

Father Hugh Assenmacher

July 24 is the anniversary of the death of Father Hugh Assenmacher. Gerald (Jerry) Assenmacher was born February 16, 1933, in Billings, Missouri, the second-oldest in a family of three boys. He attended St. Joseph Elementary School in his hometown before coming to Subiaco Academy for his secondary education, graduating with the class of 1951. He professed his vows as a Benedictine monk on September 14, 1953, receiving the name Hugh. While in the clericate he was manager of the Abbey's lending library.

He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Albert L. Fletcher on May 15, 1958, at the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Little Rock, Arkansas. Following ordination, Father Hugh devoted the next four decades to the teaching profession at Subiaco Academy. From 1962-63 he studied in his home state, receiving an M.A. degree in history from St. Louis University. He attended summer classes at Conception Seminary in Missouri. In Arkansas he attended summer school at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, and the College of the Ozarks in Clarksville.

With his mesmerizing teaching ability, Father Hugh brought students to the realization that knowledge is worthwhile and learning can be fun. His teaching repertoire through the years included history, music, band, chorus, Latin, and Christian Doctrine.

He was an avid reader since childhood, with an interest in many fields, as evidenced by library check-out cards throughout his lifetime. Of these books, many were not read just one time, but were checked out to be enjoyed over and over again throughout his monastic lifetime. One of his hobbies was historical research, especially in the archives of monastic communities.

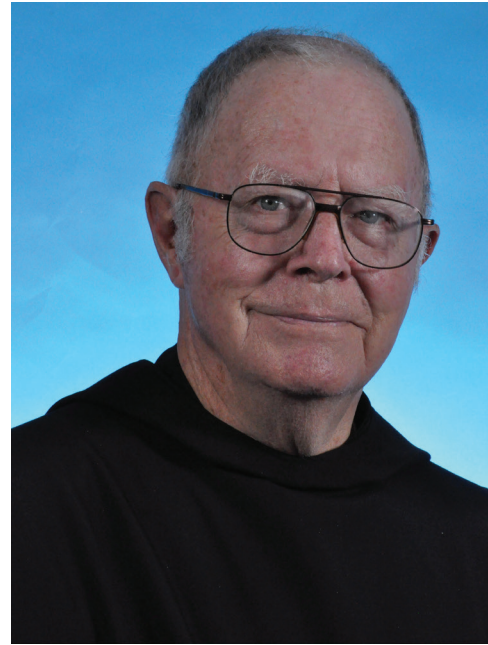
Prior to the Abbey's centennial year of 1978, he spent a year researching and writing [A Place Called Subiaco](#), a 486-page history of the Benedictine monks in Arkansas. He also authored history books of several Benedictine parishes.

As a history buff, Father Hugh's greatest love was American History, especially the Civil War era and the Westward movement. He was particularly knowledgeable in these areas and he personally liked to read any "cowboy and Indian" lore that he got his hands on, to say nothing of historical films, videos, et al. Father Hugh attributed his love for the American West to the fact that he was a "closet" cowboy - vicariously living the adventure as he read or viewed the material. He preferred teaching social history to political history.

Father Hugh was also Subiaco's walking historian. With an insatiable affinity for the great outdoors, he led hikes and excursions for students, visitors, and monks to points of interest in the surrounding ridges, lakes, and streams in the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains. Be it reading tombstone inscriptions in old graveyards, admiring God's natural beauty of the region, hunting arrowheads, discussing Indian and native folklore or simply reveling in outdoor trivia, he made a memorable impression on his troupers through the decades.

In 1986 Father Hugh received a one-year appointment to serve as Prior of Santa Familia Monastery in Belize, Central America. Upon his return to the United States, he resumed his positions in the Abbey and Academy.

A hospitable monk, he used his talents in service of the community as a multi-faceted teacher, often serving as chairman of the social studies and Christian Doctrine departments. He was Choirmaster, musician, and Dean of Scholastics. When the scholasticate (minor seminary) was eliminated in 1968, Father Hugh was the first moderator of the Benet Club, an organization for Academy students interested in learning about priestly and monastic vocations.



Through the years he also held positions of Vocation Director, Subprior, Formation Director, Retreat Master, Chaplain, Archivist, museum caretaker, and groundskeeper. With a humble chuckle and a broad smile, Father Hugh graciously welcomed anyone needing his assistance. With a shortage of monk-organists in the community from time to time, Father Hugh was the only organist available for the daily monastic functions.

He always had a healthy balance between indoor and outdoor work. For decades he kept the lawns and fields mowed on the academy premises, as well as the manicuring of the Abbey cemetery, with its challenging slopes and all the necessary trimming.

With the completion of the 2003-04 school year, Father Hugh resigned from his full-time teaching career. On November 23, 2004, he underwent heart surgery for a valve replacement. He made a rapid convalescence and by February 2005 he was able to resume a light teaching load in the Academy in addition to his daily duties in the Abbey as Choirmaster, organist, Liturgist, and instructor in the formation program. From 2014 until his death, he was assigned as Sacramental Minister at St. Mary Church in Altus, Arkansas.

During monastic recreation periods, Father Hugh was often the monk sought out for information on historical events or simply digresses on current events, especially church-related issues.

At the time of his death, Father Hugh was 85 years old. He had been a professed monk for 64 years and a priest for 60 years. He is buried in our cemetery.