

Abbot Paul M. Nahlen

August 31 is the anniversary of the death of Abbot Paul M. Nahlen, the third abbot of our monastery. Martin Nahlen was born in Conway, Arkansas, on November 20, 1882. He attended elementary school at St. Joseph's in his hometown before coming to Subiaco on December 13, 1896--five years after our monastery had become an abbey--to begin his secondary education.

Martin Nahlen professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on November 11, 1903, receiving the name of two patrons: Paul Maria. (He used the initial "M" after his first name in honor of Maria Einsiedeln.) He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop John B. Morris at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Little Rock on April 10, 1908.

A month after his ordination he went to study at the Spencerian School of Business in Louisville, Kentucky. On his return, Father Paul was made a prefect of discipline and head of the commercial course in our college.

Father Paul's zeal for perfection in the classroom and school was evident; it was not uncommon for him to use corporal punishment, if it was warranted. In 1918, he was made head prefect and treasurer of Subiaco College. In the spring of 1927, Father Paul was given the task of building and establishing a school for boys in Corpus Christi, Texas.

In 1928, when the school opened, he was made its first president. Father Paul held this post until 1939 when he returned to Subiaco for the election of the new abbot. Father Paul was elected abbot of our monastery on March 23, 1939, and received his solemn blessing on June 20, 1939, from Bishop John B. Morris.

During his 18 years as head of our monastery, Abbot Paul zealously worked toward the cancellation of the debt caused by the 1927 fire. When he was elected abbot in 1939, practically all of the debt remained to be paid. With characteristic directness, he attacked the problem with all the energy at his command. He reorganized the financial resources of the community, and then recognizing that the burden could not be dissolved without outside help, he carefully planned and launched a widespread public appeal. By the mid-1940s the debt was paid, and funds for the building of the new abbey church were being solicited.

Abbot Paul was instrumental in the founding of the Subiaco Alumni Association in 1913, and for 14 years he was its treasurer.

During Abbot Paul's administration, Alumni Hall and the press building were completed in 1952. In 1959, the year after his death, Abbot Paul's most cherished dream, the new abbey church, was completed and consecrated.

Abbot Paul celebrated his golden jubilee of religious profession in 1953. Three years later, on November 23, 1956, he underwent surgery at St. Vincent's Infirmary in Little Rock which revealed that he was suffering from an extreme case of malignant cancer. He was able to return to the abbey for several weeks, but by mid-summer his health weakened and he returned to St. Vincent's Infirmary in Little Rock where his condition was diagnosed as critical.

Abbot Paul died in St. Vincent's Infirmary at 1:30 a.m. on Saturday, August 31, 1957; he remained conscious to the end with three priests from the abbey at his bedside.



On Monday, September 2, 1957, a Mass was said at St. Edward's Church in Little Rock, with Father Prior Maurus Gerke as celebrant. On Tuesday, September 3, 1957, a Mass was said at St. Joseph's Church in Conway, Arkansas, the home parish of Abbot Paul. The celebrant of the Mass was Father Sylvester Dellert, pastor.

At 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, September 5, the funeral liturgy was held at Subiaco with Bishop Albert L. Fletcher, bishop of Little Rock, as celebrant of the funeral Mass. The homily was delivered by Abbot Columban Thuis (pronounced "tush") of St. Joseph Abbey in Louisiana, president of the Swiss-American Congregation.

The five absolutions followed immediately after Mass, the first given by Bishop Fletcher, then by each of the four abbots who were in attendance at the funeral.

At the time of his death, Abbot Paul was 74 years old and in the 53rd year of his monastic profession, the 49th of his priesthood. He had been abbot for 18 years: from 1939 to 1957. He is the first abbot to be buried in our cemetery.