting us the blessings of endurance.

Enshrined in our Catholic faith and the Benedictine tradition, these principles endow us with strength because they are eternal. We find them in the Catholic intellectual tradition and in the great works of Western Culture so intricately woven into the college curriculum. We find them in Odysseus' journey, his quest home, upon which he must grow in virtue; we find them in Aeneas' *pietas*, his duty to divine ordering; and we find them most profoundly in Dante's suffering, purification, and celestial ascendance, so evocative of our own life's journey to The Father. But we also find them beating resoundingly in the very heart of Belmont Abbey, in St. Benedict's Rule, which instructs us to "open our eyes to the light that comes from God and our

ears to the voice of Heaven..."

From the beginning, these eternal principles were essential to Abbot Leo Haid's vision.

In his speech at the cornerstone ceremony for the College Building on May 4, 1886, Haid pronounced the structure, "God willing, a house of education. To educate young men and to expand the powers of their youthful soul, and to make that soul

more like its God...by polishing it and by instilling in it on all occasions true Christian principle." This dedication to the true Christian principle, glorifying God in all things, has strengthened the Abbey and College in faith for a century and a half and continues inexorably to transform the world by the witness of Belmont Abbey's monastic life and the students it inspires.



SCAN TO
Explore the Abbey's pictorial history, *Blessing the Years to Come*

Made Strong in Mind and Heart

ABBOT PLACID SOLARI, OSB

Chancellor

MADE STRONG, ONE OF MADE TRUE'S campaign themes, speaks to a vision we hope to realize in various ways. The need for sound financial strength likely comes first to mind: ensuring that a Belmont Abbey College education remains affordable for all students, and that the College itself continues to flourish.

Monastic resources, from Abbot Edmund McCaffrey's property development initiatives in the 1970s, have predominantly supported the good work of the College, but the monastic community has assumed substantial debt to maintain this until capital campaign goals are realized.

I encourage all friends of the Abbey – and especially alumni – to join us in ensuring the blessing of an Abbey education for generations.

Another strength is the continued ability to conduct college life and studies in keeping with the traditions and faith of the Catholic Church. Catholic colleges and universities uniquely contribute to the broad diversity of American higher education through the centuries-long intellectual tradition of mutual enrichment between truths known by faith and reason. A fundamental strength of the Benedictine tradition is the way it integrates and fosters this search for Truth. In his 1691 Treatise on Monastic Studies, French Benedictine scholar Jean Mabillon wrote: "The principal goal that monks should keep in mind in their study is the knowledge of

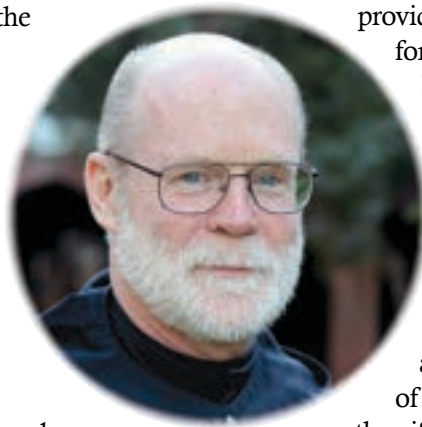
truth, and charity or the love of justice – in a word, the right ordering of the mind and heart. These are the two chief goals that not only monks but all Christians should keep in sight." It is a passage equally insightful and beautiful. In a mind

rightly ordered, the truths of faith provide the ordering principle

for all we can learn about humanity and the world.

By faith we realize that our life has meaning, purpose. Faith offers insight into the human heart's transcendent longings and moral sensitivity, guiding us in a comprehensive ordering of all we can know through the gift of reason. Meanwhile,

the right ordering of the heart, the acquisition of virtue, i.e. the strength to live the truth in all areas of life, leads to that peace, Pax, which is the true motto of Benedictine life. By this right ordering of mind and heart, a Belmont Abbey education prepares alumni for a good life in this world and the next, offering the insight and tools "to lead lives of integrity, to succeed professionally, to become responsible citizens, and to be a blessing to themselves and to others."



BELMONT ABBEY MAGAZINE

*The Opening of CaroMont Regional
Medical Center in Belmont*

Caring for Our Community

ON TUESDAY, JANUARY 7TH, a special ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrated the grand opening of the much-anticipated CaroMont Regional Medical Center

**BY SARAH
BOLTON '19**

*Marketing
Project Manager*

– Belmont. With President Thierfelder and Abbot Placid joining CaroMont executives, the event marked a new chapter for the City of Belmont and its residents.

Earlier that week, President Thierfelder and Abbot Placid had the privilege of taking a private tour of the state-of-the-art facility, guided by CaroMont Health CEO Chris Peek and Vice President of Operations Richard Blackburn, gaining insight into the hospital's state-of-the-art offerings.

**Abbot Placid
Solari, OSB
speaks to a
shared mission
of care and
hospitality.**



Belmont Abbey College welcomes this new era for the City of Belmont and for our college community. The establishment of a facility dedicated to the care of others reflects the monks' ongoing commitment to this community. Abbot Placid expressed deep gratitude for this milestone in their nearly 150-year mission of love and hospitality, emphasizing how privileged we are to be part of this collaboration. Since conversations between Chris Peek, Dr. Thierfelder, and Abbot Placid began in 2019 about a hospital serving Gaston County in Belmont, it is truly remarkable to see the hospital come to fruition—more than five years in the making.

The college is overjoyed at this new beginning and the many benefits it will bring to the broader community and our nursing students. Starting in the Fall of



Celebrating the grand opening of the new Regional Medical Center (left), CaroMont Board Members joined Abbey leadership in the ceremonial ribbon-cutting. (Pictured below, left to right: Frank Stewart, Rev. Benjamin Honton, Dr. Heath High, Abbot Placid, Dr. Thierfelder)

2025, our students will utilize space in the hospital for training and for completing clinicals. In addition, the college is equally excited to welcome CaroMont's nurses into our BSN and MSN programs in the years ahead.

During the tour, Richard Blackburn shared, "A hospital is only as good as the care the patient receives... It is about how we're going to care about that patient, one person at a time. We want to focus on caring for that patient and every staff member, understanding that that's the only thing that matters. The only thing that we're here to do is to care for people."

This partnership between Belmont Abbey College and CaroMont Health represents a shared commitment to exceptional care and education, with a lasting impact on the community for years to come. **BAC**





Mahogany Randall '25 models exceptional standards of care, uniting the best of medical science with the Benedictine hallmarks.

Dignified Care Belmont Abbey Earns Full Accreditation for Nursing Programs

**BY SARAH
BOLTON '19**

*Marketing
Project Manager*

IN OCTOBER OF 2024, Belmont Abbey announced that the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education fully accredited its Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree (BSN) and its Master of Science in Nursing Leadership degree programs (MSN). This recognition highlights the college's commitment

to developing compassionate, competent healthcare professionals grounded in faith and ethics.

Dr. Lee-Ann Kenny, Chair and Program Director of the Department of Nursing, shared, "We are deeply grateful for this accreditation, which reflects our mission of preparing nurses who not only excel in clinical skills but also embody the values of service, integrity, and compassion. Our programs are designed to educate the whole person - mind, body, and spirit, fostering both professional excellence and a commitment to the dignity and care of all individuals."

The BSN program prepares students for the role of registered nurses, focusing on holistic patient care and ethical practice, while the MSN program offers advanced training in specialized nursing roles and leadership. Both programs emphasize evidence-based practice, critical thinking, and a strong foundation in Catholic social teaching.

Accreditation is a milestone in Belmont Abbey's expansion of its nursing programs, developed in response to the growing local and regional need for ethical, highly trained healthcare leaders. The college invested in this vision through programmatic expansion, hiring new faculty, and building state-of-the-art facilities.

"Investing in the future of healthcare is part of Belmont Abbey's service to our community. Caring for the sick is a hallmark of Benedictine values, and we believe that infusing Catholic ethics and social teaching into the healthcare

curriculum sets future nurses and healthcare leaders up for success in the field," said Dr. Joseph Wysocinski, Provost at Belmont Abbey College. "We had a clear vision in mind when we developed the curriculum and student experience for these programs, and we are thrilled to welcome students as a fully accredited program."

The accreditation process involved a thorough evaluation of curriculum, faculty, student outcomes, and resources, affirming that Belmont Abbey's nursing programs met rigorous national standards. This accreditation solidifies Belmont Abbey's commitment to developing healthcare professionals who excel in their fields and embody the college's Benedictine values, ensuring a lasting impact on the communities they serve. **BAC**



SCAN TO

Explore Abbey Nursing and take a video tour of our facilities.



A New Visual and Performing Arts Center

Community Game-Changer

BELMONT ABBEY COLLEGE is working in partnership with community members to plan and build a 1,000 seat Visual and Performing Arts Center. The Abbey has agreed to provide the land, coordinate the fundraising, and manage the venue after its opening.

BY DEBBIE WINDLEY

Corporations and Foundations Relations Director

The college's Master Building Plan included the concept for this venue, which received a boost when the NC General Assembly approved \$9 million in State funding for the project in 2023. In addition, we secured the first of many naming opportunities in the venue even before hiring an architect to develop conceptual designs, and other generous donors have also already made significant pledges to the project.

As soon as the college received confirmation of State funding, we collaborated in forming a Gaston County Advisory Committee for the Arts – composed of college, business, community, and arts-



Artist's proposed, conceptual rendering captures a glimpse of the future for the arts in Gaston County.

focused nonprofit leaders to address both the college and local needs for a visual and performing arts center. Meetings, surveys, and site visits to regional venues have helped to further solidify the possibilities of such a project, while meetings between the architect, the committee, and representatives of the college have explored how best to prioritize and integrate different needs

within the design.

Identified as a major project for the One Gaston 2040 plan by Gaston County leaders and the Department of Economic Development, the Visual and Performing Arts Center is considered a “game changer” for both cultural and economic development in Gaston County and the region. **BAC**



In June, project stakeholders and Abbey leadership traveled to Raleigh to meet with NC representatives and officials. Pictured above from left to right, (front) Cam Tracy, Mary Frances Forrester, Debbie Windley, Camilla Bullard, Kerry O'Leary, Barbara Yarbrough, Steve D'Avria, Dave Wofford, Justin Amos, and Donny Hicks; (back) Rev. Dwayne Burks, Chuck Stowe, Christopher Donoghue, Jim Eddings, Phil Brach, Dr. Bill Thierfelder, Sen. Ted Alexander, Rep. John Torbett, Rep. Donnie Loftis, and Sen. Brad Overcash.



Hurricane Helene

Belmont Abbey students, faculty, and staff respond to community need

THIS PAST SEPTEMBER, the unrelenting force of Hurricane Helene struck North Carolina, making landfall and tearing a swath of destruction across the state. The storm devastated communities, leaving fallen trees, flooded streets, and homes torn apart by fierce mudslides. And while the Abbey itself was spared significant damage, many in our home state and diocese found themselves in a state of panic. The storm deeply affected numerous students, faculty, staff, their families, and friends.



**BY SARAH
BOLTON '19**
*Marketing
Project Manager*



Beginning with prayer (left), the Abbey volunteers brought joyful teamwork to clearing debris (above) and assisting recovery in Buncombe County.

Recognizing the urgent need for basic supplies, the Abbey mobilized quickly to help. The campus community gathered essential items for Catholic Charities, including food, clothing, hygiene products, and more, working together to ensure that those in Western Carolina had access to the resources they needed to rebuild and recover.

However, the desire to help didn't stop there. On the first day of fall break, faculty, staff, and students rose early, ready to travel to Asheville to support Western North Carolina in partnership with Samaritans Purse, an international Christian organization dedicated to disaster relief. A group of thirty-one individuals set out in



vans, eager to offer their hands and hearts in service. The eye-opening journey to Asheville passed devastated neighborhoods along the way, with fallen trees, destroyed homes, and roads left blocked or ruined in the aftermath.

Arriving in Asheville, the group joined an inspiring number of volunteers — so many, in fact, that Samaritans Purse had to turn later arrivals away. Each team gathered for prayer after orientation, then deployed to different job sites across the region. The Abbey group was able to travel to two different neighborhoods to help clear yards and remove leaves, brush, branches, and even uprooted trees to help residents begin the long process of recovery.

Irengé Nkere, one of the students who joined the mission, shared his thoughts on the day: “Going out to Western North Carolina was a very reflective experience. ... I was a little hesitant at first due to the cold weather and... the duration of this trip. Once arriving at the first house that changed... I was very happy that I was able to help people in need. I was left wanting to return, as I knew there were more houses that needed help. An experience like this affects all of us differently, but one thing we can all leave with in common is the feeling of empathy.”

Cassandra Mack, Human Resources Generalist at Belmont Abbey, also shared, “This journey was one of fortitude and appreciation of life and God’s creation. I have never been so moved to see the outpour of volunteers from the Abbey

and across America. Traveling to Asheville, NC, was such a humbling experience... Clearing those big trees from around [the] homes took long hours, and the tasks were tedious. But God blessed me with good health and the energy to complete the task at hand, and I would do it all over again... I enjoyed collaborating with my fellow colleagues and students and representing Belmont Abbey College.”

Working alongside local residents and volunteers, the Abbey community shared stories and laughter as they cleared the wreckage. There were moments of quiet reflection, too, as they acknowledged the toll the hurricane had taken on lives and homes. In one neighborhood, the Abbey group was surprised to find a family who knew of Belmont Abbey and had friends currently attending the college. It was a poignant reminder of how small the world can be, and the family was deeply moved to see our Crusaders helping their neighbors.

The Crusaders ended their work with Samaritans Purse as they’d begun: in prayer, lifting up all those affected in Western North Carolina alongside fellow volunteers. There was no quick fix to the devastating impact of Hurricane Helene, but the Belmont Abbey community sought to bring hope to those who needed it most. By clearing fallen trees and delivering supplies, they offered a reminder that, in times of crisis, we are never alone. As the day drew to a close, the volunteers returned to campus, exhausted but fulfilled. **BAC**

Thanks to the exceptional generosity of our alumnus, Dr. Maximo Alvarez, the Belmont House now has a permanent home on 3rd St, just blocks from the Capitol.

Vocation *and* Mission

The vision behind our new Belmont House initiative

OVER THE COMING MONTHS, Belmont House on Capitol Hill is preparing to receive undergraduate students for the College's inaugural American Semester in Washington. As we continue to host Abbey groups in town

**BY EMMETT
MCGROARTY**
*Executive Director
of Belmont House*

for the March for Life, moot court debates, career conferences, academic seminars, and networking events, the American Semester will extend the spirit of those trips: contributing to student formation and enhancing their career trajectories while bearing public witness to the many profound gifts the College has to offer the Body of Christ and the Republic. As one well-placed Washingtonian—with no connection to the College—told me several weeks ago, “Belmont Abbey students are amazing! Every single one I’ve ever met!”



Emmett McGroarty

The Abbey's gifts arise from the Benedictine tradition of living the good life, undergirded by the hallmarks of love, prayer, stability, *conversatio*, obedience, discipline, humility, stewardship, hospitality, and community. Those are not abstract ideas alien to the physical world. Rather, they encompass a 1,500-year tradition. One's mind can zip through the hallmarks, with head nods rightly affirming their truth. But their depth becomes apparent in the everyday challenges of school, family, leisure, and work. In response to the voices of modernity, which struggle to uphold or even identify the dignity of the human person, the Benedictine hallmarks offer a path steeped in human dignity.

To that end, Belmont House strives to integrate the various aspects of its mission in each of its activities. A lecture last semester by Judge Robert Conrad exemplifies that approach. By way of background, Judge Conrad is the parent, uncle, and father-in-law of Abbey graduates, as well as a former member of the Board of Trustees. He is a former federal prosecutor and just-retired federal judge, recently appointed by the Chief Justice as Director of the Administrative Office of the US Courts of the federal

judiciary. He also authored *John Fisher and Thomas More: Keeping Their Souls While Losing Their Heads*. In reflecting on their martyrdoms, as well as that of the Carthusian monks of the London Charterhouse, Conrad's book invites the reader to imagine More pondering his family's sadness as they confront his pending, torturous death. In the face of such horrors, the martyrs and More's family affirmed the practice of their faith as their most treasured, and shared, good. More's family continued sharing that practice, it seems, to the end of their days.

That was the theme of Judge Conrad's Belmont House lecture—the notion of vocation or calling, as expressed in the lives of Fisher, More, and the Carthusian martyrs and approached through the reflections of St. John Henry Newman:

God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another... Somehow I am necessary for His purposes."

That's quite an ennobling thought. God created me in his image and likeness and asks me to carry out a mission. Our first task is to discern that mission. As Conrad noted, More himself had devoted considerable energies to



St. Thomas More's witness to Truth continues to inspire vocations of faithful citizenship.

discerning his vocation, even spent time contemplating whether his vocation was to be a Carthusian monk. As Conrad put it, "Did God want him [More] to be a monk, a teacher, or a lawyer, a public servant, a harried father?"

Conrad addressed his talk to a group considerably further along in their career paths than the undergraduates who will make up

CONTINUES ON PAGE 14



Judge Conrad delivers his lecture as part of a growing number of Belmont House programs and events.

*“Through the reflections of
St. John Henry Newman:
God has created me to do
Him some definite service;
He has committed some
work to me which He has
not committed to another...
Somehow I am necessary for
His purposes.”*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

our inaugural American Semester cohort this fall. Listeners ranged from retirees to senior government and private sector executives to young professionals and graduate students. Nonetheless, his message is universal. One’s vocation is sacred, and through that vocation, we carry out God’s will and bind ourselves to other persons, human and divine. Discernment is necessary because, as Conrad noted in his talk, there “does not appear to be one ‘spiritually correct’ career path to the vocational pursuit of excellence—to the glory of God... Vocation, calling, mission, by whatever name, is not occupationally limited. It is a movement of the heart within a certain field to do all for the glory of God.”

One’s vocation always includes discerning the gifts and needs of others, which is an unfolding, continuing process. More, Fischer, the Carthusians, and we might add Conrad himself, had vocations that to the finite human mind seemed to change. But one’s vocation might more aptly be described as a path, and looking forward, we should not assume we know all the upcoming bends and turns. Conrad discussed the folly of “not fully comprehending that life is lived in the moment... of having an underlying, unspoken angst, a yearning for what’s next.” In



Hon. Samuel Brownback, former US Senator, is among the many distinguished guests and speakers who share their vision and expertise during Belmont House events.

contrast, he counseled that More and Fischer’s lives seem to stand “for the proposition that the purposeful life is accomplished more by performing well the tasks set before us rather than anxiously anticipating the next thing... We should live significant lives, but our significance must be rightly ordered behind the significance of God, for only then can we discern our life’s vocation and fulfill it in accord with his will.”

