

Father Matthew Saettele

June 21st is the anniversary of the death of Father Matthew Saettele. Anton Saettele was born in Doeggingen, in the Duchy of Baden, Germany, on December 28, 1857. He entered the abbey of Einsiedeln where he professed his vows as a monk of that monastery on September 8, 1879, receiving the name Matthew. He was ordained to the priesthood on August 19, 1883.

Prior Wolfgang Schlumpf brought Father Matthew from Einsiedeln to Subiaco with the "Expedition" of 1885, which also included one brother, four brother-candidates, and one candidate for the priesthood.

There were also several Sisters destined for the Oregon mission traveling with the group aboard the Red Star Liner "Westernland," sailing from Antwerp, Belgium, to New York.

This "Expedition" from Einsiedeln reached St. Benedict's monastery on February 12. At the time of his arrival, Father Matthew had been ordained a year and a half.

As a young priest, Father Matthew spent his first two years at the monastery, helping Prior Wolfgang with the building projects. At the same time, he ministered to the spiritual needs of congregations in the area. His first mission work in Arkansas was located near the site of the present community of Caulksville, now Ratcliff, where he built the old log church in honor of St. Anthony, whose name he had received at baptism. This was the third church built in Logan County. Later, the church was destroyed by fire, allegedly set by the Ku Klux Klan.

Assigned as assistant pastor at St. Edward's Church in Little Rock in 1887, Father Matthew found city living distasteful and returned to the monastery the next year where he served as prefect of students in the college which was in its second year of existence.

Father Matthew was next assigned the missions in Perry and Yell counties as well as the parish at Altus and its missions in Franklin and Johnson counties. Thus began his career as a missionary in the rural areas of Arkansas from 1889 to 1917 which won him the title of "Arkansas' greatest missionary."

As resident pastor of St. Mary's Church in Altus, Father Matthew built a large rectory which also served as a semi-hotel for traveling and vacationing monks from the monastery.

For nine years Father Matthew attended to the needs of Altus and its numerous missions. Then he spent one year at the Polish settlement in Marche from where he was sent to Pocahontas as pastor of St. Paul's Church from 1890 to 1908. Bishop Morris requested that Father Matthew be sent to Lake Village in extreme southeastern Arkansas to care for the missions in 11 surrounding counties. At one time, Father Matthew was handling 55 churches and missions across southern Arkansas from the Mississippi River to the Oklahoma line, virtually one-third of the land area of the state.

Father Matthew remained in this field of labor from 1908 to 1913 when he moved from Lake Village to McGhee which seemed to be a more central location for his missions. In 1917, at the age of 60, Father Matthew's health broke and the doctor ordered him from the unhealthy southeastern counties to a less humid area and to a quieter life. Father Matthew was sent to the high plains of Texas as pastor of Holy Family Church in Nazareth, Texas.



After a short period of time working in the Texas Panhandle, Father Matthew returned to Europe in 1918 to visit friends and relatives. Two year later in 1920, he returned to the United States from his monastery of Einsiedeln. From 1920 to 1924 he was stationed at Assumption Abbey in Richardson, North Dakota, where he was master of novices. Soon, however, he was again doing missionary work. From 1924 to 1926, he was chaplain at St. Joseph's Hospital in Dickinson, North Dakota.

At the age of 70, Father Matthew was secured by Bishop Morris to serve as chaplain to the Franciscan Brothers at Morris School in Searcy. What was supposedly to be a position of semi-retirement, Father Matthew also continued his missionary work in Searcy, Bald Knob, Augusta, and Heber Springs, Arkansas. In 1928 Father Matthew built St. James' Church at Searcy, the 42nd church that he had built in his lifetime.

For a number of years Father Matthew had been suffering from diabetes. The condition gradually grew worse, and by the end of 1929 Father Matthew was admitted to St. Vincent's Infirmary in Little Rock where he died at 7:40 p.m. on Saturday, June 21, 1930, following six-month's hospitalization.

Tuesday morning, June 24, a Mass was held for Father Matthew at St. Edward's Church in Little Rock.

At the time of his death, Father Matthew was 72 years old and in the 50th year of his monastic profession, the 46th of his priesthood. He is buried in our cemetery.