Father Stephen Eckart

May 7th is the anniversary of the death of Father Stephen Eckart. From cradle to grave the life of Father Stephen was nurtured by the Benedictines: born in Subiaco, Arkansas, December 21, 1929, he was christened Charles Joseph by Father Conrad Herda, OSB, pastor of St. Benedict's parish. Charles attended St. Benedict's grammar school in Subiaco and in the autumn of 1943 he entered Subiaco Academy, graduating with the class of 1947. He then continued his education at Subiaco College.

Charles Eckart professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on September 15, 1949, receiving the name Stephen. He was ordained to the priesthood in the abbey chapel by Bishop Albert L. Fletcher on May 16, 1954.

He continued his theological studies at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, receiving a licentiate in sacred theology. Father Stephen later studied at Memphis State University and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

During the 1956-57 school year he taught Greek in Subiaco College. As a faculty member of Subiaco Academy from 1956 to 1973, Father Stephen filled such roles as assistant prefect (dean), chaplain, athletic director, and director of the minor seminary. And during the summer months of the 1960s and early 1970s, Father Stephen was director of Camp Subiaco, a summer camp for boys.

From 1973 to 1982 he served as assistant pastor at Sacred Heart Church in Muenster, Texas, where he was also a faculty member and football coach at Sacred Heart High School.

Reassigned to Subiaco Academy in 1982, Father Stephen was a faculty member and played an important role in the athletic program. In the early 1980s he again directed Camp Subiaco. He served as head football coach (1988-89), assistant football coach (1989-90), and athletic director (1990-91).

Returning to parochial work, he served as pastor of St. Peter's Church in Lindsay, Texas, from 1991 to 1993. Again recalled to the abbey, he served as chaplain and faculty member of the academy until 1995 when he received his last assignment, namely: pastor of St. Boniface Church in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Due to poor health he retired to the abbey in 1996, diagnosed with early dementia. Father Stephen died suddenly during the early morning of Wednesday, May 7, 1997, in his room in the monastic Health Center.

On Friday, May 9, Abbot Jerome Kodell was celebrant and homilist for the 10 a.m. Mass of Christian burial and performed the final obsequies.

At the time of his death, Father Stephen was 67 years old. He had been a professed monk for 47 years and a priest for 42 years. He is buried in our cemetery.