Judge Conrad’s discussion exemplifies the Belmont House mission as much through its dynamics as through its text. After the talk, speaker and attendees engaged in living room discussions on the talk itself, but also in side-bar introductions and

discussions. Some attendees raised their own discernment issues and opportunities. Across age-groups, professions, and vocations, the attendees were helping each other in their vocations and building the Body of Christ. In the same way, through the American Semester, we aim to scaffold undergraduates’ internships with fascinating lectures and opportunities for fellowship: to help prepare them to discern their vocations and be men and women of substance in their families, churches, and communities. Belmont Abbey College indeed has gifts for the common good.

Stay tuned for more information on our newest Belmont House initiatives.

BAC

From the desk of an Abbey student leader

HEY Y'ALL! My name is Youthan Love, a Class of '25 Political Science major with a double minor in Marketing and Pre-law. My Belmont Abbey experience has fundamentally informed the person I am today, developing friendships that will last a lifetime and providing countless opportunities for learning and leadership.

BY YOUTHAN LOVE '25
Political Science Major

During my freshman semester, I quickly realized I wanted to leave my mark in my four years as an Abbey student. So I strove to be as involved as possible and took on the role of freshman class Senator for the Student Government Association. Later on I was blessed to serve as the Student Body President (the first commuter student and sophomore to hold the office, so I am told).

As a freshman I also worked to reestablish the Belmont Abbey College Republicans, originally founded by former Congressman Patrick McHenry. To my delight the Department of Politics supported this idea, and they have continued to work hand in hand with the student-run club. Over the last three years I have had the distinct honor of serving the NC Federation of College Republicans, first as the Western Piedmont Regional Director, then the Executive Vice Chairman, and ultimately as the Chairman through the 2024 election cycle.

Serving as Chairman over the past year, especially during a Presidential election, has been quite remarkable. Traveling across North Carolina put 12,756 exciting miles on my car alone, not to mention out-of-state adventures



Youthan visits the US Capitol Building on a Politics Department trip to Washington, D.C.

across 13 states — and including last summer's RNC in Wisconsin! Throughout this journey I have met so many exceptional people and spoken with so many students aspiring to become more involved in politics and help shape America.

Because of the stress and the frustrations that tend to go with leadership opportunities, I am truly grateful for those who supported me as I learned and grew over the past four years, especially my parents; my close friends:

Alex Malagon, Ellie Herran, and Ian Addington; and Dr. Mary Imparato, Chair of the Politics Department. The Department of Politics played a vital role in my accomplishments and growth over the last four years, and for that I am forever grateful.

From all I've seen across the state and the country in the last year - and what I see daily on the Abbey campus - I can't wait to be a part of all that our generation can build in the coming years. **BAC**



The Fight *for* Religious Freedom

*Abbey Alumnus interns with
Human Rights Activist Nina Shea*

MY NAME IS CHRISTOPHER MEE, and I graduated from Belmont Abbey's Honors College in 2024. Given the sky-high rents in Washington, D.C., I would not have been able to intern with

**BY CHRISTOPHER
MEE '24**

*Catholic University
of America
Law Student*

Ms. Nina Shea, Director of the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Liberty, without the Abbey's generous support. Thanks to their hospitality, I stayed at the beautiful Belmont House, just steps from the

U.S. Capitol. Living in the historic Capitol Hill neighborhood, I enjoyed early-morning runs along the National Mall, conducted research in the stunning Library of Congress reading room, and explored the cafés and shops along Independence Avenue. But while I appreciated the many benefits of life at the heart of our nation's capital, my research with Ms. Shea is what moved me most profoundly, providing as it did a sobering window into the sufferings of contemporary Catholics and Christians around the world.



**The 2023 Benedict Leadership Institute
Honoree, Nina Shea.**

I first became aware of Ms. Shea's work when she received the Benedict Leadership Institute Award in 2023. As a human rights lawyer and longtime champion of religious freedom, Ms. Shea has been a pioneering advocate for persecuted believers. From her role as a delegate to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights to her tenure as a USCIRF Commissioner, she has consistently championed those oppressed for their faith, including Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and Buddhists. When I first heard her speak, I was struck by her measured yet unwavering advocacy for those suffering religious persecution.

Although eager to begin my assignment researching the lives of persecuted Catholic bishops, I did not initially grasp the full gravity of the project. While the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) openly oppressed Catholics under Mao Tse-Tung, I soon learned that under Xi Jinping, the CCP has turned to more covert means of repression, placing religious leaders under house arrest without due process and concealing their whereabouts. China has two Catholic churches: the regime-controlled Patriotic Catholic Association and the underground Catholic Church. Membership in the Patriotic Catholic Association requires pledging "independence" from the Vatican—a demand repugnant to authentic Catholicism. The association also edits the Bible, requires churches to display Xi Jinping's portrait, and mandates the inclusion of his sayings in Mass. Scouring the internet for information on clergy who refused to submit to these requirements, Ms. Shea and I pieced together their stories from scattered press releases and reports, relying primarily on the Cardinal Kung Foundation and the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions. We found that these bishops had been forced

underground and imprisoned for their faith.

Our research uncovered many examples of severe mistreatment and persecution among faithful bishops. Of these, Bishop Su of Baoding endured the longest imprisonment at 44 years, during which time he suffered brutal torture, including being suspended from the ceiling by his wrists. Authorities once beat him with a board so savagely that it splintered, prompting them to tear off the door frame to continue the beatings. But he remained steadfast. In Zhengding, state authorities raided Bishop Jia's orphanage for disabled children. Authorities in Mindong shut off Bishop Guo's heat, water, and electricity, forcing him to carry water up five flights of stairs to his room from an outdoor tap.

Yet, these men's stories also communicate grace and resilience. Bishop Guo, under house arrest, blesses the security cameras in his apartment and prays for his captors. Despite incarceration, Bishop Su "made prison his church" and preached the gospel in labor camps. In fact, a Baoding priest testified that "the influence of Bishop Fan or Bishop Su is actually the spirit of the older generation that affects

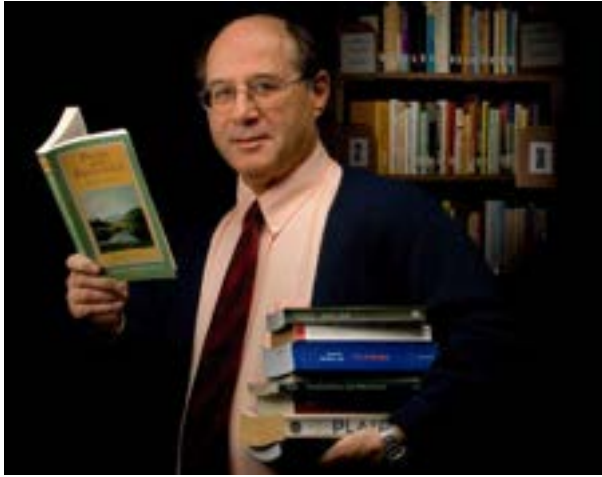
us, encourages us, and inspires us." China's faithful embody Tertullian's timeless truth that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Indeed, on a brief stint of freedom, children bicycled from all over Baoding just to attend Bishop Su's Mass in the woods. The Church in China urgently needs our prayers and support.

Interning for Nina Shea was an extraordinary privilege. I had the opportunity to meet prominent figures such as Bill Barr and Miles Yu, and I worked in the same office as Mike Pompeo and Nikki Haley. Additionally, I connected with a community of dedicated students committed to national security and the well-being of the United States. It had always been my dream to live and work in our nation's capital, and thanks to Belmont Abbey's generosity, that dream became a reality. Even more importantly, their support has enabled me to advocate on behalf of the Church.

*Christopher Mee presented his research at a religious liberty clinic at the Catholic University of America's Columbus School of Law. This summer he is applying his advocacy skills working as a Law Clerk for Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier. **BAC***

Christopher Mee and fellow Hudson Institute interns take on the cause of religious liberty.





Dr. Eugene Thuot's contagious love of learning laid the groundwork for Abbey Honors.

A Legacy of Excellence

Abbey Honors celebrates legendary Professor Emeritus, Dr. Eugene Thuot

BY THOMAS F.X. VARACALLI '11
Interim Dean of the Honors College

FIVE YEARS AFTER HIS RETIREMENT, Dr. Eugene Thuot is active and sharp. He goes on walks, reads Shakespearean

plays with his wife, plays tennis, and spends hours in his study with the great books. Lately, he has engaged in a renewed study of Antony and Cleopatra, the subject of his dissertation, because he and his wife planned to attend the Sophomore Honors Shakespeare Beach Retreat, a tradition he started over sixteen years ago.

I visited with Dr. and Mrs. Thuot in early April at their home. Their tastefully decorated dwelling was full of beautiful art, warm color, artifacts from travel, comfortable furniture, and, of course, a library. Gregorian chant played in the background. Mrs. Thuot showed me her beautiful garden with yellow roses, bird feeders, well-tended shrubs and plants, and a statue of St. Francis of Assisi. And

as they regaled me with stories about their children, the history of Belmont Abbey, and a recent Italian vacation, it reaffirmed to me what full and generous lives they have lived.

A defining part of Dr. Thuot's academic life began with his B.A. in Philosophy from Assumption College, where he studied under Father Denis Gonthier and Father Ernest Fortin. After graduation



Thuot pursued Theology at the Abbaye de Brogne in Belgium and earned a second bachelor's degree in Theology at the University of Ottawa. He then began graduate work at Boston College, spent two summers at Middlebury College's Breadloaf School of English, and received his M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago, where he wrote his dissertation, "Love, Politics, and the Emergence of the Christian Soul: A Commentary on Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra" under the renowned Joseph Cropsey. Ralph Lerner and Nathan Tarcov – two legendary political philosophers – also served as readers for his dissertation.

Thuot came to the Abbey in 1975 and oversaw the original



Honors Program from 1983-2007. In 2004 he served as a Fulbright Lecturer at the University of Malta. In 2007, with the firm support of newly arrived President Bill Thierfelder, Thuot inaugurated the Honors Institute, a 45-credit Honors program that exposed students to the most important thinkers in the Western canon. He stepped down as director in 2014 but continued to teach in the Honors College, including the freshman two-part History of Ideas sequence.

Amid the emerging revival in Classical Education, Thuot hoped to further revitalize Belmont Abbey Honors, so he worked with Stephen Shivone, Joshua Hren, and Joseph Wysocki to establish a curriculum for what

would become the Honors College. Within this program students could choose from three tracks: a 120-credit option, in which students took classes exclusively in the Honors College; a 90-credit option, in which students majored in great books but took 30 outside credits; and a 75-credit track, in which students chose a traditional major and received a minor in great books. The Honors College accepted its first class in 2018, and this May we celebrated its fourth graduating class.

Dr. Thuot was the pivotal figure of my undergraduate days, as he was for many Honors graduates. A brilliant professor with a strong command of all the philosophers in his legendary History of Ideas class – Plato, Aristotle, Augustine,

Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Sartre, and St. John Paul II – he taught me how to read a text carefully and slowly. Dr. Thuot chastised me when I wanted to dismiss an author simply because I disagreed with him; he insisted that I humble myself before the great philosophers and seek to fully understand their argument before passing judgment, and he showed me that I could learn from authors I would have rejected summarily.

His character, however, had the most profound effect upon me. A devout Catholic, he insisted that faith and reason were compatible, and he took great joy in reciting St. John Paul II's words in *Fides et Ratio*: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human

Dr. Thuot has profoundly influenced generations of Abbey students.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 20



From the historic Grace Auditorium, Dr. Thuot guides students in the joyful and rigorous pursuit of Truth.

Alumni and colleagues Sean Trompeter '17, Dr. Christine Boor '11, and Dr. Tom Varacalli '11 (left) and Dr. Joe Wysocki '04 (right) gathered to celebrate their beloved mentor, Dr. Thuot, during Homecoming 2024.

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spirit rises to the contemplation of the truth.” Dr. Thuot was also something of a fatherly figure. He would regularly check up on me, encouraging me to exercise and study faithfully.

It was this combination of brilliance and character that made him a good teacher. Dr. Thuot always came prepared to class with pages of notes, and he delivered painstakingly clear lectures. In my junior year, he taught a course on Plato’s Republic. I remember his grin on the first day of class when he announced that it was his

35th reading of the Republic. He re-read the entire book every time he assigned it because he learned something new every time.

In hindsight, I am also extraordinarily impressed with what an effective administrator he was. Without a secretary - and alongside class preparations and many thankless administrative duties - he organized a lecture series, countless cultural events at the Belk Theater, dinners with board members and professors, the sophomore beach retreat, and the junior study abroad program. He did all this because of his deep, abiding love for his students, the

great books, Belmont Abbey, and, most importantly, God.

Last October, with over 40 alumni and their families in attendance, the Honors College renamed our newly renovated St. Leo’s 301 the Dr. Eugene Thuot Seminar Room in recognition of this beloved Abbey legend and his extraordinary impact. Dr. Thuot taught at the Abbey for forty-five years, during which time he not only profoundly influenced hundreds of his own students but also established a legacy that will continue to shape future Abbey graduates in immeasurable ways. **BAC**





Abbot Placid, Dr. and Mrs. Thuot, and President Thierfelder stand before the dedication plaque, which reads: "Dr. Eugene Thuot Seminar Room: 'Gladly would he learn and gladly teach.' In loving gratitude for the immeasurable sacrifice and fruitful devotion of our teacher, mentor, and friend."

Gifts of a lifetime in liberal education

ON OCTOBER 5, 2024, the Belmont Abbey Honors College dedicated its newly renovated classroom to beloved founder, Dr. Eugene Thuot. After voicing his gratitude to Abbot Placid, monks past and present, Dr. Thierfelder, administration, and faculty, Dr. Thuot reflected on the blessings at the heart of this community:

Among the gifts of a lifetime for me have been those many hours in class across four decades with Honors students. I have not been and would never try to be Socrates, but I do have a sense of the happiness that he spoke about from being with young people. In his presence with them, he was seeking to do all the good he could by recommending and going through the "treasures" that wise men of old had left behind in their writings. And, as he put it, "exploring these books, if we come upon anything good, we extract it and set much store on BEING HELPFUL TO ONE ANOTHER."

What a blessing it has been for me to have spent time in and out of the classroom with Honors students. Thinking back upon such students is markedly pleasing in light of the thoughtfulness,

goodness, professional promise, and kindnesses to each other that were so readily observable. ...It is students like these who are the hope and pride of their families, alma mater, country, and Church.

There is one more person I wish to speak about – a most special person who has been visibly and figuratively at my side for a blessed number of years – one whose contacts with Honors students have been intermittent, but genuinely caring and ever at-the-ready to aid when circumstances beckoned. I have in mind, of course, my wife, Cathy. My gratitude to her has many remarkable facets and dimensions. Brevity compels me to mention only one of the blessings she is and has brought to me. For, upon my retirement, Mrs. Thuot initiated a practice in which on Saturday and some Sunday afternoons we

would read aloud to each other very good – sometimes classic – writings: novels, essays, plays. In the course of doing this, fruitful discussions have ensued. At the same time, unbeknownst to us, we have been acting upon an exhortation St. Paul made in his Epistle to the Philippians. For in his Letter, Paul issues seven wonderful exhortations, the sixth of which has a special appeal to those whose temperaments incline them to a lifelong pursuit of liberal education. Simply put, St. Paul exhorts his readers to THINK. Ah! But it's more complicated than this! For, it is WHAT Paul urges his readers to THINK ABOUT that indicates an affinity between Paul and liberal education. Here, then, is the full exhortation:

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - THINK ABOUT SUCH THINGS" (Phil 4:8).

What Paul recommends is not the only agenda of liberal education, but he surely points here to what may be most consequential about this kind of education. **BAC**



History *in the making*

The Man behind Belmont Abbey's new Endowed Chair

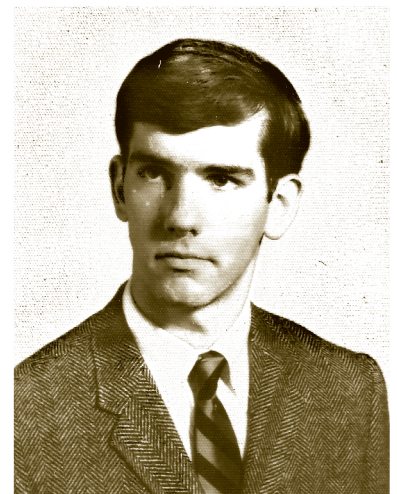
**BY LAURA
SCHAFFER**
Editor

WITHOUT HISTORY, we cannot fully understand ourselves, either individually or as a culture. Unless an intentional and shared memory makes present to us the events, mistakes, beliefs, and values of the past, we run the risk not only of repeating tragedies, as the old adage warns, but also of impoverishing our humility, empathy, and understanding of human nature itself.

In recognition of this, and in exceptional generosity to his beloved alma mater, Michael P. (Mike) Fitzsimmons '71 has established through his estate an Endowed Chair in History and a History Department Opportunity Fund at Belmont Abbey College.

Of course, history is never merely a matter of those macrocosmic wars and revolutions,

treaties, proclamations, and scandals that move people and ideas across the world stage. It also embraces the cultural, social, and political context of individuals and families, their lives and circumstances. Our personal histories inform who we are and where we are going as individuals and communities. So it seems particularly appropriate to



Michael Fitzsimmons in his Sophomore year at the Abbey. Above, John Hoffman '71 and Mike pause to commemorate their graduation day.



From the 1971 Abbey yearbook: (front, left to right) Peter Brady '73, Michael Quigley '71, John Hoffman '71, John Hudgins '71, and John Herrick '71; (back, left to right) Joseph Bauer '71, Mike Fitzsimmons '71, and Sacred Heart grad Patricia Capone '71.

introduce Mike Fitzsimmons by sharing a bit of his own history, a story whose legacy will continue to impact Belmont Abbey students and alumni for generations.

