

## Father Bernard Schumacher

February 1st is the anniversary of the death of Father Bernard Schumacher. Robert Schumacher was born in Munday (Rhineland), Texas, January 19, 1919. He began his early education at St. Joseph's and continued at Rhineland's public grade and high schools, graduating with the class of 1936.

During World War II (1942 to 1945), he served overseas with the Army Air Forces where he was a sergeant in the 303rd Bombardment Group (H) and the 358th Bombardment Squadron (H) headquartered in England and Africa. From these two vantage points, squadrons took part in six major battles and campaigns of the war, namely: The Ardennes, Central Europe, Northern France, Air Offensive Europe, Normandy, and the Rhineland. For his participation in the war effort, Sgt. Robert Schumacher earned the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with six Bronze Stars.

Following his discharge from military service he entered Subiaco Abbey College. In 1948 he began his novitiate, professing his vows as a monk of our monastery on September 15, 1949, receiving the name Bernard. He was ordained to the priesthood in the abbey chapel by Bishop Albert L. Fletcher on May 16, 1954.

After completing his theology studies at Subiaco, he did graduate work in Chicago at Rosary College, and in Washington, DC, at the Catholic University of America where he earned a master's degree in library science.

From 1956 to 1962 he was librarian and seminary professor at Subiaco, and teacher in the academy from 1958 to 1960. He served as assistant pastor at St. Boniface in Fort Smith, Arkansas, and later at St. Edward's in Little Rock, Arkansas.

In the Subiaco deanery he was pastor in Shoal Creek, Prairie View, Booneville, Clarksville, and Scranton. From 1972 to 1975 he was superior of our dependent priory, Santa Familia Monastery, Belize, Central America.

This foundation in Belize was only one-year old when Father Bernard was appointed superior. This was a crucial period in the survival-history of the mission-monastery because a decision had to be made of moving from the Santa Familia Village side of the Belize River to the Santa Elena Village side of the river.

As superior Father Bernard was in favor of this move across the river, believing that the fledgling foundation would be better able to survive as well as offer a wider apostolate to the people of the region.

Father Bernard was recalled to Subiaco in 1975 just as cement blocks were being made for the new monastery building. It was not until September 8, 1996, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of Santa Familia Monastery, that Father Bernard returned to witness this "Benedictine presence" in Belize.

In 1983 Father Bernard was assigned as pastor of his home parish in Rhineland, Texas. After a few months, however, he returned to the abbey due to ill health. He was the last Benedictine pastor of St. Joseph's Church because Subiaco Abbey relinquished the Rhineland parish to the diocese of Fort Worth in 1983.



Father Bernard retired to the abbey in 1989. From then until the time of his death, he was available at the monastery for substitution and missionary work. He also gave generously of his time in driving the sick and elderly for medical appointments and errands.

Father Bernard was an avid reader and he wrote spiritual meditation columns in *The Abbey Message* and the *Paris (AR) Express*. He had a unique way of tempering his spiritual insights with succinct proverbs and anecdotes.

“Whenever we go on a long, difficult trip, we want to make certain of accommodations when we get there. Our pilgrimage to the next life is the roughest and toughest trip we’ll ever make; in this case, too, we want to make sure of accommodations” wrote Father Bernard in his 1991 meditations featured in *The Abbey Message*.

He concluded: “Statisticians claim most wrecks take place a few miles from home. We cannot let up as we come closer to the end of our trip, but we want to become increasingly responsive to God. Be careful! This way we’ll come to the end of our journey in due time and have our reservations in order. We’ll hear the words of Jesus, ‘Welcome my good and faithful servant,’ and the glory of the Lord will shine on us in our new home.”

Once, when information was requested of him for an autobiographical sketch, Father Bernard replied: "Actually, when you put it down it doesn't amount to much; I guess that's why it doesn't take much space for an epitaph."

Suffering from respiratory problems, Father Bernard collapsed in his room on Saturday afternoon, February 1, 1997, and died en route to the hospital in Paris, Arkansas. His sudden and unexpected death stunned the community.

Abbot Jerome Kodell was celebrant and homilist of the Mass of Christian burial and performed the final obsequies for Father Bernard on Wednesday, February 5 at 10:00 a.m.

At the time of his death, Father Bernard was 78 years old and in the 47th year of his monastic profession, the 42nd of his priesthood. He is buried in our cemetery.