



Fr. Abbot Gerald Benkert

October 24, 1909 - May 17, 2012

Abbot Emeritus Gerald Benkert, O.S.B., age 102, a Benedictine monk of Marmion Abbey, Aurora, Illinois died peacefully in the Lord at the Abbey on Wednesday, May 16, 2012. At the time of his death he was the oldest known Benedictine abbot in the world. Abbot Gerald was born on October 24, 1909, in Louisville, Kentucky. He was the second of six children born to Constantine and Pauline Benkert. He is survived by the members of his monastic community and many nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents and five brothers and sisters.

After completing his elementary education at Holy Name School in Louisville, Francis Benkert entered St. Meinrad Minor Seminary in southern Indiana in September 1923, where he had two uncles in St. Meinrad Abbey and a great-uncle, Abbot Athanasius Schmitt, who was the abbot of St. Meinrad. After a five-year course of studies in the Minor Seminary, he was accepted into the novitiate of St. Meinrad Abbey in 1928. Two of his six fellow novices, Raymond Battaglia (Father Joseph) and John Schuck (Father Hugh), would later join him as founding members of Marmion Abbey. On August 16, 1929, Francis made his first profession of vows, taking the name Gerald. On November 30, 1932, he made his solemn profession of vows as a Benedictine monk. He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Joseph Ritter of

Indianapolis on May 22, 1934.

Father Gerald's first assignment was to pursue graduate studies at DePaul University, Chicago. He was assigned to reside at Marmion Academy in Aurora, where the monks of St. Meinrad had taken over the school in 1933. Father Gerald returned to St. Meinrad in 1935 to teach in the Minor Seminary. He also began summer studies in philosophy at The Catholic University in Washington, D.C., obtaining a Master's Degree in 1938. In the same year, he was appointed Headmaster of Marmion Military Academy. He remained headmaster from 1938 to 1940, before returning to The Catholic University to continue his doctoral studies in philosophy, obtaining his Ph.D. in 1944. He was then appointed as Rector of the Minor Seminary at St. Meinrad.

On March 21, 1947, Father Gerald Benkert was named the first abbot of Marmion Abbey when it was raised to the status of an independent Benedictine Abbey. He was blessed as abbot on May 22, 1947 by Bishop John Boylan of Rockford. For the next 22 years, Abbot Gerald guided the Marmion monastic community in its founding decades. He was responsible for the purchase of the property on Butterfield Road and the construction of the present monastery building in 1952. He oversaw the construction of the resident campus of Marmion Military Academy on Butterfield Road that opened in 1959. Responding to the request of Pope John XXIII, he founded the mission Priory and Seminary of San Josè in Sololá (and later in Quetzaltenango), Guatemala in 1965.

In 1969 Abbot Gerald decided to resign as Abbot of Marmion Abbey. He chose to begin a new period in his life as teacher and spiritual director in the Priory and Seminary of San José in Guatemala. From 1970 to 2002 he taught philosophy and theology. After 1989, Abbot Gerald played a key role in helping to raise funds for the construction of a new complex of buildings for the Priory and Seminary in its move to Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

In 2002 Abbot Gerald returned to Marmion Abbey on a permanent basis. He continued to contribute to the spiritual life and public witness of the monastery, and to raise funds for the Guatemala mission. On the occasion of his 100th birthday in 2009, he published his *Memoirs of the Founding Abbot of Marmion Abbey*.

Abbot Gerald's body will be received by his monastic community on Monday, May 21 at 4:00 p.m. at the Abbey Church of St. Augustine of Canterbury. Visitation will be from 4:00 until 8:30 p.m., and continue from 8:30 a.m. until the 10:30 a.m. Funeral Mass on Tuesday, May 22. Burial will take place immediately afterwards in the Abbey Cemetery.

Cemetery Details

Marmion Abbey Cemetery

850 Butterfield Rd.
Aurora, IL 60502

Previous Events

Visitation

MAY 21. 4:00 PM - 9:00 PM (CT)

Marmion Abbey Church
850 Butterfield Rd
Aurora, IL 60502

Funeral Mass

MAY 22. 10:30 AM (CT)

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850 Butterfield Rd
Aurora, IL 60502