"I was interested in history from a very young age," he recalls, "and was a voracious reader. I focused on history and non-fiction, and of the fiction I read, much of it was historical in nature."

Driven to learn about and understand the past, Mike excelled in school as a young child. After moving from Michigan to the Chicago suburb of Park Ridge during his sixth grade year, however, his mother and father began to suffer from mental health and personal struggles, which placed inexpressible pressure on Mike as the oldest of his siblings. In the abuse, turmoil, and isolation

he increasingly found at home, Mike's grades plummeted, and it was not until eleventh grade, with the help of his best friend, the late James Luety, and his AP US History teacher, the late Michael Hinkemeyer, that he began to recover some "sense of worth and confidence," through which he rekindled his early enthusiasm and climbed to the top third of his class.

College bound

By the end of high school, Mike knew he wanted his college experience to be entirely different from the schools he had known thus far. So when he noticed a small, Catholic, North Carolina college in the pages of Barron's Guide to American Colleges, he decided to visit Belmont Abbey.

During his campus visit over the Christmas holiday in December 1966, as Mike and his father arrived at the Abbey, Mike recalls: "I was struck not only by its beauty, but also by its serenity and calm." Fr. Clement, Director of Admissions, greeted them warmly and began their campus tour as Fr. Martin's peacocks wandered up and down Abbey Lane. And Mike knew, almost immediately, that this was where he wanted to go. "It turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life," he said.

During his first year at the Abbey, and "unaware of [the professor's] fearsome reputation," Mike took a core class with Mr. Jack Hanahan. "He was a sometimes dour, intimidating tyrant in the classroom," Mike

CONTINUES ON PAGE 24



Friends and fellow alumni Mike Holley, Chris Caver, John Hudgins and Mike Fitzsimmons gather annually at John's house in Portsmouth.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

remembers, “but the minute one stepped outside of it, he would do anything to help a student.” Mr. Hanahan became a mentor and even a surrogate father, challenging Mike to raise his expectations for himself and work hard to set and meet ambitious goals. He also introduced “the importance of representing the college well” and supporting it as a “loyal alumnus.” Thanks to Mr. Hanahan - and Chris Caver, Mike’s freshman roommate and “an early and significant beneficial influence” - Mike surprised himself and his family by making the Dean’s List from his very first semester.

Piedmont to Pensacola

Throughout his time at Belmont Abbey, Mike found a strong and supportive community of professors and friends. Within the History Department, Father Anselm, Frank Murray, and Kenneth Margerison all played important roles in his academic formation. In addition, his friends in the close-knit class of ‘71, especially Chris, John Herrick, John Hoffman, Mike Holley, and John Hudgins, played a pivotal role in his personal growth and he believes helped make him a better person. Mike feels deeply attached



Mike’s scholarship and dedication have made him an indispensable member of the academic community.

to the entire class of 1971 - in fact, he dedicated one of his books to it. During his Abbey years, Mike also met his future wife, Theresa Tassone, whose love and support became a mainstay on his journey.

With his draft number having been called before he graduated, following commencement Mike joined the United States Naval Reserve. After four and a half months of signals training in Pensacola, Mike then served in electronic intelligence at Naval



Security Group Activity Hanza (Okinawa) from 1972 until 1974, when he returned to North Carolina for graduate school.

Abbey Legacy

Although the Modern European History program at UNC was not always a fruitful experience and certainly lacked the stability of his Abbey undergraduate studies, Mike found in the resident Medieval Historian and fellow Abbey alumnus, Fred Behrends ‘58, “a friend and source of counsel and support.” The contrast between the programs, in fact, and Behrends’ mentorship, only drove home the value of his Abbey community.

“My four years at the Abbey were transformational and completely altered the arc of



“My four years at the Abbey were transformational and completely altered the arc of my life.” — Mike Fitzsimmons

my life,” Mike reflects. “I have been able to live a life of greater authenticity and purpose than would have been the case otherwise – of that, I am sure. I remained in touch with Father Anselm and Mr. Hanahan until their deaths and am in touch with Frank Murray, Ken Margerison and my friends and classmates to this day. My time at the Abbey... gave me a sense of direction and purpose, provided me with the confidence and ability to pursue lofty goals, and imparted a spiritual depth that I deeply value. Simply stated, I would not have had the life I have had without the experience of the Abbey, for which I am everlastingly grateful.”

In establishing an Endowed Chair in History and a History Department Opportunity Fund,

Mike Fitzsimmons has brought his own personal history to a new kind of fruition, inviting future students and faculty to draw on the joy and the strength he found both in the Belmont Abbey community and in the riches of historical study. Not incidentally, he has also embraced the challenge Professor Hanahan made to him and to his classmates all those years ago: to assume not only the rewards but also the responsibilities that an alma mater confers - and to take an active role in its rich and continuing history.

“The Ph.D. is a research degree,” Mike notes, “and it is my hope that the endowed chair and the History Department Opportunity Fund will make available to the faculty of the Department of History reduced teaching loads, leave time and research funds to develop

more fully that aspect of their profession. The faculty has shown itself to be superb teachers, but I can say from personal experience that an active research agenda not only makes one a better teacher but also that the fruits of that research bring distinction to the institution. Research, in the form of books and articles, is the currency of academia, and it is my wish that the members of the Belmont Abbey College Department of History be able to pursue research and achieve publication to participate more fully in the historical profession, which will raise the profile of Belmont Abbey College in the scholarly sphere.”

It is with profound gratitude that we announce this new chapter in the life of the Humanities at Belmont Abbey College. **BAC**



Effective Leadership *for the Common Good*

Belmont Abbey Business Chair Dr. John Crane and his fellow faculty help students explore ideas and develop effective leadership skills.

Belmont Abbey Graduate Students Giving Back to the Community

**BY DR. BRAD
FRAZIER**

*Vice Provost and
Dean of Graduate
and Professional
Studies*

DR. S. LIZ DAVIS
*Associate Professor
of Business*

BELMONT ABBEY COLLEGE launched its Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Leadership (MAL) degrees in August 2024. Now, approaching the end of our second year delivering these programs, the Abbey has awarded 43 MBA and MAL degrees. Demand remains strong, and we look forward to continued growth in coming years, both in enrollment and in the programs on offer.

While designing these graduate programs, Belmont Abbey carefully considered how to orient coursework to a Benedictine vision: highlighting, teaching, and reinforcing its essential hallmarks.



All graduate students take “Effective Leadership for the Common Good” in their first semester as a way of immersing themselves in leadership theory, philosophy, and Benedictine and Catholic teachings on leadership and ethics. This team-taught course engages students with current and ancient texts, examining their application and value for today’s leaders and professionals. The experience helps to ground students and shape the unique focus of Belmont Abbey graduate education.

Capstone projects

In the spirit of this focus, we determined that MBA and MAL students should complete a summative capstone project in lieu of a thesis. So we enlisted a range of community partners from among nonprofits, government organizations, and small businesses with projects, problems, or needs to which students could apply their skills and knowledge in measurable and meaningful ways. The resulting capstones are a culmination of coursework wherein students gain immersive experience rooted in service to our community.

Working in teams under the guidance of a faculty advisor, these students spend a semester analyzing real life business scenarios, evaluating current conditions, and making appropriate recommendations for company objectives in conversation with Catholic social teaching. At the end of the term, they present their capstone in the form of a written report or other tangible deliverable (e.g. business plan or software prototype) to a panel of faculty and peers. Faculty then evaluate the project alongside external stakeholders, assessing for feasibility, research depth, innovation, or any other predetermined criteria.

Dr. Brad Frazier, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate and Professional Studies, notes, “This was an opportunity to move beyond case studies, which while valuable, don’t give students the

real-life experience they need to be effective leaders. In addition, it was an opportunity for Belmont Abbey College to give back to our community and engage in a meaningful way. This has been a true win-win for both our students and our community.”

Throughout the first several cohorts, Belmont Abbey students completed a number of projects, ranging from website development and franchise expansion viability evaluations to new business start-up consulting, marketing plans, business and legal evaluation for small businesses, and much more. Across all projects, students demonstrated proficiency in their discipline while providing a valuable service to community members.

During the Spring and Summer 2024 semesters, three teams of capstone students partnered with a literacy coaching business. One group provided consulting services on business planning and legal needs, increasing client inquiries and improving cash flow; another evaluated financial management, offering an aging report with actionable insights on collecting overdue payments and maintaining liquidity. The third enhanced marketing and branding in a variety of ways: developing a robust LinkedIn profile, generating an optimized social media calendar with extensive content ideas, conducting a review of competitors, providing a phased 30-60-90 day marketing plan, identifying untapped market segments, evaluating client management portals, and designing a use-friendly dashboard to track essential performance metrics. Each capstone team assisted our community partner in concrete and impactful ways. As Dr. Frazier points out, “Students enjoyed this opportunity to hone their skills, and partners benefited from having access to expertise in areas needed at no cost.”

Jenny Ryan, MAL ‘24 and another team of peers completed their capstone project by designing

Get involved today

CAPSTONE PROJECTS are designed to create meaningful impact in our community. Whether you’re a local business, nonprofit, or community leader, we invite you to collaborate with our students and faculty to drive innovation and solve real-world challenges. If you’d like to learn more or get involved, please contact us at the contact email below:



S. Liz Davis, PhD

Director of MBA and MAL

Belmont Abbey College
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Belmont, NC 28012
susandavis@bac.edu

a leadership development program for current and future students at Belmont Abbey. Their team conducted a detailed analysis of several existing programs at peer institutions, interviewed faculty and students, and presented a detailed program and implementation plan. Reflecting on her experience, Jenny writes, “Collaborating with my cohort on our capstone project was the highlight of the program. Although I was initially apprehensive about the difficulties that would arise from working with my peers long-distance, with busy schedules all around, the team project was seamless and rewarding. At graduation, we all met in person and celebrated our joint accomplishments.”

The capstone project encompasses the values and aims of the Belmont Abbey Business Department as a whole and the MBA and MAL programs in particular. Drawing on the Benedictine hallmarks of stewardship and community, students not only learn how to apply their skills and knowledge, but they have the opportunity to embrace the real needs of our local partners. They contribute something to the health of our economy while remembering that this economy - that any economy - is really about the workings of community life, of people seeking to live well in meaningful relationship. **BAC**



Classical education seeks to form the whole person, that they may pursue the True, Good, and Beautiful throughout their lives.

Preparing to Live Well

Belmont Abbey Alumni Join the Classical Education Movement

**BY SUSAN
BRANDOLINI '23**

*Director of Recruitment
and Operations for the
Honors College*

BELMONT ABBEY ALUMNI regularly go on to transformative careers: across business, politics, law, medicine, religious life, and more. Many devote themselves to teaching, and among these an increasing number have embraced the classical tradition now revitalizing American education. We reconnected with just a few of these alumni to hear about their experiences.



Kevin Gillett

» **KEVIN GILLETT '23**

currently serves as Middle School Dean and Mathematics Teacher at Founders Classical Academy of Lewisville, TX.



Daniel Leonardi

» **DANIEL LEONARDI '16**

earned his M.A. in Classical Education Leadership with Ave Maria University. He served as headmaster of Holy Family Classical Academy in Wichita Falls, TX and will soon join St. Austin School in St. Louis as Director of Advancement.



David Brandolini

» **DAVID BRANDOLINI '15**

earned his M.A. in Humanities with a Classical Education concentration from the University of Dallas. He has taught across nearly all K-12 grade levels and also served as a HS administrator.



Harris Moriarty

» **HARRIS MORIARTY '12**

has master's degrees in Liberal Arts (MLA, Johns Hopkins University), Business (MSB, Catholic University of America), and Psychology (MSP, Divine Mercy University). Although no longer active in education, his time in Classical schools left a lasting impression.

What is Classical Education?

At first the classical approach might seem like an odd conglomeration of old-fashioned texts, but classical education has flourished since Ancient Greece because of its grounding in the truth of human nature.

As David Brandolini explains, the curriculum follows the seven liberal arts: the Trivium (Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric) begins with words and syntax and then builds to logically consistent, persuasive arguments, while the Quadrivium (Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy) approaches the world through tangible mathematical truths.

Classical curricula usually focus on the great primary texts of Western culture, selecting authors who

facilitated a shift in human culture, politics, or thought or those who reveal human experience in rich and essential ways. Classical education emphasizes “the universal quality of human nature,” rejecting the “historicist or relativistic approach to studying men ‘according to their time’ alone” (Brandolini).

Unlike many modern educational models, Kevin Gillett suggests, “classical methods start with questions, often posed by historical texts. A student then seeks to answer the question via any number of means (seminars, reading texts, making observations, solving an equation, etc).”

Likewise, Daniel Leonardi describes classical methods “pointing to the transcendentals, connecting the subjects, and crafting lessons in a manner to invoke the students’ thoughts, discover new ideas, and logically discuss topics.” The great writers and thinkers of Western culture explore essential human questions. Students discover these questions and then search, not only for the author’s answer, but even more importantly for the truth itself. Teachers moderate socratic seminars to guide students toward truth by a “mutual love of knowledge” (Gillett), inviting students to discuss, analyze, and evaluate assertions and understandings. They free the students to think critically and express their thoughts, rather than regurgitate a memorized answer.

Why is Classical Education important?

“Having worked in public school education,” Leonardi notes, “I saw the inefficiency of [that] model. More importantly, leaving the source and summit of all knowledge and truth out of education cannot be a full education at all. ... Even in a non Catholic classical school the lessons learned point to Truth, Goodness and Beauty.”

Harris Moriarty points out that “classical education resets, properly orders, and educates on each individual’s natural (and super-

*Classical education
resets, properly orders,
and educates on each
individual’s natural (and
supernatural) rights and
duties... [It] leads us to
understand what it means
to be a good human and
then further what it means
for me to be a good human.*

natural) rights and duties.” He adds, “it is a study of virtue - how we ought to be, ethics - how we ought to act, and politics - how we ought to be and act with each other. Classical education leads us to understand what it means to be a good human and then further what it means for me to be a good human.” By studying how others have approached this understanding, today’s students receive guidelines for crafting their own lives.

Classical education, Leonardi agrees, “instills lessons that will help each person to become a virtuous citizen with the crowning goal of achieving the eternal reward.” The “glory of [the] Catholic classical model of teaching,” he maintains, is to “work for the fortification of western civilization and the salvation of souls.”

Brandolini likens the goal of classical education to “free[ing] the mind and soul to help the student make informed, virtuous choices.” As in Plato’s image of the Cave, “the mind and life of each man are prisoner to his own ignorance before he is drawn out of the cave and into the light of Truth and Being.” This freedom transcends the ability to act as one wishes; it is a freedom to pursue the Good, True, and Beautiful. Ultimately, classical education leads us out of the cave and prepares our minds for the light of divine contemplation. **BAC**



“This would be
a call. And I’m
coming because
this is a Catholic
Benedictine
college.”

— **Dr. Bill Thierfelder,**
PRESIDENT, BELMONT ABBEY COLLEGE

Belmont Abbey looks back on twenty-one years of excellence and virtue.

Trustful Surrender to Divine Providence

BY LAURA SCHAFFER | *Editor*

ONE DAY DR. BILL THIERFELDER, President of York Barbell Company, opened the National Catholic Register. While reading an article to the left of the fold, however, an ad on the right caught his eye. A small, Benedictine college in North Carolina was hiring a president. Suddenly, instead of continuing the article, he found himself reading the ad, and not only reading it, but cutting it out and bringing it home. That night Bill showed the ad to his wife, Mary. They talked about it for a few minutes, but not seriously. After all, Belmont Abbey College was an unknown quantity.

Meanwhile, the Thierfelders lived happily in Hershey, PA with (then) eight kids, all under the age of 14; they had good friends and a robust parish community; they'd paid off and renovated their home; and Bill ran a successful company providing health and fitness equipment to major retailers, Olympic events, and championship games. There was "no reason in the world to ever leave Hershey, Pennsylvania."

CONTINUES ON PAGE 32



The Thierfelder family arrives at Belmont Abbey in 2004.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

But over the next five days, that ad kept showing up. Bill would pull it out of his pocket or his folder and look at it again, every day, until finally he called the phone number listed at the bottom. 45 minutes later, at the end of a conversation he'd begun by insisting he wasn't looking for a career change but just wanted to know more, Bill heard the man on the Belmont Abbey end of the line say, "I actually think you're the person for the job."

Six and a half weeks - and an airport layover interview - later, Bill and Mary arrived at Belmont Abbey for an on-campus interview, and at their first sight of the historic brick and the iconic basilica spires, they took a collective breath. Dr. and Mrs. Thierfelder got out of the car and went inside Mary Help of Christians Basilica for the first time, walking slowly down the

slate floor to the front pew and kneeling to pray for discernment. Both felt an overpowering sense of peace as they left the basilica.

During the whirlwind visit that followed, the Thierfelders met the monastic community, members of the faculty and staff, and BAC students. The guide on their campus tour that day, who had ferried each candidate in his turn, distinctly recalled that "Dr. Thierfelder was interested in more than buildings and land; he wanted to know about the people and the atmosphere - the essence that is the Abbey."

Later, Dr. Thierfelder would ask Abbot Placid how many people had applied from that ad in the Observer. In answer, the Abbot simply raised one finger.

From the beginning Dr. Thierfelder embraced a call to affirm and nourish the essential Catholic identity of Belmont Abbey College.

"One of the things I first said

to the Board of Trustees in the interviews," Dr. Thierfelder remembers, was that "this would be a call. And I'm coming because this is a Catholic Benedictine college. If you don't want me to go down that path, you should just tell me right now." But they assured him this was exactly what they wanted. "It's not that we were ever not Catholic or Benedictine," Dr. Thierfelder remembered, "I just think that [the college] became... more focused and more deliberate about being Catholic and Benedictine."

Excellence & Virtue

It is this particular identity that enables Belmont Abbey, through grace, to extend the kind of hospitality that sees Christ in each human person. "The reason you're going to receive the incredible, loving welcome that you're going to get (here)," Dr. Thierfelder notes, "is because of our Catholicity, because of what we believe." For a college community, or any community, this is profoundly formative, and from the beginning Dr. Thierfelder was eager to embrace the Abbey's Benedictine motto, that in all things God may be glorified.

As one consequence, "Excellence & Virtue" quickly became watchwords, with banners going up all across campus. When someone asked a few years later whether or not it was time to switch them out, Dr. Thierfelder grinned, quipping, "Are we still striving for excellence and virtue? Well, then, we'll keep them up." And even today members of the college community often speak of our mission and the fruits of an Abbey education in these terms.

