

## Abbot Michael Lensing

December 30 is the anniversary of the death of Abbot Michael Lensing, fourth abbot of our monastery. William Lensing was born on January 11, 1916, in Scranton, Arkansas. After completing the elementary grades at St. Ignatius School in his hometown, he came to Subiaco on October 1, 1928, to begin his secondary education. He graduated from our academy with the class of 1932.

William Lensing continued his studies in our college and seminary, professing his vows as a monk of our monastery on September 16, 1933, receiving the name Michael. Having completed his studies for the priesthood at the age of 23, and having received a dispensation from the Holy See for ordination at his age, he, along with six classmates were ordained to the priesthood by Bishop John B. Morris at the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Little Rock on June 3, 1939.

Father Michael was first assigned as a teacher in our academy from 1939 to 1943. He was then appointed novice master and director of formation. He retained this position in the abbey for the next 10 years.

After Abbot Paul founded *The Abbey Message*, Father Michael was its first long-term editor, a position he held from 1940 to 1957. His monthly column, "Chatting with Father Michael," revealed the depth of his insights and spirituality. During the same time he served as secretary of the Subiaco Alumni Association.

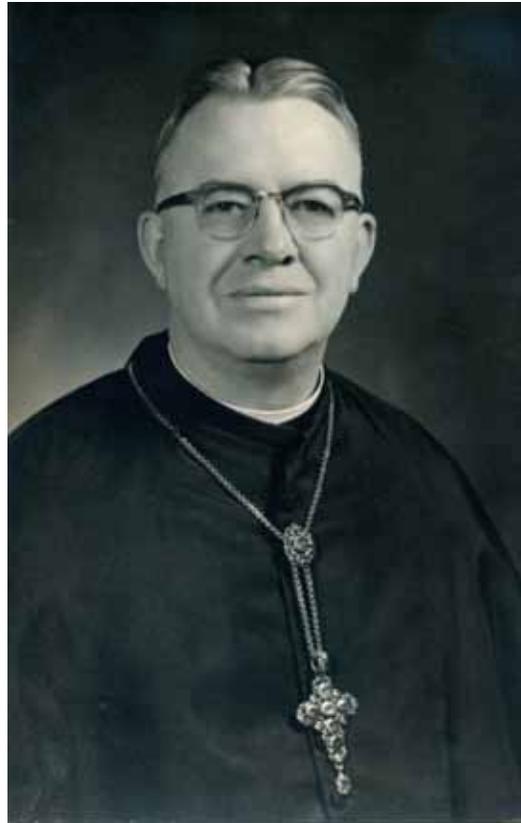
Of special significance in the state of Arkansas was his supportive role in working with rural development groups. From 1945 to 1948 he was director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. He was a member of the advisory council of the Vegetable Experiment Station of the Arkansas Extension Service.

On the local scene, he served as advisor of the Logan County Farmers Cooperative Association, being instrumental in the formation of the credit union in the county. Father Michael was also active in local efforts to obtain rural electrification for Arkansas farm communities.

Convinced of the need for education and action in both spiritual and social concerns, he was an avid worker in the Subiaco Deanery and its Study Clubs, serving as moderator from 1939 to 1943. He inspired others to become leaders.

Father Michael believed that the monastic community should use its gifts to help the civic community develop. He and other monks gave their time and talent to this apostolate. By his constant encouragement, Father Michael inspired many civic leaders to push for the development of the Arkansas River Valley, especially through the navigation efforts of the river.

A man of vision, Father Michael knew the price the forerunner must pay. He was a supporter of social justice during the 1940s and 1950s. He promoted racial integration long before it became a national concern, and he worked for fair housing for the poor. This united him with Dorothy Day, Friendship House, and other social justice movements, bringing to Subiaco Dorothy Day and other national speakers concerned with social justice issues.



He was an early supporter of the Liturgical Movement, working with and bringing to Subiaco some of its noted leaders. Father Michael, too, was often asked to conduct retreats and other spiritual exercises in many places.

On Monday, September 23, 1957, Father Michael was elected fourth abbot of Subiaco Abbey. he was blessed on Friday, November 29, 1957, and served our community as abbot for the next 17 years.

His years as abbot were marked by great physical expansion of the abbey. The brick and mortar work most dear to him was the completion of the Abbey Church in 1959. His promotion of the retreat movement saw the completion of Coury House in 1963.

Other construction works undertaken during his years as abbot were the completion of the north-west wing of the monastery and the building of Heard Hall, Rebsman Stadium, the Father Louis Deuster Field House, and the Oskar Rust Gymnasium. In the early 1960s, Abbot Michael organized the President's Council of Subiaco Abbey and Academy, an invaluable lay advisory committee.

In 1961, Corpus Christi Priory was raised to the status of an abbey. And, in response to the appeal of Pope John XXIII, and through Abbot Michael's leadership, the abbey established missions in Nigeria, West Africa, in 1963, and later in Belize, Central America in 1971. During the crucial years of the Second Vatican Council, Abbot Michael updated and guided the community into new eras of religious life. New formation standards were introduced with solemn vows and chapter rights the norm for all monks.

In January of 1970, Abbot Michael was diagnosed as having Parkinson's disease, although he was little impaired at the time. By 1974, however, the combined impact of several ailments was taking its toll on his stamina, and he found it necessary to resign his office as abbot and retire on Wednesday, October 30, 1974.

At the time of his resignation, he chose to set aside the title of abbot and resumed his original rank in the monastic community as Father Michael.

As the Parkinson's disease continued to weaken Father Michael, he was less and less able to follow the daily horarium, and in time he retired to the abbey infirmary. The last stages of Parkinson's disease set in about one month before his death, marked by grand mal type seizures, some lasting as long as 30 minutes.

Surrounded by Abbot Raphael and confreres, Abbot Michael died peacefully in the abbey infirmary on Friday morning, December 30, 1988.

Abbot Raphael was celebrant of the funeral Mass for Abbot Michael on Wednesday, January 4, 1989. The absolution was given by Bishop Joseph P. Delaney of the diocese of Fort Worth, Texas. Final obsequies were given by Bishop Andrew J. McDonald of this diocese.

At the time of his death, Abbot Michael was 72 years old. He had been a professed monk for 54 years and a priest for 49 years. He had been abbot for 17 years: from 1957 to 1974. He is buried in our cemetery.