

Focus



Father Francis Forster, O.S.B.

"Why is it that the only time that people appreciate the importance of keeping records is when something gets snafu'd or lost?" mused the custodian of the college records as he leaned back in his swivel chair and puffed on a fat black stogie. Fortunately, for Belmont Abbey College, break-downs are rare in the registrar's office under the capable direction of Fr. Francis Forster, O.S.B. The smooth operation doesn't just happen; it is the result of ceaseless efforts on his part to improve the efficiency of service to the students and faculty.

The youngest of six children, Father Francis was born in Willard, Ohio, just about forty years ago. His baptismal certificate reads Philip Joseph Forster. Those were the difficult times of the depression, and the Forster family moved to a farm to make a go of things. Phil's earliest memories are filled with bucolic images of milking cows,

feeding the pigs, and herding the sheep to pasture. Young Phil had to help with the chores alongside his brothers. At harvest time he learned to handle the big green John Deere tractor, struggled with the dusty sacks of wheat and oats, husked corn and pitched hay for the stock. The conditions of the farm were rustic--there was the artesian well which provided cool, sweet water; the great iron stove in the kitchen (which devoured a constant supply of wood); the pungent kerosene lamps which had to be replenished each week. There was the privy down by the back fence (called the 'Democrat' because it was made by W.P.A. program under the Roosevelt administration) and the large fireplace around which the family gathered during the winter evenings while the wind drove the snow into deep drifts against the house and barn.

Phil attended a typical country school, a small red frame building of three rooms which was staffed by three teachers who managed all eight grades. When conditions made it impossible for the school bus to get through, Phil had to trudge the three miles to school and back through the rigors of the Ohio winter. When he was ten, America became involved in World War II, and the older boys went off to military service. Because the farm quickly became too taxing for Mr. Forster alone, the family again moved into the town of Willard.

In High School Phil distinguished himself in athletics. He was elected captain of the football team in his senior year. That year he was also named to the All-Ohio team and offered a scholarship to Purdue University. No less outstanding in studies, he finished close to the top of his

high-school class. Since money was rather scarce at home, Phil worked in his spare time as an auto mechanic to help with his personal expenses. Motors still intrigue him and he likes nothing better than to strip down an engine to see how it ticks.

About the time that Phil was finishing school, the Korean war erupted. He enlisted for a four-year hitch in the Air Force and was sent to Wichita Falls, Tex. for basic training. Further schooling in long-distance telephone communications followed at Cheyenne, Wyo. He was then assigned to duty in Seoul, Korea for a year. One of the bright spots of his tour in the Orient was the R & R trips to Tokyo, Japan. Upon return to the United States he was stationed at Donaldson AFB in Greenville, S.C. While there he became acquainted with Belmont Abbey College and visited the campus twice. After his discharge Phil decided to continue his education, and in September of 1955 he enrolled at the Abbey. His first two years of college followed the general liberal arts curriculum. Throughout these months of study the thought of a vocation continued to preoccupy his mind.

In 1957 he decided to give the religious life a trial and entered the novitiate of Belmont Abbey to become a Benedictine monk. It was at this time that he chose the name Francis because it had been very important in his family, and also because he had special admiration of great saint from Assisi.

With his novitiate year completed, Fr. Francis made first vows and reentered the College to earn an A.B. degree in philosophy. In 1960 he entered upon the theological studies leading to the priesthood at Belmont Abbey seminary. These reached culmination at his

ordination by Bishop Reh of Charleston in June of 1964.

For the next year, Fr. Francis did graduate work in philosophy at the Catholic University of America. He returned to Belmont Abbey to become a full-time instructor in the philosophy department. In 1968 he took on the additional work of institutional research which is so vital to planning for the future development of the College.

In June of 1970 the President named him Registrar of the College. In this position he has discharged his responsibilities for academic records and the registration process with dispatch. He has been particularly interested in computerizing the procedures of record keeping. If he is able to implement a project close to his heart, the College will embark during the Spring term upon a system of pre-registration of students for the next year.