A Knight of Malta and a Benedictine Oblate, Dr. Thierfelder has continually celebrated Belmont Abbey's Catholic identity in a variety of other ways as well. From the trusting gratitude that is, in a sense, his personal charism, he

New to the Abbey, Dr. Thierfelder lost no time in getting involved, finding ways to celebrate excellence and virtue across campus life.





The Gratitude Bell gives students, visitors, faculty, and staff the chance to ring out our thanks.

erected the Gratitude Bell outside the dining hall, where passersby can ring it in thanksgiving, sharing the peal of their gratitude across campus.

“Bill’s gifted with a great spirit of praise and thanks,” Mrs. Thierfelder notes, “...and he doesn’t turn [those virtues] off and on when he’s in public and when he’s at home.”

Over the years he has also regularly joined the Crusaders for Life on their March for Life trip to Washington, D.C., and when the Abbey faced the HHS Mandate, which jeopardized their ability to live out their Catholic identity, Dr. Thierfelder testified before the US Congress in defense of religious liberty. In fact, in recalling that time, among others, Mrs. Thierfelder continued, “he always has charitable words for others, even in the privacy of our own home, for people who have treated him with hostility. I’m very impressed with that... [as well as with] his sense of humor during suffering and challenges and crises. ...He’ll never come home and tell me that there’s a

CONTINUES ON PAGE 34



The St. Joseph Adoration Chapel invites all to pause and dwell in the presence of God. Students, faculty, staff, and visitors alike have found strength and peace in this contemplative space.





One of Dr. Thierfelder's favorite hallmarks of Abbey life is the Benedictine hospitality that welcomes each person as Christ.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

problem, but when he's funnier than usual, I think, oh, no, there's something really bad happening. ... I remember in the middle of the HHS mandate it was pretty heated, and there was a lot of stress and pressure from that. And we were at an event, and Archbishop Chaput came up to me and said, 'It must be so difficult,' and so forth, and I said, 'well, actually, you know, Bill makes it really easy for me' - which is another one of his gifts: the gift of peace and confidence in the middle of others' anxiety and fear. He doesn't waver."

St. Joseph Adoration Chapel

One of Dr. Thierfelder's most significant contributions to campus faith life was his role in building the St. Joseph Adoration Chapel. Soon after beginning his presidency, he conferred with Abbot Placid over the possibility of breaking ground on a new Adoration Chapel.

The chapel represented an important aim of the Strategic Plan they had developed with fellow Abbey leadership; however, no funding was yet available. Still, Dr. Thierfelder felt - and the Abbot agreed - that it was important to set the tone for these next decades

of Abbey history by placing Christ Himself at the heart of campus and prioritizing a place where students, faculty, staff, and guests could pray in His Eucharistic Presence.

Abbot Placid suggested that they break ground as an act of faith. And as soon as they did so, in August of 2006, donations began to pour in, mostly from first-time donors. Two years later the beautiful and striking St. Joseph Adoration Chapel stood complete, and ever since the chapel has nourished students' faith life and become a visible sign of God's steadfast care for the Abbey.

Divine Providence

This care is something the Thierfelders would witness again and again during their tenure as President and First Lady.

"I think one of my favorite things is all the surprises that Divine Providence seems to send to the Abbey while we've been here," Mrs. Thierfelder reflects, "they just keep happening. Every present moment is a surprise."

And Dr. Thierfelder agrees: "I knew coming in that [Belmont Abbey was] in sort of desperate shape. We had, you know, dwindling [numbers], and residence halls were closed, so there was a trustful surrender to come.

"And then, as Mary described... just one thing after another. As a matter of fact, if you look back in the history of the school before we ever came, it's one story of trustful surrender after another. So I think we've just tried to continue living that trust in God.... We should be literally overwhelmed with gratitude for all that we have in our lives and for all that God, through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, has done for this college and the Abbey."

From a total enrollment of 800, Belmont Abbey College has

grown to over 1600 students during President Thierfelder's tenure, including those enrolled in the Abbey's eight master's degrees, all of which also launched under his leadership. On-campus residency has increased by over 65%, and retention recently reached its all-time high of 72%. His presidency also built or refurbished 40 facilities, established the Honors Institute (which would become the Honors College), and developed a relationship with CaroMont Health that has further galvanized our new Nursing program by bringing a state-of-the-art medical campus adjacent to our own.

Sports & Virtue

Dr. Thierfelder's athletic background, moreover, equipped him to profoundly impact Belmont Abbey Athletics from the start. A licensed psychologist with master's and doctoral degrees in Sports Psychology and Human Movement, Dr. Thierfelder is a former member of the US Olympic Committee's Sport Psychology Registry, a former NCAA Division I Coach, an Olympian (though injury precluded his competing), a National Champion and Record Holder, and a two-time All-American.

Bringing this enthusiasm and expertise to a transformative Sport & Virtue program that has changed the way our coaches and athletes pursue excellence on and off the field, Dr. Thierfelder's support has helped Abbey Athletics grow to the seventh largest program nationally, while repeatedly winning Conference Carolinas Messick Awards for outstanding sportsmanship.

Since the start of his tenure, Dr. Thierfelder has joined the Sports Faith International Hall of Fame and the NCAA DII Presidents Council; he has also published *Less Than A Minute To Go: The Secret to World-Class Performance in Sport, Business and Everyday Life*.



Twenty-one years

Looking back, Dr. Thierfelder explains, "I had no expectations... I tried to listen; I tried to understand. ...It was basically discerning in the present moment where we were, what the challenges were, what was the next good step we could take or the next best step we could take. And we've been very blessed here in... the people who continue to come to the Abbey."

In fact, if you ask him his favorite part about this work, Dr. Thierfelder will tell you, "It has been the people. You know, the place is lovely. Everybody comes and says how beautiful it is... But it is the people as to why this is a special place. It's why the students come here. It's why our faculty are here, our staff here. God has drawn people to this place, and it's a remarkable community. I mean, every place has a community, but

I've never seen one like the Abbey."

The twentieth president in Belmont Abbey College history, Dr. Bill Thierfelder has stewarded and served this community faithfully for twenty-one years, as of the date of his retirement on August 2, 2025. His profound legacy - the fruit of that call he and Mary first heard issuing from a newspaper ad - will remain a source of blessings to the Abbey for many years. There can be no more fitting tribute than to repeat his favorite quote from Abbot Leo Haid, in the grateful recognition that Dr. and Mrs. Thierfelder have participated so beautifully in its fruitful hope:

"The work and prayers here shall spread God's blessing over this beautiful country in the years to come when perhaps few of you who are listening will be among the living." **BAC**

Dr. Thierfelder's faithful efforts have been indispensable to the Abbey's Made True Campaign.



SCAN TO CHECK OUT our farewell interview with Dr. and Mrs. Thierfelder.

Two Decades of Abbey Growth



2004

- **Dr. Thierfelder** becomes President of Belmont Abbey College
- **59%** first-to-second-year retention rate among first-time, full-time students
- **800** total enrollment
- **20** BA/BS degrees
- **13** team sports

2005

- First honorees inducted into **Alumni Wall of Fame**

2008

- **St. Joseph Adoration Chapel** dedicated
- Athletics Hall of Fame established

- **Motorsport Management** business concentration officially codified with counsel from Abbey prep school alumnus **Humpy Wheeler, Jr.**

sportsmanship

- **Bachelor's in Motorsport Management** launched
- First undergraduate class of 500

2012

- Athletics wins first **Conference Carolinas Overall Messick Award** for

2013

- **Sts. Scholastica and Benedict Residence Halls** completed

2016

- **Revitalized Philosophy Department** welcomes future priests for undergraduate formation
- **Benedict Leadership Institute** established

2018

- **Fr. Aaron Huber** graduates as first diocesan seminarian with Abbey Philosophy degree
- New science building entrances and chem labs completed, thanks to the generosity of George '66 and Susan Horner

- **Honors College** and **Great Books** degree established

2020

- Fully online degree programs launched

2021

- **Belmont House** established in Washington, D.C.
- **St. Michael's Residence Hall** completed
- **Nursing labs completed**, thanks to the Cherry family's generosity
- College approved to offer master's degrees

2022

- **New Nursing program** launched, including MS in Nursing

2023

- Public launch of **Made True Campaign**
- Sts. Gertrude and Gregory Residence Halls completed
- **Wittenberg-Shevchenko Microbiology Lab** completed, thanks to the generosity of Dr. Peter and Betty Ann Wittenberg
- **MBA, MA in Leadership, and MS in Data Analytics** added to graduate offerings



- **RN-BSN** launched
- **Visual and Performing Arts Center** project receives \$9 million in state funding
- **Permanent Belmont House** established, thanks to Maximo Alvarez's generosity



2024

- **Made True Campaign** reaches \$100 million, extends goal to \$150 million
- College sponsors Leo Haid Symposium on Catholicism in the American South
- **First Endowed Chair** established through the Pallos family's generosity: Vilma György Pallos Chair in Classical and Liberal Education
- **MA in Classical and Liberal Education** and **MA in Communications** launched
- Newly expanded **Jerry and Martha Schmitt Dining Hall** dedicated

- **Abbey Players** celebrate 140 years of continuous theater
- **71% first-to-second-year retention rate** among first-time, full-time students
- **1687 total enrollment**, with 660 incoming class



2025

- **Caromont Hospital** opens
- Largest graduating class in history
- **Catholic Intentional Residency Program** announced
- **American Semester** in Washington announced
- **Bishop William G. Curlin Nursing Leadership Suite** dedicated, thanks to the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Vincent "Cap" Mona and family
- **MA in Motorsport Management** and **MA in Sport Management** launched

- **37 BA/BS degrees** and **8 MA/MS degrees** available: constituting **125% increase** over seven years
- Athletics wins **sixth Conference Carolinas Overall Messick Award for sportsmanship**: with a total of 2 Men's, 3 Women's, and 74 Individual Sport Messick Awards in fifteen years
- **26 team sports** available, doubling offerings since 2004
- **Dr. Thierfelder** retires as President of Belmont Abbey College

ATHLETIC CHAMPIONSHIPS | FALL 2004 - SPRING 2025: Regular-Season Champions: 27 Tournament Wins: 27 Conference Championship Wins: 10



Mary Thierfelder receives an honorary degree from Belmont Abbey College in 2024 in recognition for her years of loving service.

Hearts United *in* Devotion

AS FIRST LADY OF BELMONT

Abbey College, Mary Thierfelder has been a quiet, faithful witness to the love of God for our BAC family. Always ready to offer the sincerest welcome, Mary's prayerful generosity has continually nourished the college community, whether by sponsoring "Family and Friends" dinners for faculty, staff, and their families or by instituting Hearts United at the Abbey Basilica, a program embracing First Friday Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and First Saturday Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. These devotions, in fact, have extended Abbey blessings not only to students, faculty, and staff but also to friends of the college and members of the local community, offering a rosary, hymn, and reflection before Mass and after Mass an opportunity for fellowship and refreshments on the piazza - including Mary's famously delicious gingerbread. All those privileged to know Mary Thierfelder will readily attest to the graceful humility and wholehearted gentleness with which she gives of



Mary Thierfelder's warmth and generosity have been a continual blessing to the Belmont Abbey community.

herself in Benedictine hospitality.

Dr. Thierfelder maintains, "Mary is... an incredible imitator of Our Lady. She is the deepest well. Her spirituality and soul is what has helped form me and helped me to have a stronger spiritual life and to do what God's called me to do. Her contributions sometimes are like the Blessed Mother. They're sort of hidden, and people don't always see them. But her love for people, her deep faith, is always shared.

It's all throughout the community, and it's just been a great blessing. And you know, the two of us are one. So the only reason this is possible is because the two of us are completely one and have committed to this completely."

The Belmont Abbey community remains profoundly grateful to Mary Thierfelder for her inexhaustible warmth and her faithful testament to the goodness of Divine Providence. **BAC**



Abbey Alumni, Future Priests

Diocesan Seminarians receive a Belmont Abbey formation

IF YOU VISIT BELMONT ABBEY COLLEGE, you might notice young men in cassocks and backpacks heading to class. As it happens, our connection with the local Catholic seminary just minutes

**BY HANNAH
MARTIN '26**

*BAC Marketing
Intern*

away from campus is a little-known but important fact of college life. St. Joseph College Seminary enjoys a special relationship with the Abbey, and seminarians earn their BA in Philosophy here while living down the road in a house of formation.

These young men navigate the question we must all consider:

What is my calling, the living purpose God created for me? The discipline and structure of life in the college seminary minimize distractions and allow seminarians the time and clarity to ask this question and discern the answer: not as a disembodied, heavenly voice, but as the patient unfolding of life in formation. One seminarian suggested that even in a purely practical sense, “A well-ordered

daily routine and schedule is extremely beneficial to all aspects of your life.”

Seminarians discern their vocation through honest striving in prayer and community, which reveals over time whether or not a young man was made for this way of life he’s chosen to explore. Seminary formation focuses on cultivating a deep prayer life, practicing the cardinal virtues, developing intellectual gifts, and embracing opportunities for pastoral charity.

Assisting at Mass, praying the Liturgy of the Hours and the Rosary, and setting aside time for Adoration establishes a daily life rooted in sacramental grace, and regular spiritual direction guides each seminarian’s journey. This framework of prayer and formation also orients seminarians’ studies, sports, and work and thus helps them seek God’s will throughout all parts of their lives. Ultimately, the seminary enables men to discern their vocations by discovering who they are.

Likewise, Belmont Abbey College strives to form students as the men and women God created them to be. We seek to cultivate a rich faith life rooted in the sacraments and monastic prayer - so that, from this rootedness, our students may thrive in excellence and virtue. Our mission “is to educate students in the liberal arts and sciences so that in all things God may

**The Abbey’s 2024
graduating class
of seminarians:
(left to right)
Carson Cannon,
John Harrison,
Ronan Ostendorf,
Gabriel Lugo, and
Mateo Pérez.**

be glorified. ...provid[ing]... an education that will enable [students] to lead lives of integrity, to succeed professionally, to become responsible citizens, and to be a blessing to themselves and to others.” “Lives of integrity” necessitate the active self-knowledge that embraces our personal callings, through which alone we become most authentically “a blessing to ourselves and others.”

As part of daily campus life, seminarians offer a visible reminder of the vocation each of us has within. College is a time for young people to grow and discern God’s will for their lives within their degrees, careers, and vocations. It is our duty as a college to foster this discernment, and we strive to provide the tools and the resources students need to become fully themselves. Professors, coaches, faculty, and friends support students throughout their term, while the monastery maintains a prayerful stability at the very heart of campus life, offering friendship, guidance, and sacramental nourishment to the entire Belmont Abbey community. The seminarians’ presence on campus, moreover, and their integration into academic life, brings close an added and regular witness to committed discernment and inspires all of us to consider more seriously who it is God created us to be.

Since our founding in 1876, Belmont Abbey has played an active role in the life of the Catholic Church in the American South, not only providing a Benedictine liberal arts education but also ministering to North Carolina parishes and communities from the time when the state was considered “mission territory” to the recent past. Abbot Leo Haid presided as bishop over the entire state until the establishment of the Raleigh Diocese in 1924, and from 1890 until 1937 the college itself offered seminary formation, so we are particularly grateful to continue this legacy by providing an undergraduate education to the future priests of the Charlotte diocese. **BAC**



In June 2025 the Charlotte Diocese joyfully ordained her first class of home grown diocesan priests: (left to right) Fr. Anthony del Cid Lucero, Fr. Kolbe Murrey, Fr. Andrew Templeton, Fr. Nicholas Kramer, Fr. Joseph Yellico, and Fr. Christopher Angermeyer. PHOTO COURTESY CATHOLIC NEWS HERALD

Seminarians reflect on their experience

“As a second-year seminarian at St. Joseph College Seminary, most of my classes are at Belmont Abbey. While I was at first a bit confused when I found out seminarians take classes away from the actual seminary building, I have come to enjoy and appreciate commuting to the Abbey. As someone training to become a pastor, taking classes with the students has given me the chance to share my life with them and to get a first feel for inviting the people of God to a relationship with Our Lord. Whether it’s praying the Angelus with students before lunch, competing in the flag football tournament, or trying to make others laugh in class, I’ve enjoyed sharing a life with the students at the Abbey, and it’s shown itself to be beneficial to my priestly formation.”

— *Michael Herman*

“Looking back at my time at Belmont Abbey College, I think that what sets it apart from the vast majority of other colleges and universities is the integrity of its approach to higher level education. I have been pushed to excel and grow in virtue in all areas of my life while at the Abbey: first, through the intense physical training and discipline required to be part of the BAC Athletics program (Men’s Tennis); secondly, through the rigorous intellectual formation of the Honors College and the Philosophy, Economics, and (Latin) Language departments; and, finally, through the deep human and spiritual formation I received by being a part of the vibrant Catholic community on campus, the members of which have taught me how to order my actions such that I might come to know and glorify God in all things. I am currently continuing my undergraduate education at Belmont Abbey College as a seminarian in the St. Joseph College Seminary program.”

— *Elijah Burkle ‘23*



SCAN TO CHECK OUT
St. Joseph
College
Seminary
stjcs.org/



Abbot Placid serves as a spiritual father to the monks of Belmont Abbey, each of whom makes a Benedictine vow of stability to love and seek God in this community.

I started writing this reflection shortly before I took solemn vows. I wrote about how monastic life follows in the footsteps of others: of Benedict and the monastics before him, and of Benedict's disciples down to the present day: the footsteps of Abbot Placid and the other monks of our community. That ultimately, we are all following in the footsteps of Christ the Lord, the true model for every Christian life.

But after the Mass of Profession, after celebrating with the Abbey community, with the monks and close family and friends, and going to bed later than I would have liked, I realized I had to start all over. I could not have known beforehand what making solemn vows really is. Taking vows was a revelation, an epiphany, a Christophany. I suppose the experience is similar when one gets married: you know what it is like to fall in love, you know the other person, you know the gravity of lifelong commitment. But to call another your own—to make another your own by pronouncing words in the presence of God—must open a new level of awareness.

