

Father Fintan Kraemer

April 18th is the anniversary of the death of Father Fintan Kraemer. Henry Kraemer was born on April 18, 1868, in Leitstadt, Germany. After coming to the United States in 1883, he moved to Arkansas on September 1, 1886, and settled on the Guenther farm, now the Willems residence, near Paris. As a young man, he taught in the public school system in Logan County.

At 19 years of age, Henry Kraemer entered our monastery, and on the feast of St. Benedict, March 21, 1888, he and his classmate Peter Fleig professed their vows as monks of our monastery. They were the first fraters in the history of our monastery. In honor of the first two abbots of St. Meinrad, these two young monks received the names Frater Fintan Kraemer, and Frater Martin Fleig, respectfully.

Frater Fintan was ordained to the priesthood on May 24, 1892, by Bishop John J. Hogan, the first bishop of the episcopal City of St. Joseph, Missouri.

In this cathedral, Father Fintan's ordination took place during the same Mass in which Father Ignatius Conrad received his abbatial blessing as first abbot of our monastery.

His first assignment came one year after his ordination when he was sent to St. Edward's Church in Little Rock where he remained for the next 15 years. He eventually became pastor and then vicar general of the diocese in January 1900.

Father Fintan still held his position of pastor at St. Edward's and lived in the rectory. He was a German immigrant and the diocese of Little Rock was still somewhat ethnically divided. His main rival during the 1900 controversy, Irishman Father Patrick Enright, was stationed just blocks away at St. Andrew's Cathedral.

Father Fintan was only 30 years old when appointed vicar general, and just 32 years old when the whole diocese was placed in his hands as administrator.

Two Catholic societies in Europe--one in Vienna, Austria, and one in Munich, Germany--offered financial support to foreign missions. Father Fintan solicited funds for both St. Edward's and the whole diocese by his correspondence with the Leopoldine Society in Vienna.

In February of 1907, Bishop Morris asked him to begin ministering specifically to the small number of black Catholics in Little Rock and in 1908, named him the first pastor of St. Bartholomew's, a black Catholic parish in the capital city. Father Fintan built the first chapel for that congregation and said the first Mass there on January 10, 1909.

Father Fintan was replaced as vicar general by Msgr. John M. Lucey in June 1907. By the fall of 1909, Father Fintan was in Armstrong Springs near Searcy trying, unsuccessfully as it turned out, to start a religious order known as the Brothers of St. Paul.

In 1912, Father Fintan was sent by Abbot Ignatius to St. Mary's Church in Nevada, Missouri, and he would not work in Arkansas again for the next 20 years.

During these 20 years, he was a spiritual director at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio. He also served for a few years at Corpus Christi Priory, and his last post was as chaplain at Spohn Hospital, in Corpus Christi, Texas. On Thanksgiving Day of 1934, Father Fintan returned to the abbey exhausted with diabetes and high blood pressure.



Father Fintan died in the infirmary of our monastery at 5:30 a. m. on Thursday, April 18, 1935--his birthday.

At the time of his death, Father Fintan was 67 years old and in the 47th year of his monastic profession, the 42nd of his priesthood. He is buried in our cemetery.