Less well known but no less significant are his contributions to the electronics and stage lighting of the Abbey dramatic productions and reviews. He also has set up and maintained all of the public address equipment for athletic events, graduation exercises, and special events in the college union.

Although dedicated to work, Fr. Francis still manages to find time for some hobbies. He has been an avid model railroad builder. He loves swimming and fishing. While vacationing in Denver, Col., last summer, he learned the art of panning gold. He now has a new ambition to test local streams and the historic old 'gold mine' on the Abbey property for traces of the precious metal. Most people here suspect that if his success in other ventures is any gauge, Fr. Francis will "strike it rich" in the near future!

News In Education

REPORT GIVES DATA ON 275 INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC COLLEGES

Data about the nation's 275 traditionally Catholic colleges are contained in a report released this week by the National Catholic Educational Association. The study shows that total enrollment in the institutions increased by four percent to 451,000 in 1970-71, mostly in part-time students. Enrollment increased in 142 institutions, but declined in 129. Since 1970, the report notes, seven of the 275 institutions closed and six have merged.

Other highlights of the report: Of the approximately 2,500 colleges and universities in 1970, about 1,500 were private and enrolled 25 percent of the students. Catholic colleges represented 18 percent of the private institutions and about 20 percent of the private enrollment.

As of fall 1968, enrollment included 72 percent full-time students, 82 percent undergraduates, and 56 percent male. The 1968-69 curricula were strongly based in liberal arts with about 20 percent of the degrees earned on the graduate level. The 1971-72 teaching faculty included 71 percent full-time, with 46 percent having earned doctoral degrees and 47 percent master's degrees.

The average excess of current fund revenue over current fund expenses for all institutions was \$69,000 in 1968-69 and \$36,000 in 1970-71, a 48 percent decline. Educational and general revenue increased 19 percent, but educational and general expenses increased 20 percent. Revenue from tuition and fees increased 22 percent over the two years, accounting for 71 percent of all educational and general revenue in 1970-71. Church support, a negligible revenue factor, was 0.2 percent.

The 1968-69 current fund expenditure-per-student was \$2,014, compared to \$2,105 reported by the U.S. Office of Education for all public institutions.

The most commonly used

Federal programs were for student financial aid. Of the \$107 million reported by 161 institutions for all Federal programs in 1970-71, about 38 percent was for building construction, 33 percent for student financial aid, 21 percent for various educational and health research projects, and eight percent for other programs.

The report notes that the greatest expansion in Catholic higher education took place between 1900 and 1950. During that period, 44 coeducational colleges, 70 women's colleges, and five men's colleges opened their doors. Since 1950, an additional 14 coeducational colleges, 12 women's colleges, and two men's colleges were established. Prior to 1900 there were only two Catholic junior colleges. Between 1950 and 1970, however, 30 were established.

Although the report is largely statistical and does not present recommendations or projections, it notes: "Unless some kind of financial solution or assistance comes forth soon, many private college and universities cannot hold back the consequences of recent and current deficits, much less play

a dynamic role on the American educational scene."

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Fr. Kenneth

Attends Conference

Our chaplain Fr. Kenneth attended an ecumenical conference on HUMAN SEXUALITY: CRISIS IN MORALITY at Yale University Oct. 2-6. There were some twelve protestant ministers and Jewish Rabbis in the conference, which was led by fifteen experts from the Yale faculty. A most rewarding and enlightening experience. Fr. Kenneth was also present at the interdenominational retreat for college students held at Camp Greer Oct. 20-22. The retreat was more of a treat than a retreat, Fr. Kenneth remarked, no one preached at us; no one let us pray-ed us to death." Instead each participant ministered one to the other through group encounter sessions which resulted in a live, refreshing and inspiring application of Christian ideals. --Another such retreat is being planned for Spring.