Or so it was for me, promising “with solemn vows before God and his saints, in the presence of our Father in Christ, Abbot Placid Solari, and the monks of this monastery, stability in this community, conversion through a monastic life, and obedience according to the rule of our Holy Father Benedict and the law proper to our Congregation.” I realized I was consenting to being “taken possession of by Christ.”

It was the readings, carefully chosen by Abbot Placid, that also taught me. I could relate to Abram—departing the comfortable familiarity of Pennsylvania for the strange land of North Carolina, because I heard God's call. Abram went to become a

To be *with* Christ

Reflections on a Solemn Profession

**BY BR.
CHRYSOSTOM
SICA '24**
O.S.B.

THE LORD SAID TO ABRAM: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. - Genesis 12:1

It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ. - Philippians 3:12

Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. - John 24:26a

D'un aultre amer mon cuer s'abesseroit;
Il ne fault ja penser que je l'estrange
Ne que pour rien de ce propos me change,
Car mon honneur en appetisseroit. -15th c. chanson

blessing, and because God told him to.

But in the reading from Philippians and the Gospel I received an even greater promise than Abram: “resurrection from the dead,” “the supreme good of knowing Christ,” and that where Christ is, there will I be, provided I serve him.

To be with Christ! Here words fail. All I can say—that there is nothing and nobody that compares to him, that our true joy and our true end is to be with him, that he satisfies the deepest longing of our hearts—none of it can express the knowledge of my heart, the knowledge of his love.

Of course, faithfulness is not always easy, nor is monastic life. “I have decided to follow Jesus... the world behind me, the cross before me, no turning back, no turning back for me,” went one of the Communion hymns. And I do not always willingly embrace the cross.

But now, in those moments of darkness and weakness, when the grain of wheat falls and dies, when my lack of perfect maturity manifests itself, I can remember this moment: the moment Christ seized hold of me anew and I vowed to follow him to the end. Christ became my refuge, my goal, my guide, my love.

In the 15th century, Josquin des Prez adopted a chanson into a liturgical text. “You alone can do wonders... You alone are the Redeemer... To you alone we flee... O Jesus Christ.” And then, weaving the French love song into his Latin poem, he continued: “to love another / would be deceitful / to love another / would be great madness and sin!”

No other love can satisfy my heart—so I am resolved. As the closing hymn stated:

O Jesus, thou hast promised
 to all who follow thee
 that where thou art in glory
 there shall thy servant be;
 and, Jesus, I have promised
 to serve thee to the end;
 O give me grace to follow,
 my master and my friend! **BAC**



Confreres, family, friends, and local priests gather to pray and to celebrate this extraordinary vocational milestone with Br. Chrysostom. (above) Br. Chrysostom intones his plea for God’s help and abiding presence throughout the vowed years of his life.





Beloved cross country coach, teacher, mentor, friend, and confrere, Br. Paul has dedicated his life to serving the Abbey community.

Steadfast in Hope: *A Golden Jubilee*

Br. Paul Shanley celebrates 50 years as a monk of Belmont Abbey

**BY LAURA
SCHAFFER**
Editor

BR. PAUL SHANLEY ARRIVED on Belmont Abbey's campus in 1971 in his sister's green Camaro. A high school senior from upstate New York, he had decided to visit on the recommendation of his parish priest, who had been ordained alongside the Abbey's Fr. Raymond Geyer. At the time, Br. Paul knew almost nothing about Belmont Abbey, but after touring campus with James Butner - who would later become Fr. Michael in his novitiate class - Br. Paul made up his mind. He returned as a student that August, "and here I am," he remarks today, "52 years later."



An English major, Br. Paul remembers Dr. Herndl and Dr. More, Fr. Matthew and Fr. John Oetgen, and considers his undergraduate experience “the best education I ever got.” Of course, from friends and peers, English and Political Science professors, and especially from the monks, Br. Paul learned much more than the essential skills and knowledge through which he now serves his own students.

Fr. John Oetgen became particularly influential, not only in the classroom but also along Abbey Lane, where he could be found during “monk walks.” “After lunch every day almost,” remembers Br. Paul, “we would walk down Abbey Lane, and Fr. John and Fr. Anselm would walk... with Fr. Kenneth sometimes, and... they always spoke to people... They got to know you, and you got to know them. John was always good at bringing you into the conversation.” In fact, Fr. John would become a true mentor in Br. Paul’s studies, discernment, and early monastic years. “Be steadfast,” Fr. John told him, “Don’t quit; just keep moving towards the goal.” It was advice to which he repeatedly turned, finding in it the stability and hope that still draw him to Benedictine life and to service in the college community.

Film Class

Today, Br. Paul’s film class remains extremely popular, not least because he brings to it the humor, directness, and compassion which have always endeared him to students and colleagues.

“I would like [my students] to see that the black and white movies of the thirties and forties have relevance and meaning today - like Mr. Smith Goes to Washington and even Citizen Kane,” Br. Paul says, “What I want them to see is

CONTINUES ON PAGE 49



Br. Paul greets alumni, students, and friends after the Golden Jubilee Mass, during which he renewed his monastic vows.



During Homecoming 2024, the college community celebrated Br. Paul’s jubilee with a special dinner and cocktail reception.



Brother Paul Shanley Through the Years

Founding member of the Pi Kappa Phi fraternity and legendary Abbey presence, Br. Paul came to know this remarkable place first as a student, then a novice, and later as a brother, teacher, and lifelong friend.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 47

that a film can be entertaining and thought provoking. It doesn't have to be a Marvel comic. It can be two characters around whom a story's being told, and it can be powerful and dynamic." Recognizing the dynamic power of a person's character - of a conversation, an encounter, or a familiar place - requires the same attentive humility on which genuine community depends, and inviting his students to encounter person and narrative in film (while also great fun) invites them to a deeper understanding of the hallmarks sustaining Benedictine life.

Cross Country Coach

In addition to teaching decades of English and film classes, Br. Paul was a beloved Cross Country coach for many years - though he originally assumed the role only to fill a last-minute vacancy. Stepping in with no prior knowledge of the sport, Br. Paul nevertheless found invaluable resources in Mike Reidy, Stephen Miss, and the entire Athletic Department.

"The door was always open," he remembers. With their support

*"When I was coaching,
I would emphasize that
what [students] had was a
gift and that they needed to
use that gift for the greater
glory. If they didn't, then
that was just as much of
a sin as anything else ...
I did not want them to
squander it."*

Br. Paul inspired and guided his team, becoming a mythic member of Abbey Athletics. "When I was coaching," he noted, "I would... emphasize that what [students] had was a gift and that they needed to use that gift for the greater glory. If they didn't, then that was just as much of a sin as anything else... I did not want them to squander it."

And when Br. Paul led his team in creating a campus running trail, he began a work that would benefit not only Abbey Cross Country but also future generations of students and community members. So it

seems fitting - despite his own surprise at the Athletic Awards Banquet that year - that when it came time to choose a name for the completed project, the team and administration quickly decided on the "Brother Paul Trail."

The Rule of St. Benedict has sustained centuries of monastic life, yet it concludes with the gentle admonition that its contents are only the beginning. After fifty years as a monk of Belmont Abbey, this has become Br. Paul's favorite aspect of the Rule: its essential foundation in hope. "Each day is a beginning," he notes. In the quiet way of life St. Benedict commends, founded on the stability of monastic rhythms in prayer and Scripture, there is always hope.

Fifty years of students, alumni, and Abbey community have found in Br. Paul a teacher, coach, mentor, confrere, and friend. As we celebrate his Golden Jubilee, we gratefully acknowledge both this immeasurable legacy and the gift that Br. Paul continues to be for the entire Abbey community. May God bless his steadfast service. **BAC**



**SCAN TO
LEARN MORE**

about Br. Paul's
journey in his
own words
bac.edu/brpaul



During COVID, Gabby Enciso '24 took a chance on a small NC school ... Now hear her remarkable story



Faith, Family, School, Soccer

GABRIELA ENCISO LOOKED FORWARD to finding a second family among her teammates in college. A gifted and disciplined

**BY LAURA
SCHAFFER**
Editor

soccer player, she anticipated the kind of camaraderie that competing at the college level must develop, with athletes enthusiastically coming into their own at this new stage of life and community. However, when she began her undergraduate career at a college in her home state of California - and even before COVID effectively shut down athletics at this institution - the team dynamics left Gabby disillusioned and off-balance.

Uncertain what she might expect elsewhere but acutely aware that the pandemic had essentially foreclosed her opportunities to thrive as a student-athlete in her current situation, Gabby accepted a recruitment call from Coach Jaime Malilong, three thousand miles away at Belmont Abbey College. Three hours later, in a leap of faith that would open the door to the “biggest blessing of [her] life so far,” she decided to transfer to Belmont Abbey for her sophomore year.

Abbey Soccer

From the beginning of her Abbey career, Gabby found her coaches emphasizing an unexpected order of priority: faith, family, school, soccer. Gabby believed in God; she had been baptized Catholic, but she had been away from the sacraments for years and had never considered faith to be a focus of her life. Coach Mike Lynch and his colleagues regularly infused faith onto the field, opening players up to the opportunity to engage in athletic excellence not as something distinct from virtue but as a continued pursuit of the good in forming the whole person.

Coach Jaime and peers were planting seeds in Gabby's life. Still, she felt “a little lost.” Choosing a new college far from home - one she had never heard of before Coach Lynch pitched it over the phone - she had encountered all the challenges of sudden change with the added pressures of an ongoing pandemic. And while Gabby registered and even appreciated the cultural difference between her old and new teams, she also held back from embracing the true impact of this difference.

That summer, however, in preparing for junior year, Gabby tore her ACL. Suddenly, instead of the anticipated season - in which she'd looked forward to pushing herself even further and celebrating the rewards of determined teamwork - Gabby

faced months of rehabilitation and a slow recovery on the sidelines. It didn't help to be told that "God had a bigger plan," certainly not at first. She had come to the Abbey to play soccer, and now she couldn't. Yet as the fall semester ground past, Gabby began to recognize the way her coaches modeled the trust they were asking of her. "God has a bigger plan." It was never just words to them, and in practicing the patience and trust inherent in rehabilitation, she began to hear their encouragement in a new way.

Challenge and Opportunity

That spring Gabby continued physical therapy. Watching coaches and teammates living out their faith, meanwhile - not least in the ways they supported and encouraged her recovery - Gabby started to feel a "tap on the shoulder from God." Always before, when she'd felt a spiritual nudge, she'd ignored it, thinking she could never "be that person," someone so "involved in their faith."

But this question of who she was and who she could be had begun to take on a depth and a reality she'd never considered before. Turning to face her relationships and insecurities, she couldn't help but register an aimless drift to her life. She looked around her at the kind and happy people she most admired: people like her teammate, Anna Richard, were so open in their faith, so authentically secure in self-knowledge and so warmly present to others, and Gabby found herself thinking, "I want to be like that."

For the first time in her life, Gabby found herself "open to diving deeper into [her] faith," and it was an openness that changed everything. She started asking questions of her Catholic family members, whose joyful encouragement only increased the call she felt to seek out more. She discovered that she could turn to God as to a friend. And

she began to reevaluate her own friendships in the light of this new understanding. Surrounding herself more intentionally with people who shared her values, Gabby discovered a new source of strength in her own, core community, friends who love, understand, and challenge her and who ask her to do the same for them, mutually striving for the good.

And while she has now completed her undergraduate degree, Gabby has already begun the next stage of her journey, bringing a renewed and growing faith life into Belmont Abbey's master's program in Healthcare Administration. In pursuing her MHA, she hopes to become a healthcare leader who sees and serves people first. She seeks the formation that will enable her to uphold others in their need, inviting them to lean on someone who cares about them and their health and remains motivated, first and foremost, by the desire for their authentic good.

A Bright Future

Today, Gabriela Enciso radiates joy of a characteristically Benedictine kind. With a humility that recognizes God at work in her own gifts and struggles, she



Gabby celebrates with her friend and teammate, Alyssa Espinosa '25.

remains warmly attentive to those around her, practicing a hospitality that springs from generosity and gratitude.

Gabby's understanding of what it means to be in community has grown and deepened, animating her sense of vocation and inspiring profound possibilities on her path. Gabby continues to deepen her prayer life and embrace her faith in intentional community, yet as with all authentic works of love, this new life spills over and becomes a blessing to others beyond what she can know.

As a future healthcare administrator and Abbey graduate, Gabby looks forward to making her own contribution in a profession so urgently in need of faithful servant leaders, leaders who bring joyful self-knowledge in love to the service of others. **BAC**

Belmont Abbey student athletes strive to model excellence and virtue on and off the field.





MADE
TRUE



Leadership and generosity embrace the future of Classical Education: (left to right) Dr. Wysocki '04, President Thierfelder, Dr. and Mrs. Pallos, Dr. Boor '11, Kyle Boor, and Abbot Placid.

The Task Ahead

Dr. Boor's thoughts on her Installation as Vilma György Pallos Chair in Classical and Liberal Education

**BY CHRISTINE
(BASIL) BOOR '11**
*Vilma György Pallos
Chair in Classical &
Liberal Education*

IT IS A GREAT JOY TO FORMALLY receive the honor of being installed as the first Vilma György Pallos Chair in Classical and Liberal Education. The Pallos family's generosity has established the first Endowed Chair in the college's history. I am by no means worthy of this honor; however, I receive it in the firm trust that it is ever the Lord's way not to call the qualified but to qualify the called. And so in that hope, I accept this gift to the college, to myself and to my family, and, indeed, to what will be made possible in the future through the sacrificial generosity of the Pallos family.



Today, I would like to cast a vision of this future and speak to the task ahead. However, no such compelling vision (at least on the natural level) can be given without taking stock of past and present.

In thinking about the past, I would like to pay tribute to the woman to whom this chair is dedicated: Vilma György Pallos, Dr. Pallos' mother. Mrs. Pallos' life reads like one of the historical fiction adventure novels I obsessed over in my high school years. She was a survivor not only of the Nazi-occupation of Hungary in World War II, but also of Hungary's subsequent Communist-occupation and, later, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. In the wake of that revolution against the Communist government, during which the USSR violently repressed the people's resistance to communist rule, the Pallos family fled.

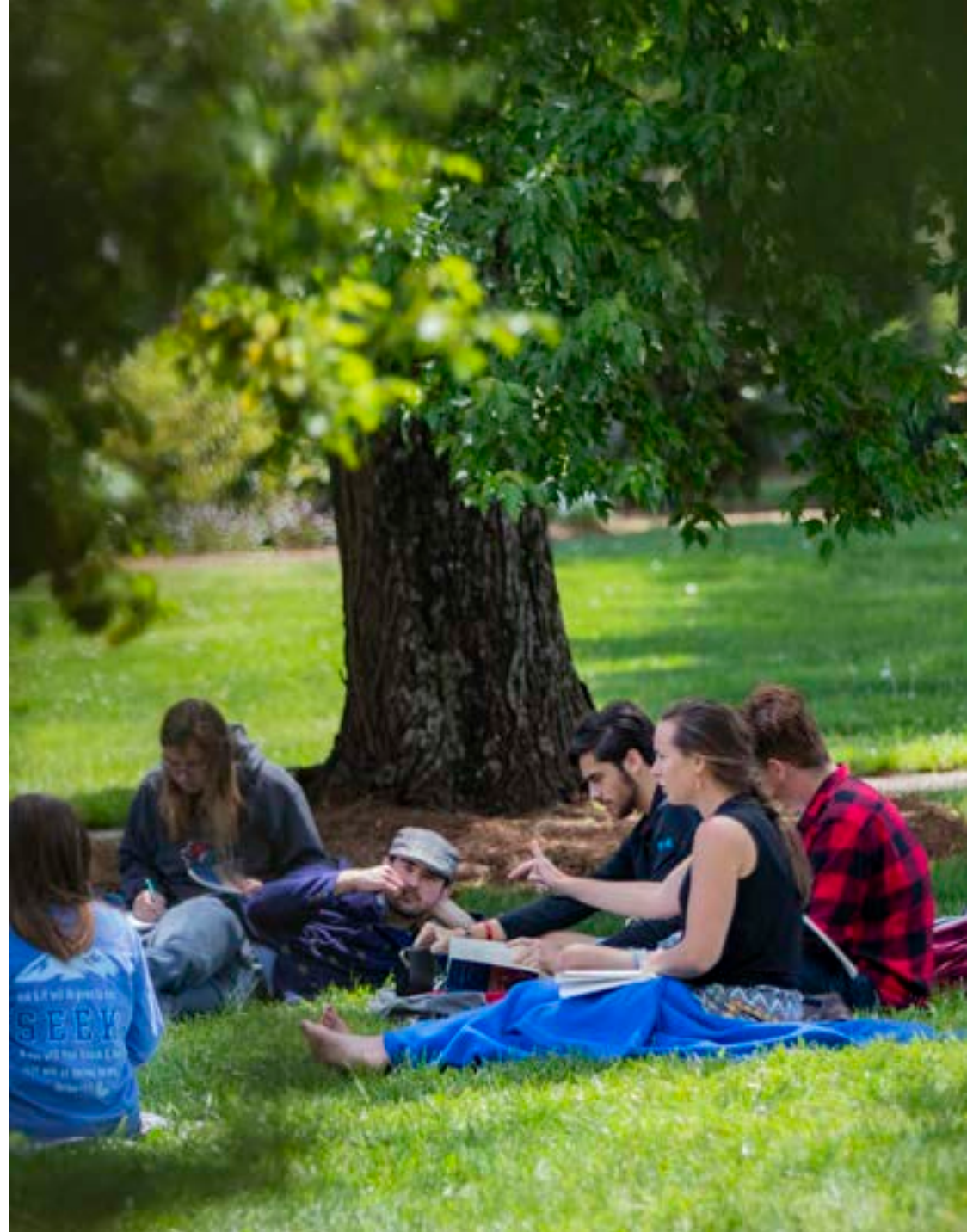
A Crisis in Education

They walked fourteen kilometers overnight and spent two months in a refugee camp before finding a sponsor to initiate the process of US emigration. The Pallos family eventually settled in Chattanooga, TN where Mrs. Pallos raised her children, homeschooled Dr. Pallos in Hungarian, and cared for her husband for seventeen years after he suffered a stroke.

How can this incredible history orient us to understand the significance of this chair and program in classical and liberal education in the present and the future? While a teacher by training, Mrs. Pallos did not teach in a formal setting after coming to the United States, but her life and quiet witness speak volumes to what classical and liberal education can mean.

