



Fr. Jeff Kirby '99, MA '01

## Alumni Profile

Class of 1999, MA '01  
Father Jeff Kirby

As the son of a U.S. Army soldier, Father Jeff Kirby grew up in West Germany. There, he experienced the tensions of the Cold War but also the rich Catholicism of Mainz, where his family was stationed.

In 1989, the family returned to the United States, settling in Columbia, South Carolina. Five years later, however, when it came time for him to choose a college, he knew he wanted one that had deeply Catholic sensibilities. When he visited Franciscan University, he knew he'd found the one.

"It wasn't just a Catholic university but a university that really celebrated Catholicism and taught its students how to live," he explains.

During his time at Franciscan, he joined the Brothers of the Eternal Song Household. He also served in the U.S. National Guard. Nevertheless, he still completed his undergraduate degree in history (and Honors Program classes) in three years. He then stayed on at Franciscan to earn his master's in philosophy in 2001.

Originally, he planned to go to law school, but he realized he needed to give seminary a try.

"I'd always thought about the priesthood but wasn't sure," he says. "My time in Steubenville helped me see that if I had that call, it would be worth the sacrifice."

He spent the next four years at the North American College in Rome and then was ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Charleston in 2007. Since then, Father Kirby has earned a master's in bioethics and a licentiate and doctorate in sacred theology. He also served as a high school chaplain and diocesan vocations director while teaching part time at Belmont Abbey College.

Nationally, he has served the Church as author or co-author of nine books, including *Lord Teach Us to Pray* and as co-author and host of the digital catechetical program, *Doors of Mercy: A Journey Through Salvation History*.

In 2016, Father Kirby was named as the first pastor of South Carolina's newest (and fastest-growing) Catholic parish, Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church in Indian Land, and he's loving every busy minute of it.

"I've done a lot of other things as a priest that I've enjoyed," he says, "but being here now, in the parish, has given me a renewed sense of vocation. This is why I was made. This fits. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

Franciscan University recognized Father Jeff Kirby's dedication to advancing the teaching mission of the Church with the 2017 Bishop John King Mussio Award. ■

*Emily Stimpson Chapman*