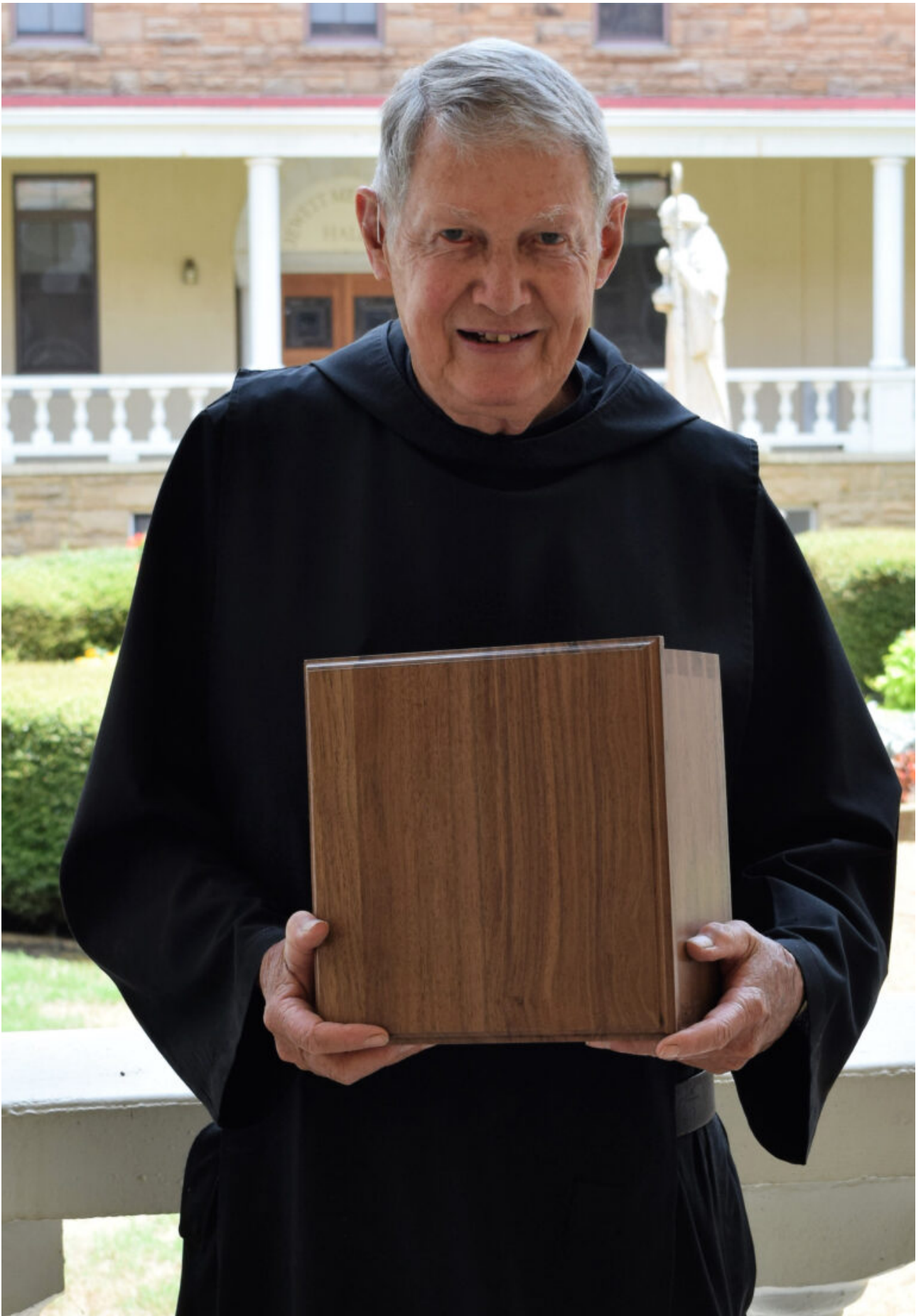


Beloved Subiaco priest celebrates his 60-year Jubilee

written by Katie Zakrzewski |



Among the most well-known clergy in the Diocese of Little Rock is Father Jerome Kodell, OSB.

And on May 22, the Benedictine priest celebrated his 60-year Jubilee.

Father Kodell grew up in Clarksville and attended Subiaco Academy, where the monks made a lasting impression.

“As time went on, I was very impressed by the life here, what they were doing, and I liked the idea of working together and praying together,” he told *Arkansas Catholic*. “I felt a cause for God, and to be able to be with other people on a common project — that was very attractive to me. So I came back here later on and started a vocation here.”



Father Jerome Kodell (center) was ordained to the priesthood at St. Benedict Church at Subiaco Abbey on May 22, 1965. (Courtesy Abbot Elijah Owens)

But of all the gifts his religious career has allowed him, Father Kodell said one of the greatest was being allowed to study Scripture in Rome. He was ordained a priest in 1965 and earned his licentiate in sacred Scripture at the Biblical Institute in Rome in 1969.

“That really shaped my whole life, as far as the focus and what I could do,” he said.

One of the highlights of Father Kodell's religious career began after his return from Rome, when several Catholics approached him about starting a Scripture study program in the years after Vatican II.

Little Rock Scripture Study was established in the fall of 1974, with 40 attendees expected on the first night — but more than 150 showed up. Co-founded by Father Kodell and Fred and Tammy Woell of Christ the King Church in Little Rock, the program quickly gained popularity. Catholics copied session recordings onto cassette tapes, and the Woells printed study guides from their garage to meet demand.

LRSS soon spread globally, translated into Spanish, Mandarin and more, reaching more than 50 countries. The program was acquired by Liturgical Press from the Diocese of Little Rock in 2019. More than 2.8 million study materials have been distributed worldwide.

Father Kodell was serving in the abbey's mission in Belize from 1987 to 1989, when he received the news that the abbot at Subiaco had resigned. He returned to the abbey to help select the next abbot, thinking he would be returning to Belize shortly after. To his surprise, he was elected abbot on Nov. 8, 1989.

"I went from being in the quiet atmosphere of Belize to suddenly being thrust into responsibility for (the abbey and its operations)," Father Kodell said with a laugh.

He continued overseeing operations at the abbey and boys' academy until he resigned as abbot March 24, 2015. In the 10 years since, Father Kodell has spent time as the abbey archivist and museum director, in the carpentry shop and on the monastic council. He has also authored several books.



*Father Jerome Kodell, seen here Jan. 2, 2017, works in the woodshop at Subiaco Abbey.
(Courtesy Abbot Elijah Owens)*

While things have changed a lot over the past 60 years, Father Kodell said that the most important things have stayed the same.

"The main thing we all need to know is that our main vocation is our relationship with God," he said. "You've got to be consistent in your prayer. It doesn't have to be fancy. But every day, you've got to make room for God. I remember, what helped me a whole lot, was way back when I was confirmed, Bishop (Albert) Fletcher gave this homily. He said, 'Boys and girls, what I want you to do is just say this little prayer every day. It's just one sentence, and this is the prayer: Dear God, help me to know what you want me to be.' ...

"You have to keep your prayer life alive and your private relationship with God alive. ... Every day, in some way, you make communion with God. You turn to God, and he turns toward you."

"St. Benedict, in chapter 3 of his Rule, speaks about the qualifications of an abbot," Subiaco Abbot Elijah Owens, OSB, told *Arkansas Catholic*. "Benedict expects his abbot to 'demonstrate everything that is good and holy by his deeds more than by his words.' Father Jerome lived this not only in his monastic service as our sixth abbot for 25 years, but also in his life as a priest for 60 years."