We live in a spectacular moment. A vibrant moment. It is a moment of choice when life and death, blessing and curses, lie before us.

A word on the darker side of



that moment: this is a moment when the very ideological nightmares that threatened the Pallos family's life, home, and future have begun to resurface in the extremes of left and right in this country and around the world. On one hand, nihilistic despair leads to a tendency to tear down institutions. On the other hand, hubristic hope contends that the world can be remade in man's own image through establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth by purely human means. Both

movements grasp for control over a future that has become dim and uncertain in the wake of a widespread loss of faith in God and in truth. We live in a crisis of faith that is caused by a crisis of truth—human beings have lost confidence in reason's ability not only to know but to love - and to live in light of - what is true. I believe this crisis of faith in God and in truth is first and foremost a crisis of reason—and therefore a crisis in education.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 50

Dr. Boor and her Honors students pursue the True, the Good, and the Beautiful in academic community.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 49

Understandably, contemporary ideological clashes have led to deep confusion and fear in our nation, families and communities. Subsequently, this is a moment in which citizens on opposing sides of political issues seem incapable of speaking to one another or maintaining friendship that transcends partisan divides. A moment when young people too often lose their capacity to hope, suffering instead from the anxiety and depression that naturally accompany the secular vision of a future without eternal hope. A moment when so many of us find ourselves confused about what to do, and maybe even feel powerless to resist the waves of darkness that spiral not just “out there” but within our own families, communities, and parishes.

This is not an easy moment, but Mrs. Pallos’ life speaks to an eternal truth as present in this moment as it was in hers: Love

triumphs in the quiet and hidden life that cares for one’s own. Love triumphs in the little things, the little moments, the little choices. Love triumphs not so much in political sloganeering and campaigning but in a reverence for truth that transcends the tumult of every moment. Love triumphs in the womb and it triumphs in the tomb.

Love and the Liberal Arts

Mrs. Pallos’ life speaks to a truth that the Benedictine community has long understood, ever since its founding in the wake of the collapse of the Roman Empire: Rome is always burning. And while we have a duty to care for the common good, more often than not the most important thing we can do for that good is not to get distracted in the clash of ideological warfare but to tend to our own gardens, our own families, our children, and those who have been entrusted to our care. And it

is also our work as Benedictines to attend to our books; after all, most of the classical literature we read today owes its existence to the quiet work of obedient monks who preserved what is true and good in a spirit of love and listening.

I believe Mrs. Pallos’ history offers a key to our future, for it speaks to something quite simple, though very hard, as we face the everyday task of life: it speaks to the irreplaceable gift of loving dedication to the good entrusted to us, no matter the storm of the moment. As the Lord reminds each of us: “in the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.”

If I have painted a dark picture, it is only to highlight this point: I have an explosive hope in the good made possible by the Pallos family’s generosity. For it is precisely the dissatisfaction with the current wars of ideology and the limits of contemporary education that have revived the devoted pursuit of a radical alternative: a rediscovery of classical and liberal education.

In the past five years alone, we have seen exponential growth in classical homeschooling and classical charter schools. Closer to home, bishops around the country and indeed around the world are beginning to reclaim the vision of education that is our birthright, education in the liberal arts—and education in natural reason (logos) that naturally opens us to a fuller encounter with the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ, logos made flesh.

These schools, popping up around the country and the world by the minute, need teachers who are formed in love of truth and in a competent pedagogy that will allow them to be effective in conveying the truth to future generations. Our movement needs teachers. And we are here to provide a resting place for teachers in this movement to grow and to thrive and to learn as they pursue

Thanks to the generosity of Dr. and Mrs. Pallos, Dr. Boor carries on Vilma Pallos’ legacy of loving excellence in education.



their own vocation to teach.

The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few! Our program is thriving not because of anything I have done but because it was born of the Pallos family's generosity in responding to this overwhelming need in education today that calls us to reclaim a fully human vision of education that is our birthright as a Benedictine, liberal arts institution. I believe that this Chair and the Master's in Classical and Liberal Education that it establishes marks the beginning of a new springtime in education not only at Belmont Abbey College but in the diocese, the state of NC, the nation, and the world. To be candid, I believe we are called to be a new Montecasino, for such a time as this. And I believe this program is one of the most significant strides we could ever take in that direction.

This generation's starvation for truth is in fact our greatest



opportunity; for the one thing that I encounter every day in the classroom with undergraduates and now teaching master's students—teaching the teachers—is an irrepressible hunger for the truth. Our students are hungry for truth, and for the wealth of meaning it gives to life, to faith, to family, and to freedom. Not only that but our students are hungry to share the truth they encounter every day with

their own students and generations of students to come.

The task of the future is now the task of the present: to love well in the little moments of every day and in the face of overwhelming odds, to pass on the treasure of our spiritual and intellectual inheritance, and to be a blessing to generations to come. Thank you, Dr. and Mrs. Pallos for making that possible. **BAC**

Honors seminars seek ever more deeply to embrace our spiritual and intellectual inheritance.

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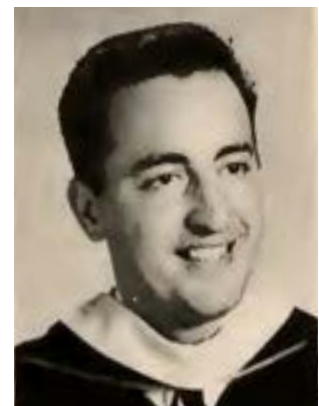
Chuck and his beloved wife Fran were married for almost 68 years.

Chuck Muller, Sr.

Remembering a Belmont Abbey Legend

HEARING ALUMNI STORIES is one of the best parts of being Belmont Abbey's Alumni Director. Each history is unique, but across their varied range I recognize a similar arc of responses and emotions when alumni relate how they came to the Abbey. Many first encounter Belmont Abbey through family or friends, or through a teacher, guidance counselor, or member of the clergy.

**BY MIKE
ELLIS '90**
*Director of
Alumni Relations*





Then comes a sense of curiosity about this small Catholic college in the heart of the Bible Belt - with a monastic community still thriving at its heart after nearly 150 years. "What is this place?" prospective students wonder. And when wondering turns to visiting, many find in the peace and stability something they didn't even realize they were looking for. It's one of the things that unites so many of us in our Abbey experience.

In October of 2023, I was still trying to find my footing in my new role at the Abbey. Of course I was glad to be back on campus, but I was also nervous to face my first Homecoming as Alumni Director. Yet as I walked out to the Lowry Alumni House and began introducing myself to those checking in, I noticed an older gentleman sitting at a table. He had on a Korean War Veteran baseball cap and seemed to know everyone walking through the door.



Chuck Muller led the 1955-6 Student Government as President (back row, second from right).

It was my first encounter with Anthony "Chuck" Muller Sr. '56, and when I approached to greet him, he couldn't have been more gracious. He introduced his son, Anthony "Corky" Muller '73 and his daughter, Judith, who'd driven him up for the weekend from his home in North Myrtle Beach, SC. And as Chuck, Sr. and I began comparing our Abbey journeys,

we were glad to find those familiar elements in each other's stories and experiences, even with 34 years between us. More than once over the course of the conversation, Chuck shook my hand and said, "You're going to do great in this job." I knew, in that moment, that I had to get to know Chuck better.

Chuck brought contagious joy and enthusiasm to countless Abbey events.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 54

Early years

Chuck Muller was born in Chicago, the son of Austrian immigrants. At 17, like many young men of his generation, he investigated the armed forces. Though he completed a Coast Guard application, Chuck decided to investigate other opportunities before taking the oath of service, and it wasn't until he saw a Marine Corps recruitment poster in Chicago's "Loop" that he recognized his calling. Seeing the marine standing tall in his dress blues against a background of palm trees, Chuck decided then and there to enlist. So off he went to Parris Island, SC.

For the rest of his life, Chuck would credit his discipline and attention to detail to his Marine Corps training and experience. After an early military career that included honorable discharge, entering the Reserves, being recalled to active duty in the Korean War, and returning to reserve duty again, Chuck decided to enroll at Illinois Wesleyan.



Six months later he finished his coursework and went back on active military duty at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, where he achieved the rank of Gunnery Sergeant.

It was during this time, on a weekend pass to Carolina Beach, that Chuck met the love of his life, Frances "Fran" Ellen England. They married in 1950, and Chuck always bragged that he married the "former Miss England." It was Fran, a 1950 Sacred Heart graduate, who convinced Chuck to move to the Belmont area and enroll at Belmont Abbey, and who

ultimately helped him to find his way as a student, husband, father, and devout Catholic.

Belmont Abbey era

While studying Business Administration at the Abbey, Chuck worked full-time at the local cotton mill. Recounting his undergraduate days, he remembers, "I worked an 8-hour shift, and if you were late, you didn't get to work that day." He could sometimes study for 1 or 2 hours at work, but only if he'd completed his duties, and each night he would get home around 10 pm just to continue studying. Despite the ambitious load, however, and thanks to the discipline of his Marine training and the guidance of Father Cuthbert, his academic advisor, Chuck managed to thrive, even serving as student body president.

Chuck always remembered his Abbey years with great fondness. No matter how many years passed, and despite his recently declining health, Chuck always returned to campus at Homecoming, where he brought a smile everywhere he went. As a faithful Abbey benefactor and an 1876 Heritage Society member, Chuck even created the even created the Frances England Muller and Anthony C. Muller, Sr. Endowed Scholarship to support local Catholic students in their own Abbey journeys.

Into his 90's, Chuck's warmth and tenacity remained irresistible. He continued to meet new people nearly every day and delight in learning from them. He knew how to love and value his ever-increasing number of friends. And looking back on a long and active life, including a successful career with Ford Motor, Chuck recognized his proudest accomplishment as the time he shared with his beloved wife and family, his seven kids, many grandchildren, and

Chuck catches up with the much-loved Fr. David Kieran, O.S.B.



great-grandchildren. He was a remarkable man.

Two weeks after I traveled to Myrtle Beach to interview Chuck, his son “Corky” Muller ’73 passed away. Less than three weeks later, on March 5, 2025, Chuck followed at the age of 94. When I spoke with his daughter, Mary Fran, at his funeral in the Basilica, she told me that she’d been astounded at how many people had attended the Irish “send off” in North Myrtle Beach. I can’t say I was surprised. After all, Chuck was a man who cared about people and was more interested in hearing your story... than telling his own.

As someone who had the pleasure of counting Chuck my friend in a comparatively brief time, I know I am far from alone in missing him. His strength and discipline and his touchingly genuine humility will remain a profound inspiration to me, and I am deeply grateful to have encountered such an extraordinary fellow alumnus. **BAC**



Mike Ellis '90, left, enjoys lunch in Myrtle Beach with (left to right) Bill Hatfield '73, Chuck Muller '56, and Chuck's daughter Mary Fran.

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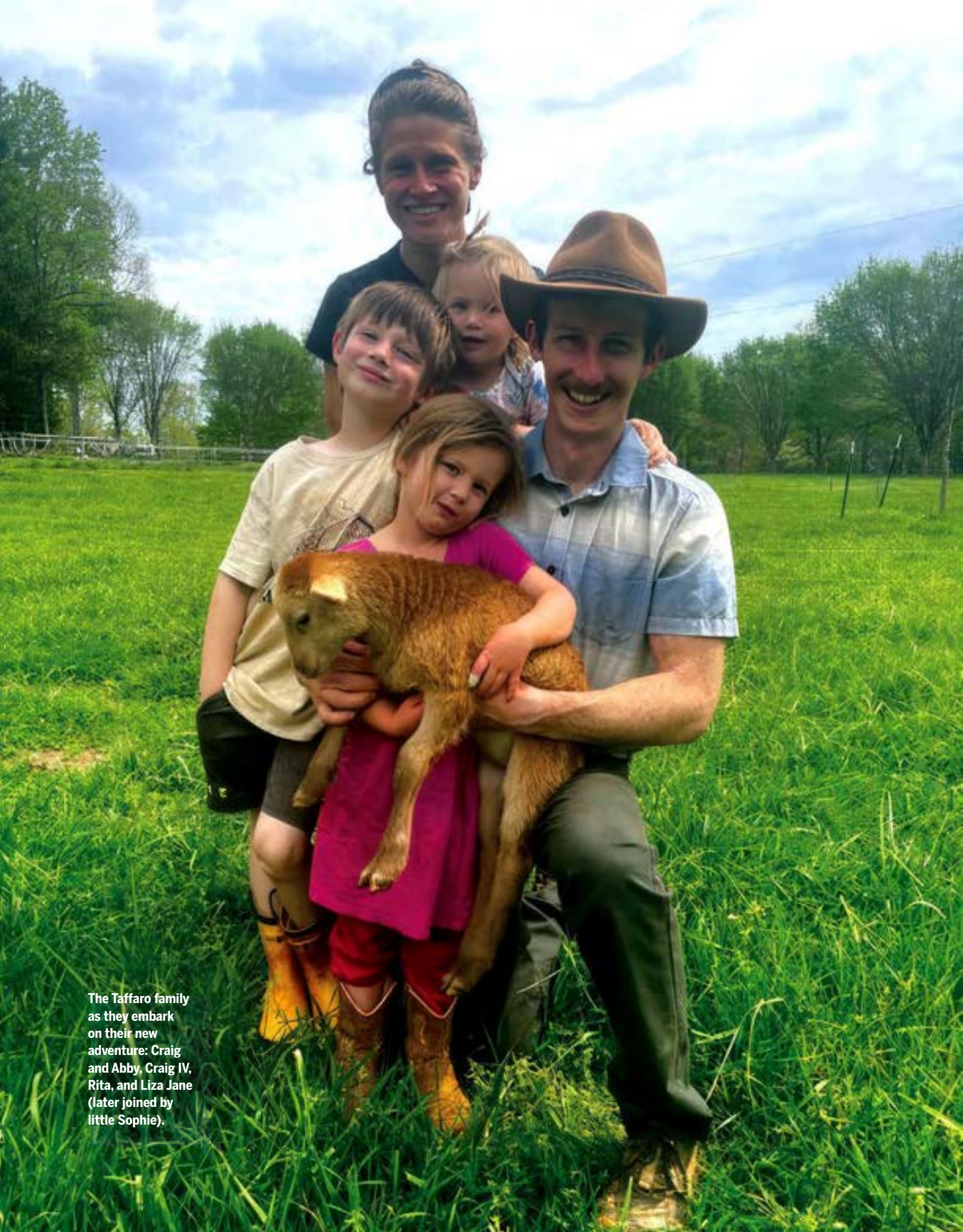
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The Taffaro family as they embark on their new adventure: Craig and Abby, Craig IV, Rita, and Liza Jane (later joined by little Sophie).



From Seminar *to* Abattoir

An Education in the Good Life

BY LAURA SCHAFFER | *Editor*

FROM CAMPUS IT'S LITTLE MORE THAN an hour drive to Melvin Hill Meats in Columbus, NC. As our Abbey team headed west through the Piedmont on a bright, gusty Saturday at the beginning of March, the perfect weather and the foray into Carolina countryside only heightened our eagerness to hear about the home and business that Honors alumni Craig and Abby Taffaro '13 had built - or more appropriately, grown - since graduation.

When we arrived, Craig saw us and waved. You might never guess that the man cheerfully coming to welcome us - with his hands and his knees marked with the good dirt of tree-planting - had begun a job in the Charlotte banking scene after graduation, and though we wondered what had first inspired a city-dweller in the world of finance to become a rural butcher and farmer, we could already see how naturally he'd adopted the place and way of life.

Right away, Craig ushered us toward a boisterously flapping green and white striped tent where we devoured heaping bowls of gumbo. And I didn't need to be told that the tender chicken and flat-out revelatory sausage had come fresh from the abattoir of Melvin Hill Meats. (It turns out you really can taste the difference!)

The Taffaros had organized a tree-planting event on the 16-acre farm where they raise pigs, cattle, and chickens. In keeping with age-old agrarian traditions, neighbors and friends of all ages would gather throughout

CONTINUES ON PAGE 58



The Taffaros pause in a joyful, mid-work moment of leisure with friend and fellow alumnus, Dr. Boor '11.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 57

the day to share labor, food and drink, music, and fellowship and to reinforce the joyful responsibility of community life. By the end of the day - after beer for the grown-ups, king cake for the kids, and gumbo for everyone - more than a thousand seedlings would stand ready in long furrows: a variety of fruit and nut trees (including plums, elderberries, hazelnuts, and apples) that would start providing food for the animal and human members of the farm community over two to seven years.

While we ate, Craig parked the orange tractor with its fresh load of compost; then he and Abby brought out the king cake for the waiting kids, and the two of them joined us in the shade to share their story, beginning with the early impact of their Belmont Abbey experience.

In particular, Craig recalled a conversation he'd had with Dr. Eugene Thuot as a junior in the (then) Honors Institute, long before he'd considered an agrarian life: "I went to Dr. Thuot," Craig said, "and told him that I wanted to pursue a doctorate degree and... be a professor. And he told me... without any real discussion, No,

that's not for you. You need to do something more active. You have an active soul... I didn't really like the answer at the time, but I took it, and I thought, okay, maybe you know me better than I know me... He did have a special gift for knowing people."

"Dr. Thuot was particularly formative for both of us, I think," Abby added, "and really challenged us to pursue Truth in a... unique and specific way."

Drawn to the Real

This love of Truth, in fact, continues to inspire their vision and goals, as the Taffaros seek to meaningfully engage with reality in the work, relationship, and community of their daily lives. "It's not like there's a farming aspect to Belmont Abbey or an immersion in nature... as part of the curriculum," Craig said, "but if we are seeking truth and we're seeking specifically God who is Truth, then the whole education is about seeking the real. And for us, that was the constant in our discernment of what we wanted to do as a family. What we wanted to accomplish in life was to seek the real, and in our particular case, that kept leading us back to wanting to do something on the

farm, something agricultural. And so...our Abbey experience, I think, planted... the seeds of discernment that led us to what we're doing now."

Since graduation, this discernment has drawn the Taffaros ever more deeply into an agrarian way of life: from growing herbs on their Charlotte apartment porch to raising chickens and tending a garden in the suburbs, to buying farmland in rural North Carolina.

