

## Brother Benedict Silva

January 10th is the anniversary of the death of Brother Benedict Silva. Jose Silva was born in Duck Run, Cayo District, British Honduras (now Belize), Central America, on March 13, 1927. He was the third child in a family of nine children, four boys and five girls. He grew up on Carmelita Farm, a small ranch adjoining Santa Familia Village, where he assisted his father in tending the cattle and working on the farm.

Jose's father had been instrumental in having a Catholic school begun on the family property for the education of the children in the area. Thus, Jose received his primary education at this school which was located 100 yards from the Silva home.

After his mother's death, Jose attended St. John's College in Belize, the national capital of British Honduras. Crowded city life did not appeal to him. Thus, after one year of study, he returned to the work he loved on his father's ranch.

While he was at St. John's, however, Jose had attended a movie that depicted the life of a group of Franciscan friars in Mexico. The dedication of these men in a communal life of prayer and service intrigued Jose; he decided to learn all he could about monastic life. While reading the Sacred Heart Messenger in the early 1950s, he saw an advertisement about Subiaco Abbey and he decided to make inquiries about this Benedictine community.

When Jose Silva received a visa to enter the United States, he first visited Bishop David F. Hickey, S.J., to tell him of his acceptance as a candidate at Subiaco Abbey. Bishop Hickey blessed his venture and requested that he mention to Abbot Paul Nahlen how welcome the Benedictines would be to someday establish a monastery in British Honduras.

In 1954 Jose Silva came to the United States and to Subiaco where he professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on the feast of St. Benedict, March 21, 1956, receiving the name Benedict.

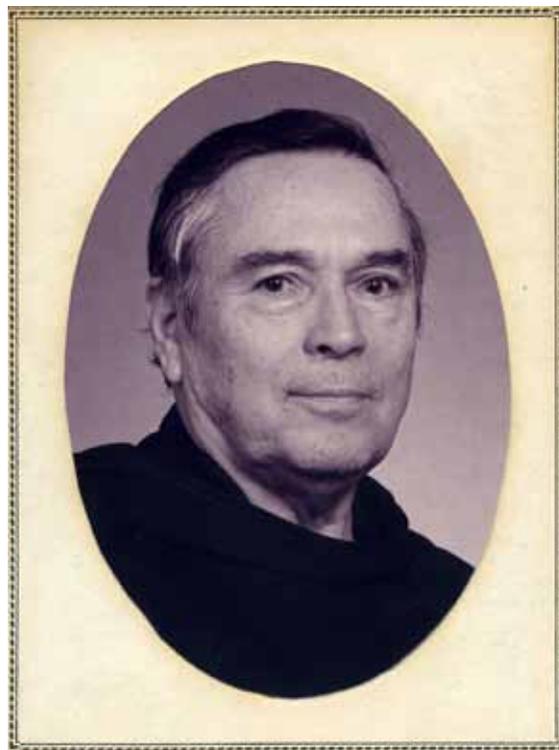
Brother Benedict first served the community on the abbey farm and dairy until 1956 when he was assigned to the abbey kitchen. In his spare time he built religious shrines on the abbey grounds and in the ridges. He had the ability to see "potential" in the ordinary: he could take a stone, add a few pencil marks, and a duck or a cow or some other object would come to life before your eyes!

One day Brother Benedict picked up a piece of wood on the abbey farm and noticed the musical sound it gave when struck by another object. He continued gathering scrap materials from the farm, and with creative ingenuity, he fashioned a marimba and played the musical instrument for the enjoyment of his confreres.

In 1958 he was sent to Corpus Christi, Texas, for one year to help with the farm work at Corpus Christi Priory. He became a U.S. citizen in 1960. Upon his return to the abbey from Corpus Christi he was assigned to work in the laundry, a responsibility he held until 1971.

Through the years Brother Benedict recalled the Franciscan movie that prompted his vocation, and the request made by Bishop Hickey. As a result he began to envision the possibility of a Benedictine foundation in his homeland.

He had to put his dream on hold, however, because the community of Subiaco voted to locate its first foreign mission in Nigeria, West Africa. But a few years later, when the Biafran War put an end



to this Benedictine foundation, the monks of Subiaco deliberated the possibility of a foundation in Central or South America.

Several Latin-American countries were considered with the final choice being British Honduras, Central America. Excursions were made to various locations in this country; the site chosen was Carmelita Farm, which Brother Benedict's father was willing to sell so that he could retire.

On September 8, 1971, Brother Benedict became one of the three founding monks of Santa Familia Monastery. The first monastic home was the same house in which he had been raised as a child. Thus, Brother Benedict returned to the same duties as a monk that he carried out years earlier on Carmelita Farm.

Later, when the monks moved across the Belize River to re-establish themselves near Santa Elena, Brother Benedict continued his duties at the farm. This entailed walking or bicycling from the monastery to the Belize River and then rowing a dory across the river to reach the farm on the opposite bank. In late afternoon he would return to the monastery via the same route. On weekends he helped with the chores at the monastery and assisted in the apostolates of the community. When the new monastery was completed in 1978, he played a major role in landscaping the grounds with native rocks, plants, and flowers.

Ever since his childhood, Brother Benedict had a great fascination for the Christmas season. Therefore, as he went about his work all year long at Santa Familia Monastery he would collect any stone, plant or object that would beautify the "nacimiento," the large seasonal display that he erected at the monastery each Christmas. Adults and children of the area were always fascinated by Brother Benedict's ingenuity in honoring the birthday of the Christ child.

Ten years after the founding of Santa Familia Monastery in British Honduras, Great Britain granted full independence to their former colony on September 21, 1981, allowing it to become a sovereign Central American nation known as Belize.

In 1988 Brother Benedict was recalled to the abbey in order to receive medical attention for heart trouble. During his time he wrote a lengthy memoir about his family life as well as his monastic life at Subiaco Abbey and Santa Familia Monastery.

He returned to Belize in 1990, resuming his former role as groundskeeper of the monastery, spending most of his time developing 10 acres of tropical rain forest in the area. Domestically, he was custodian of St. Benedict Centre, the guest and retreat facility.

Brother Benedict was recalled to the abbey on August 3, 1999, to receive medical attention and to retire from his many years of dedicated service in Belize. As his health permitted, he continued to assist in the abbey refectory and laundry.

In 2002 he was admitted to the Abbey Health Center where the staff was better able to meet his health needs. In the summer of 2002 he went to St. Louis, Missouri, for a family visit. Shortly after his return to the abbey he was admitted to the hospital in Paris, Arkansas, for treatment of chest pains and internal bleeding.

Brother Benedict was then transferred to St. Edward Mercy Medical Center in Fort Smith, Arkansas, where he was diagnosed with myelogenous leukemia. In addition to other ailments, Brother Benedict's condition necessitated his spending the next five months in the hospital where he died of complications of acute myelogenous leukemia at 2:30 a.m. on Friday, January 10, 2003.

A Christian Wake Service was held at 7:00 p.m. on January 12. On Monday, January 13, Abbot Jerome Kodell was celebrant and homilist for the 10:00 a.m. Mass of Christian burial and performed the final obsequies.

At the time of his death, Brother Benedict was 75 years old and in the 46th year of his monastic profession. He is buried in our cemetery.