

Father Kieran FINDS JOY IN HELPING OTHERS

By Emily Williams

This past fall, Fr. Kieran Neilson, O.S.B. celebrated the 55th anniversary of his ordination on May 26, 1960. Born and raised in Charlotte, Fr. Kieran came to Belmont Abbey in 1950 as a student, eventually taking his vows in 1954. Since then, he has become a beloved presence on campus, a popular figure well known among students who are drawn to his cheerful smile, hearty laugh and warm nature.

After over 50 years of serving as a monk and priest at the Abbey, Fr. Kieran has certainly seen a great deal of change within the College and the monastery itself. “The monastery was much more limited and stricter when I first came here,” he says. “Just about anything you can think of was different back then. For instance, we ate more fattening food than you could shake a stick at and a lot of it came from right off the farm we used to own across the street.”

Fr. Kieran has particularly fond memories of that farm, which the monks tended during the 50’s and early 60’s on a plot of land directly adjacent to the monastery. “The student body was smaller then and we fed them with



produce from the farm. But once the early 60’s came, there were fewer and fewer people who knew how to run farm equipment. Back then, you would take someone from the city and ask him to strip the cow and they would look at you like you were crazy.”

When he wasn’t tending to the farm, Fr. Kieran taught Sociology and Theology at the nearby Sacred Heart campus in Belmont. At one point he acted as the resident disciplinarian at Benedictine College Preparatory School in Richmond, Virginia. “I saw those young men later grow up as doctors and such; and they came back to see me with their children and thanked me for what I did for them. That’s what really makes me feel good.”

In the end, Fr. Kieran says it’s the happiness he receives from knowing the good he has done thus far that gives him the most satisfaction on his Jubilee Anniversary. “What is so wonderful for me about my life so far is the people I served over those years – the joy they gave me in being able to minister to them. That’s something I’ll never lose sight of and never forget.” ■