Discernment and Community

"When we first purchased the land," Craig remembered, "we weren't quite sure what we would do... and we started asking our future neighbors... and other local people here what was needed, what might be... useful to the community. And what we kept hearing was, Well, we need a local butcher." At a pig workshop weekend not long before, Craig had discovered an interest in butchering, so when he and Abby heard that this coincided with a community need, they decided to make the leap. "And here we are, a couple of years later, running Melvin Hill Meats."

Just as community needs guided their discernment, community life has continued to inform the Taffaros' journey, together with an essential stability. "Stability is a huge part of our life," Abby said. "We chose a piece of land and decided to develop it. ... Whatever we do to the land, whatever we plant, whatever additions we put into the soil, those are going to be part of our children's lives and hopefully their children's children - and for however many generations the farm stays in our family. ... It puts a responsibility on you. And... in committing to a place you end up committing to the people of that place," she added, "and we very quickly realized how big of a deal that was. And how difficult it could be. It required a lot of us."

"The hallmark of stability,"



SCAN HERE
to watch their
interview
Or visit bac.
edu/taffaro

Craig agreed, “is so beautiful in the way that it seems to be the precursor to any real lasting good in a place... In our particular case, now living on this piece of land and in a community, I can see how disruptive a constant moving can be to real community developing, true relationships forming... When you face difficulties in... building good community, ...the temptation is to move on to the next thing. And... living in the city of Charlotte for almost ten years... gave us some of that experience. It was easy to move from group to group.” Whereas, the Taffaros learned, living within an agrarian community of neighbors - and depending each other in ways that self-selecting social groups aren’t required to do - means working through difficulties, responding and growing with the humility, patience, and love that authentic commitment requires.

Gratitude in the Good Life

“I think one of the most powerful moments,” Abby recalled, “was sitting down in the first few months that we lived here and praying the usual table prayer of *Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts...* The gifts are so much more real when you have an idea of how they’ve been given... So often our friends and people in our community are called to mind in that moment because they’ve provided the food that’s on our table. And it’s a really special way to live. We’re really grateful for it.”

At the end of our visit, loaded up with fresh eggs and honey, we drove home with a new appreciation of what it means to pursue “the good life:” that aim of liberal education - and human endeavor itself - from the very beginning. Of course, most of us can’t go out and buy a farm, but each of us can find ways to seek reality, share community, and live the gratitude and stability that so inform the way of life the Taffaros have found and embraced. **BAC**



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Interested in a more agrarian life?

A few practical tips from the Taffaros

Abby: “One of the simplest things you could do is start growing herbs on your porch if you have a porch - anywhere there’s sunlight. In your backyard you could start a vegetable garden; you could start one in your front yard, actually. We did that. And get your hands in the dirt and try to grow something for your table. It’s a really powerful experience putting seeds in the ground and watching them turn into something that can sustain you.”

Craig: “Wendell Berry reminds us that... society is fundamentally agricultural because we all need to eat... So if you want to try and seek an agricultural type of life ...I think for most of us that’s probably going to mean just small changes of habits... If you have a family, cook together at home. ...[it’s] a great family activity. You reconnect with one another, and... share a meal that you worked together to create. And even better if you actually provided some of those ingredients for your table. If you can’t, then know the person who did and just grow out from that act of eating.”



SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HOMESTEADING
The Taffaro’s online course, Homestead Pig Harvest, is for anyone who wants to master the art of home-scale pig butchery.



Celebrating 40 Years

Dr. Gireesh Gupta's Legacy at Belmont Abbey College of Excellence

**BY SKYLER
CABAN '25**
*BAC Marketing
Intern*

FOR FOUR DECADES DR. GIREESH GUPTA has been a cornerstone of the Belmont Abbey College faculty, inspiring countless students through his passion for teaching and dedication to education. From his arrival in 1985 to the present day, Dr. Gupta has remained steadfast in his commitment to student success, embodying the Benedictine values that define Belmont Abbey's academic culture.

A Passion for Teaching

Dr. Gupta's journey into education began in high school, where he discovered his enthusiasm

for learning and helping others understand complex subjects. "I enjoyed helping my high school friends with math and other

subjects," he recalls. This early passion translated seamlessly into his career, where he continues to find joy in witnessing students grasp new concepts and grow academically. At Belmont Abbey, Dr. Gupta has taught a wide range of courses, from technical subjects like Spreadsheet and Database Applications to foundational mathematics courses such as College Algebra and Mathematics for Liberal Arts. His expertise also extends to business education, with classes like Introduction

to Business and Applications of Quantitative Methods in Business & Economics. His ability to teach across disciplines reflects his broad knowledge and commitment to equipping students with essential skills for their careers.

Finding a Home at the Abbey

Dr. Gupta first visited Belmont Abbey College in the summer of 1985 for an interview. He was immediately struck by the warmth of the faculty, students, and monks. “The people I met were very welcoming, kind, and gracious,” he says. The opportunity to interact with students one-on-one in a smaller class setting was particularly appealing to him, especially compared to his experience as an M.B.A. and Biophysics M.S. student at the University of Rochester, where the interaction with professors was minimal. Since then, he has remained at the Abbey, drawn by the positive work environment and the deep sense of community. Over the years, Dr. Gupta has formed meaningful relationships with faculty members, students, and monks, who have enriched his experience both professionally and personally.

A Driving Force in Education

Throughout his career, Dr. Gupta’s driving force has been his passion for teaching and the joy of seeing students succeed. “When I see my students learning the subject matter and feeling good about it, that makes me very happy. It makes my day,” he shares. His enthusiasm is evident in his teaching approach, where he emphasizes clarity, engagement, and support to ensure that students grasp difficult concepts. Belmont Abbey has played a crucial role in supporting his career by providing opportunities for professional development and ensuring he has the resources needed to excel in his work. “I have always felt welcome here,” he says. “I have always

“When I see my students learning the subject matter and feeling good about it, that makes me very happy. It makes my day.”

received the resources that I need to do my work and support my teaching and research.”

Advice for Future Educators

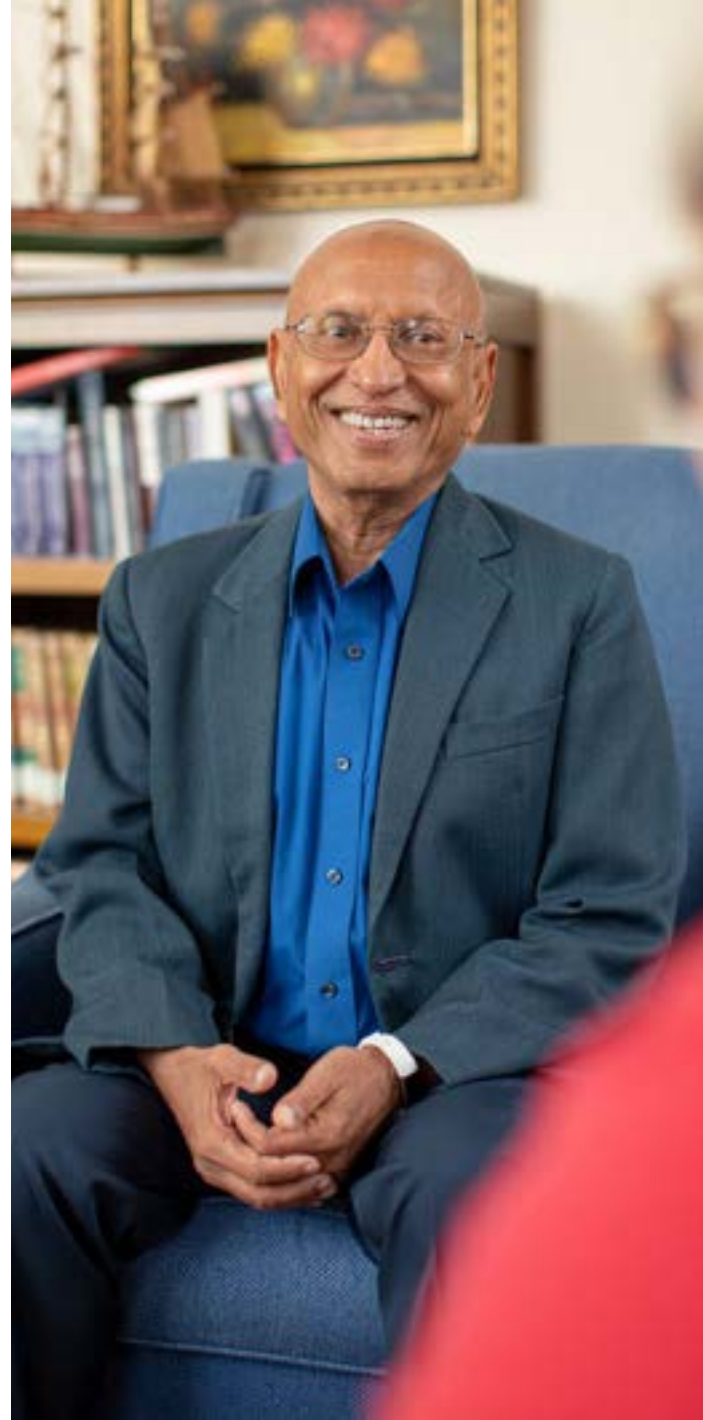
Reflecting on his career, Dr. Gupta offers advice to those just beginning their journey in teaching: “Be true to your work and continue learning. Use respect to build positive relationships with students.” He believes that fostering a welcoming environment and encouraging student engagement is key to a successful teaching career.

Spiritual Growth

Beyond academics, Dr. Gupta’s time at the Abbey has also been spiritually enriching. He credits the monks, particularly Father Chris, with helping him grow in faith, gratitude, and humility. “This faculty is very spiritual, and that has helped me grow in my faith, my gratitude, my humility, and in admiring service to others,” he reflects. The Benedictine traditions have also shaped his teaching style. He embraces the rule of Saint Benedict to “listen with the ear of your heart,” incorporating active listening and respect into his classroom environment. “Humility has enabled me to cultivate a respectful and conducive learning environment in the classroom,” he adds.

A Lasting Impact

Dr. Gupta’s influence extends far beyond the classroom. His dedication to education and mentorship has left an indelible



mark on Belmont Abbey College, shaping the academic and personal journeys of countless students. As he celebrates 40 years at the Abbey, his legacy serves as an inspiration for future generations of educators and students alike. With his unwavering commitment to teaching, faith, and student success, Dr. Gupta continues to exemplify the values of Belmont Abbey College, proving that education is not just about imparting knowledge but also about fostering growth, connection, and lifelong learning. **BAC**

Dr. Gupta has served four decades of Abbey students with unwavering cheerfulness and generosity.



Shared Language, *Marriages sprung from the Honors College* Shared Life

THE BELMONT ABBEY HONORS COLLEGE has always sought to form the whole person: to prepare students to discern and embrace their calling. Alumni weddings, then, are particularly joyful occasions, and since 2020, eight Honors College couples have married within a year of graduation. We caught up with four of these couples to discuss how the Honors experience formed them, both individually and in relationship.

**BY BR. LEO
YOUNG '13**
O.S.B.

David and Ellie Cornwell '25 attribute the close-knit Honors community to classroom discussions about the Great Books, discussions which usually continue after class and cultivate lasting friendships. "Conversations about the texts lead to conversations about life," said Ellie, "which naturally leads to friendship." David described studying the Great Books in community as "a unifying experience," which gives the students "a shared language" for discussing life's big questions. Kevin and Laura Gillett '23 even consider this friendship as the greatest Honors College blessing: "We have a tight-knit and wonderful community of friends, even several years after graduation," they said, adding, "we are most grateful for the experience of community and friendship that we received at the Abbey." Anthony and Dana Klein '24 likewise described the program as "a special breeding ground for true friendship" and cited Christ-centered friendships as a particular gift of the Honors College: "It's so much easier to run toward the Lord when you're running in a pack."

Each couple spoke enthusiastically of the impact on their spiritual lives. "Spirituality was at the heart of what we did," said Kevin and Laura, who recalled the formative experience of joining professors and classmates for Eucharistic Adoration and daily Mass. Matthew '24 and Mary '23 Ratcliff remember similar examples. "I was daily inspired by students and... professors who wanted to glorify God through their studies," said Matthew; "I saw that by sincerely and humbly pursuing truth, we were coming to better know Our Lord." Mary agreed, adding that the Honors College helped her to "encounter the beauty of (the) faith" both inside and outside class.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 64



KEVIN AND LAURA GILLETT '23, MARRIED JUNE 2024

KEVIN AND LAURA LIVE IN TEXAS. Laura teaches high school literature and writing at Founders Classical Academy of Frisco. Kevin is a 7th grade mathematics teacher and Middle School Dean at Founders Classical Academy of Lewisville.



ANTHONY AND DANA KLEIN '24, MARRIED JUNE 2024

ANTHONY AND DANA LIVE IN WACO, Texas. Anthony is an English PhD student at Baylor University. Dana is the Assistant Campus Minister at St. Peter's Catholic Center at Baylor University.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 63

The entire Honors experience provided a strong foundation for discernment. “When you’re already seeking truth and to deepen your faith,” David said, vocational questions “naturally come up... We’re all asking these questions together.” Mary Ratcliff remarked that studying virtue and goodness in philosophy and literature “helps you learn how to recognize tendencies towards both virtues and vices within yourself and others... Upon getting to know Matthew,” she said, “I could see the virtuous man that he was constantly striving to be.” Anthony and Dana noted their Honors professors’ own marriages and family lives: “(we were) very lucky to witness the beautiful marriages and relationships of our Honors professors,” the Kleins said; “Their witness ... showed us how to love one another well and gave us good models to keep in mind as we discerned marriage.” Kevin and Laura agreed: “The examples of our professors, many of whom have large and joyful families, did not go unnoticed,” while their studies further aided discernment: “We were encouraged at every turn to discover the nature of and live out a virtuous relationship.”

Even more than its undeniable career and postgraduate preparation, “the Honors College integrated spirituality into the academic life and leisurely life,” according to Kevin and Laura, “provid[ing] a model for a life well-lived: we were not taught to treat work, church, and leisure as atomized parts of a life. Instead, the life given to us was communal and integrated.” Likewise, when asked what they most wanted to share with others about the Honors College, David and Ellie did not hesitate: “(The Honors College) teaches you not what to think but how to think,” said Ellie, and David added simply, “the Honors College is interested in making saints.” **BAC**



DAVID AND ELLIE CORNWELL '25, MARRIED JUNE 2025

AFTER GRADUATION, DAVID plans to teach in the Charlotte area. Ellie will begin working as a registered nurse at Atrium Health in Pineville.



MATTHEW '24 AND MARY '23 RATCLIFF, MARRIED JULY 2024

MATTHEW AND MARY LIVE IN BELMONT, North Carolina. Matthew is the Coordinator of Marketing and Course Development at Veterum Sapientia Institute. Mary is an Oncology Research Specialist for Atrium Health.

Jacob Ciccarelli has harnessed AI as a tool for evangelization.

Abbey Alumnus Reimagines Apologetics

JACOB CICCARELLI '13 is CEO and Co-Founder of Truthly, an app designed to offer “instant answers about Jesus and His Church, daily inspirations, and bite-sized lessons to equip and support believers.”

**BY PAUL
JAKUB '25**

*BAC Marketing
Intern*

During a religious retreat called a Cursillo, Jacob realized there was no easily accessible tool to assist in-the-moment evangelization, especially for those who might be less well-versed in their faith than they would like. When he later heard a bishop say, “The step beyond belief is rarely taken,” this only reinforced the idea that would drive Truthly’s mission. Jacob wanted to equip himself and others with Catholic resources to strengthen faith and support all those seeking deeper understanding.

This was the start, but Jacob’s Belmont Abbey experience also deeply informed his journey, forming him in the faith and leadership necessary to realize his vision.

Leadership

Jacob developed and practiced essential leadership skills as an Abbey student. At the time, there was no active rugby program, so he and a few others organized an event called the North Carolina Rugby Union Tournament, which invited teams from UNC Greensboro, Appalachian State, and other colleges to compete at the Abbey. Jacob played a key role in fundraising, securing referees, arranging a national anthem performance, and organizing multiple matches throughout the day. This initiative contributed to the establishment of Belmont Abbey’s official NCAA Rugby program.

Another influence on Jacob’s leadership style, Br. Paul Shanley,



Jacob and Dr. Thierfelder share a joyful Abbey moment at the National Eucharistic Congress.

O.S.B. left a lasting impact through his intentionality and the way he greets everyone by name. Jacob aims always to bring this kind of personal connection and attentiveness to his own leadership approach at Truthly.

Abbey Values

Jacob attributes much of his mindset and mission at Truthly to the Benedictine hallmarks he learned at Belmont Abbey College. Hospitality, humility, and discipline in particular played a crucial role in shaping the app’s mission since Jacob designed Truthly to help the layperson

navigate religious questions with ease, fostering a space for exploring and strengthening faith.

Merging his entrepreneurial spirit, leadership experiences, and the faith-driven Abbey education, Jacob Ciccarelli has created an app that empowers others in their spiritual journeys. His time at the Abbey not only shaped his approach to leadership but also reinforced his desire to provide accessible tools for evangelization, and Truthly stands as a testament to the ways Abbey alumni continue to bring excellence and virtue into the world. **BAC**

Fun, Fellowship, *and our Abbey Future*

*Yacht Rock Event
Embraces Alumni Legacy*

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, under the leadership of Sarah '83 and Rana Mukerji, the Christmas in New York City event has successfully raised funds for the Alumni Legacy Scholarship.

**BY MIKE ELLIS
'90**

*Director of
Alumni Relations*

As alumni, we all recognize the value of a Belmont Abbey education and how it prepared us for professional and personal success. But in the competitive space of higher education, the decision to attend a particular college or university often comes down to the amount of financial assistance offered, so the Alumni Legacy Scholarship aims to provide a four-year, renewable scholarship to

deserving freshmen for whom cost might otherwise stand in the way of their Abbey journey.

This year, the scholarship committee decided to take a new, summer approach with our inaugural Yacht Rock Funday Sunday in Rockaway Beach, Queens, NY. On June 8, 2025, over 30 alumni and guests gathered at the Rockaway Hotel to enjoy food, fellowship, and fun in a casual setting.

To say it was a great day would



Mike and Annette Ellis '90 love nothing more than celebrating the Abbey with their fellow alumni.



Alumni brought their joyful brand of Abbey festivity to the Rockaway Hotel this summer.

be an understatement. The group shared memories from their Abbey days and connected over familiar themes. Father Chris even joined us for the festivities, and having a chance to catch up with our beloved monk was a highlight for many in attendance. It was a blessing to recall his influence on our lives, and as you can imagine, Fr. Chris was very moved by the love and kindness everyone showed him.

Prior to our event, **Albert Connolly '85** and **Patrick "Tubz" Tubridy '97** raffled two gift baskets at a separate event in Atlantic City, while the Yacht Rock 50/50 raffle generated another substantial sum. In total, alumni raised \$8725 toward the scholarship fund, the most money raised for the scholarship at one time. None of this would have been possible without the tireless effort of the Yacht Rock Committee:

Sarah Mukerji '83
Patrick Tubridy '97

Albert Connolly '85
Molly Nash '02
Jenny Gareis '06
Mike Ellis '90

In the end, the best alumni events are always driven by alumni themselves. Yacht Rock was a great example of what motivated alumni can accomplish by taking the lead and generating new and exciting ideas. We're excited to increase attendance and add even more activities and prizes in 2026.

But we also want to do more events all around the country! Father Chris has offered to join me at as many alumni gatherings as he can, and both of us are already looking forward to new opportunities to reconnect with our alumni family, celebrate great memories, and embrace our alumni legacy - helping to support future Abbey alums and our beloved alma mater.

If you wish to host an event, please reach out to Mike Ellis at mikeellis@bac.edu or call 336-409-3428.



Molly Nash '02 (right) and her sister Kate Cheney (left) brighten the Rockaway Hotel.

Alumni Legacy Scholarship

AS AN ABBEY ALUMNUS, you know firsthand the value of a BAC education. The skills, knowledge, and relationships you developed at Belmont Abbey helped to prepare you for success, and now you have the chance to impact the lives - and the futures - of the students following in your footsteps. Leave your alumni legacy and give today!



Upcoming Alumni Events in 2025-2026:

Homecoming
Oct 3-5, 2025

Christmas at the Belmont House
Dec 4, 2025

Tampa Bay Alumni & Friends Reception
Feb 26, 2026

And stay tuned for more information on:

Belmont Christmas Reception
150th Anniversary Kickoff Event
Athletics Hall of Fame Reception
Alumni Yacht Rock Event





From left, Rachel '19, Cassidy '16, and Rebecca '19 have made "Coutinho" a byword for excellence in Abbey Women's Soccer.

Three Sisters Find a Home

The Coutinho Siblings built an epic Abbey legacy

HOW DO YOU MAKE a home away from home? It has to begin with a welcome. At Belmont Abbey College, the Benedictine Hallmarks instruct us to welcome each person as Christ him-

BY ROLANDO RIVAS
Associate VP
of Marketing &
Communications

self. This indeed was the case with Cassidy Coutinho, the first of the three Coutinho sisters and soccer legends to find her home at the Abbey. Coaches Mike Lynch and Jaime Malilong, in particular, along with Dr. Gene Thuot of the Honors College, offered just such an authentic welcome and showed Cassidy that the Abbey was not just a place to play and learn but also a place to thrive.

Newcomers to the Abbey find themselves surrounded by loving support, an atmosphere in which friendships steadily grow. "My only advice to my sisters," Cassidy says, remembering her efforts to recruit her twin sisters to the Abbey, "was my own experience here. The opportunity to play, to make a family here, connecting with the coaches, making lasting friendships and incredible memories, going to championships... my experience was the best advice."

Cassidy had the ideal - but not unusual - Abbey experience, and Rachel and Rebecca knew from their first visit with Cassidy that the Abbey was different. "Belmont Abbey was such a down-to-earth looking school; it wasn't what you see in the movies. When we visited her, she was saying "hi" to everyone she walked by. I had to ask her do you know everyone on campus?" Rachel said.

And when they joined Cass as fellow students, Rebecca recalls, "It was truly like a home. Once you invest yourself into Belmont Abbey, ...all the people become your family. That's why we still hang out with the coaches. You get out of it what you put into it: your relationships, your soccer skills, the education - it's a holistic experience."

Skills for Success

Rachel maintains, too, that the Abbey amply prepared her for professional life. From the lessons she learned on the field to the robust academic formation, the Abbey helped her find her career as an attorney. "Perfect practice makes permanent," Coach Lynch would always say, and that mantra stuck with the players. When it came to applying to law school or studying for the bar, Rachel took that principle to heart, taking practice tests to make sure she succeeded. "I feel very well rounded. I have gained knowledge about every aspect of my life that



has helped me to find happiness,” Rachel recounts.

For Rebecca, in addition to instilling confidence and self-knowledge, the Abbey strengthened her communication and leadership skills through team captaincy in her senior year, and these skills have continually informed her career in human resources. Moreover, the discipline she learned at the Abbey had her running a marathon this year: “Four months of crazy training proved to me that I could stick to something and be disciplined and do hard things; a lot of the reason I was able to do that is because of what I learned at the Abbey.”

Cassidy, too, recalls the inspiration she always received from Coach Jaime. “Before each game Coach would say to me, ‘fire in the belly, ice in the head,’ his way of telling us to tap into your competitive side, but control it - find it but filter it. That mindset has stuck with me throughout my life and my career.”

Parents and Coaches

The Coutinho parents also commend the Abbey for their daughters’ growth. “They got wonderful leadership training, and dealing with successes and failures on the field helped them learn how to deal off the field,” Christopher Coutinho, their father, relates. These experiences prepared the sisters for the real world. “When they were done with college, they didn’t feel done with pursuing what’s next for them,” said mom, Beth, “they all felt like there was more: education, playing abroad, and pursuing their professional careers while maintaining their Abbey roots.”

Coach Lynch, head of women’s soccer and a key leadership figure in the sisters’ Abbey lives, instilled the philosophy that every practice and every competition is a growth opportunity. Through dealing with adversity and challenges, the team learns and grows, hopefully resulting in success on and off the



field. “We recently lost a critical game. It hurt, but every player realized that the sun came up the next day; they were still able to rely on their friends, their family, and their faith... Everything was going to be okay,” Lynch said.

Coaching the Coutinho sisters over seven years, Lynch recalled, was inspiring to the rest of the team. Their dedication and positivity even impacted team culture. Coach remembers a particular time when a game wasn’t going well and a sidelined Cassidy kept calling encouragement to her teammates. The twins, too, consistently gave their all, and Coach recalls how well they worked together: “One would step, the other would drop,” he said “Before every game they had to pass to each other, and if it meant a great game, I would make sure that happened.”

From field to classroom, the Coutinho sisters experienced the best of the Abbey. They found a family, they found inspiration, and they found their future. Their time at Belmont Abbey was filled with blessings, challenges, wins, and losses, and through it all, they kept the Abbey spirit of love and community. **BAC**

With the unfailing support of their parents, Chris and Beth, the Coutinho sisters excelled on and off the field, bringing the utmost in excellence and virtue to their Abbey experience.

Abbey Lane Update



Abbey Players bring Theatre Games to Gastonia



Last March, Abbey Players Ethan McEntire '25, Emma Ribideneira '24, and Emma Brand '18 joined Jill Bloede in Theatre Games for the students of fellow Abbey Player and alumnus Ryan Caulley '17 at St. Michael's School in Gastonia.

CLASS NOTES

1960s

» **GLEN DAVIS '63**

Glen visited friends in Slovakia last year, then traveled to Salzburg, Austria. Last November he and his wife Margaret went to Spain and in January to Puerto Rico. Abbot Oscar officiated his marriage in 1966, and he and his wife have been blessed ever since.

» **CHUCK M. COLLINS III '69**

Chuck remains Chairman of the Board for Marine Federal Credit Union, which just passed \$1 billion in assets. In January 2024, he and his wife Patricia (Patricia Rafferty, SHC '71) celebrated their 50th anniversary with an Antarctic cruise.

1970s

» **THOMAS F. MCKENNA '74**

Thomas has enjoyed traveling to keep in touch with classmates and Phi Kappa Theta brothers. Though the hurricane prevented some of his classmates, last October he was able to attend a fraternity gathering at Don Hatchet's '76 summer home in Duck, NC. Attendees from the classes of '74-'78 included: Bob Ganter, Bill Mulkeen, Bob Delaney, Dave Stevens, Tim Lehan, Brian Murphy, Al Raimo, Frank Duggan, Chris McDonald, Mike Klinker, Don Hatchet, Tom McKenna, Cliff Rhodes, Ed Burns, Pete Arsenault, and Ken Heretick.

» **JANET SMITH JONES '79**

Janet became a Nonna to sweet little Reese Jones Citron on May 10, 2024!

1980s

» **FR. MICHAEL BUTLER '80**
Fr. Butler retired from active ministry in the Diocese of Raleigh last year. He now resides in Greenville, NC and is still active in helping out the two local parishes. He celebrated 40 years of priesthood in January.

» **REV. JOE PEARCE '81**
Rev. Pearce was recently elected to the Deputy Congregation of the Rock Hill Oratory and named Secretary to the Deputy Congregation. He celebrated 25 years of priesthood last summer.

» **MARK T. PRESCOTT '83**
Mark retired in 2020 to start an organic vegetable market garden in Bassett, VA. Since then he has added beekeeping and greens grown in a high tunnel to the greenhouse. He is the State Coordinator for Hives for Heroes and has his Apprentice Beekeeper Certification through VSBA. He sells 100% hyper-local through three farmer's markets within 15 miles of production: vegetables, honey, greens, and sourdough bread.

1990s

» **NATALIE JONES LACEY '90**
Natalie runs a strategy and design marketing group whose longest standing client was former U.S. President Jimmy (and Rosalynn) Carter. She also had the honor of serving on a national committee and implementing the plans for Mrs. Carter's funeral in areas including protocol, logistics, and global media relations. She was invited to share her key learnings with the federal team handling President Carter's funeral and was fortunate to be invited to various funeral events.

» **MARSHA KAREN WRIGHT '96**
Marsha retired in 2020 and more recently moved to Stanley, NC.

2000s

» **JENNIFER KRANZ '04**
Jennifer recently earned a promotion to Senior Vice President of Private Wealth Management with Fisher Investments and will be moving from Tampa, FL to Annapolis, MD this summer. She and her family are so excited for the new adventure and glad to be closer to their NC roots again! "I'm proud of the business education I received at the Abbey as a foundation for my career successes."

2010s

» **BEN TORRES '10**
Ben has been the VP of the Menagerie Hospitality Group in Charlotte for the last four years and bought his first home in Mount Holly at the end of 2024. He and Chelsea welcomed Elizabeth in 2021, Everleigh in 2023; and Elliott in April.

» **DANIEL KORYCKI '14**
Daniel and his wife, Anniebelle, welcomed their first child, August Sebastian Korycki, into the world on February 18, 2025.

» **SHARL WILSON BEATY '15**
Sharl began a new job last November. It is her first time working a not-for-profit childcare, and she hopes this experience will help prepare her for her career goal of teaching ECE teachers at the college level. She is currently completing her MA in Leadership, Policy, and Advocacy at UNCW and will graduate in December.

» **COLIN BRYANT ROSENBAUM '18**
Colin is engaged to be married in October in Antigua. He and his fiancé are so excited for this step in their journey together.

» **MICHAEL DUANE ARABIE, JR. '19**
Michael got married last summer to his beautiful wife Megan. He has returned to school for his teaching certification so that he can continue teaching in NC,



CATIE NORTON '17
SHERMAN NORTON

CATIE WAS MARRIED at the Abbey in June. Over the summer she also moved to Gastonia and started a new job as an RBT at Ignited Minds ABA.

and he received the opportunity to help with a semi-professional soccer team this past season.

2020s

» **KATHERINE CARABALLO '20**
Katherine got married in 2023 and had her first child in January of 2024. She and her family relocated to Canfield, OH in August of 2024, where she is teaching as an adjunct professor at YSU.

» **AMANDA (JOHNSON) GILDAY '23**
Amanda married her husband Michael '23, and they are now expecting their first baby this summer!

» **ALYSSA M. JONES '23**
Alyssa earned her MPA. She is currently working on her MBA and will begin Law School this Fall.

ABBEY LANE UPDATE



ADRIANNA AVENA-JOHNSON '20
BRANDON JOHNSON

ADRIANNA GRADUATED law school last year and got married on August 13, 2024.

» **STACY MARIE WHITE '23**

Stacy became a teacher's assistant in the special education department at Hunter Huss High School after graduation. She now works as a full time teacher, teaching World History and Civics.

» **JOSHUA ATKINSON '24**

Joshua is now working for Fox Sports.

» **AIDEN SHAW '24**

Aiden recently got engaged and is now the Program Director for an adventure focused summer camp called Camp Mondamin. He works full-time hiring summer staff and is responsible for all social media and marketing. Over the summer he also supervises



Fill us in on your new arrival, and we'll send a cuddly, Abbey ambassador to welcome the future Crusader!

the 60+ staff members and hundreds of campers. He now lives, works, and plays on the lakes, rivers, and mountains here in Western NC - and recently finished his degree online.

» **MAURA GRACE SICA '24**

Maura married Timothy '24, and they're expecting in July!

» **KATHLEEN MARIE STINNEFORD '24**

Kathleen was accepted into FSU Law on a scholarship.

HAVE YOU RETIRED? MARRIED?

Traveled somewhere exciting? Taken on a new job or welcomed a new baby? We'd love to hear from you! To be featured in the next issue of Belmont Abbey College Magazine, please email your life updates to collegerelations@bac.edu



HOMECOMING 2025

ABBEY THROUGH THE AGES



OCTOBER 3-5, 2025 SAVE THE DATE!

IN MEMORIAM

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

» DR. CAROL BROOKS

Charlotte, NC

FEBRUARY 6, 2025

A part of the Belmont Abbey family since 1995, in her fifteen years on the Abbey staff she embraced a variety of Development and College Relations roles, supporting the inextricably linked mission and community with tireless love and dedication. A friend, colleague, mentor, and servant leader, she was often the “go to” person for projects great and small, infusing every activity with calmness, objectivity, and cooperation. In recognition of her many and profound contributions, she received the Spirit of St Benedict Award. We remain deeply grateful for her goodwill, humility, and unfailing generosity.



» CHARLIE MARTIN '70

Belmont, NC

JULY 1, 2025

An Alumni Wall of Fame Inductee and former President of the BAC Alumni Board, Charlie Martin cherished a deep and lively affection for his alma mater and local community. Together with his beloved wife Dot, Charlie never hesitated to answer the call to generosity in leadership. In addition to serving as Mayor of Belmont for ten years, Charlie dedicated his tireless energies to the Belmont City Council, numerous Gaston County Boards, and the Knights of Columbus as his home parish of Queen of Apostles. We are profoundly grateful for his faithful friendship and unwavering service.



» FRANK ABERNATHY

Mount Holly, NC

JANUARY 18, 2025

» WILLIAM BOORMAN '56

Santa Rosa, CA

FEBRUARY 4, 2025

» DAVID BROWNE '59

Anderson, SC

MAY 27, 2025

» CARL BUMGARDNER

Raleigh, NC

FEBRUARY 24, 2025

» DR. DONALD CRESSWELL '65

Philadelphia, PA

JUNE 19, 2025

» PETER CRITIKOS

Hendersonville, NC

JANUARY 29, 2025

» JANE (JONES) DUNSMORE '96

Stanley, NC

FEBRUARY 4, 2025

» WILMER EARLE, SR. '59

McConnells, SC

JUNE 12, 2025

» WILLIAM ELLISON, JR. '73

Waynesboro, VA

APRIL 12, 2025

» JOSEPH FALLETTA '61

Virginia Beach, VA

MAY 14, 2025

» SAMUEL FERGUSON '71

Lewisville, NC

MAY 17, 2025

» SUSAN FERGUSON '81

Dallas, NC

APRIL 19, 2025

» CHARLES HILLON '56

Sylva, NC

JANUARY 11, 2025

» PAUL THOMAS HOYING

Charlotte, NC

JANUARY 2025

» GRETCHEN (SCHWARTZ) JACKSON

Jacksonville, FL

FEBRUARY 12, 2025

» SAM JERNIGAN III '70

Goldsboro, NC

MAY 22, 2025

» JOSEPH JOHN

Raleigh, NC

JANUARY 20, 2025

» JANE (HARRILL) KEEVER

Murrells Inlet, SC

JUNE 18, 2025

» GINGER (EMMETT) KISELICK '96

Davidson, NC

JUNE 10, 2025

» JOHN LAVELLE '60

Charleston, SC

MARCH 26, 2025

» JIMMIE MCDANIEL

Lowell, NC

FEBRUARY 13, 2025

» FRANCIS (FRANK) MULGREW

Media, PA

MAY 27, 2025

» ANTHONY “CHUCK” MULLER, SR. '56

North Myrtle Beach, SC

MARCH 5, 2025

» ANTHONY “CORKY” MULLER, JR. '73

Fort Mill, SC

FEBRUARY 16, 2025

» WILLIAM “BILL” NEE

Norfolk, VA

FEBRUARY 17, 2025

» PHYLLIS (NAUGHTON) NEILSON '48

Charlotte, NC

MAY 28, 2025

» DANIEL OVERCASH '89

Gastonia, NC

JUNE 14, 2025

» CHARLES POWERS III '64

Raleigh, NC

APRIL 11, 2025

» JOSEPH “JAY” PUCKETT

Stanley, NC

APRIL 12, 2025

» SR. MARY ANDREW RAY, RSM

Belmont, NC

FEBRUARY 8, 2025

» LYNN “IRIS” (THOMPSON) RHINEHARDT

Charlotte, NC

DECEMBER 19, 2024

» SR. MARY SCHMIDT, RSM

Belmont, NC

JUNE 13, 2025

» ROGER SMITH

Asheville, NC

JUNE 15, 2025

» CARLOS SOLIZ

Grottoes, VA

APRIL 14, 2025

» RICHARD SPENCER, JR. '56

Winston-Salem, NC

JANUARY 19, 2025

» WRISTON THOMPSON, JR.

Midlothian, VA

APRIL 25, 2025

» GARY VARNADORE

Lancaster, SC

JUNE 27, 2025

» JOHN WILDING '00

Winter Park, FL

MARCH 3, 2025



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COLLEGE

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the Abbey today.



The Belmont Abbey College podcast, *Conversatio*, explores the way of formation and transformation, that each of us may reflect God's image in an ever more palpable, transparent way. Our goal is to challenge, inform, and enlighten our listeners.

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