

Father Bernard Zell

September 5th is the anniversary of the death of Father Bernard Zell. Charles Zell was born on August 11, 1868, in Biberach, Germany. His father was a physician in Germany.

Charles' early education was at local schools, and later he was sent to boarding schools in Ulm and Mergentheim. His education was a deep concern to his father; only the best would suffice. For this reason he was sent to Switzerland to be enrolled at the Abbey School of Einsiedeln for the final two years of the humanities.

Charles Zell was one of the "Eight Beatitudes" who came to the United States and to our monastery in 1887 with the "Great Expedition" from the abbey of Einsiedeln led by Father Gall D'Aujourd'hui. He was the only German among his seven counterparts.

He completed his studies at Subiaco, a member of the group known as the class of 1887, the first college class of the little school which grew up around the mission center.

Charles Zell professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on October 24, 1888, receiving the name Bernard. He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Edward M. Fitzgerald here at the abbey on December 20, 1891.

After his ordination Father Bernard served our community for many years in the parish missions, first in 1892, at Caulksville, Arkansas, then eleven years in Monett, Missouri. After a short assignment at the abbey he was assigned as pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Muenster, Texas, from 1904 to 1910.

At the turn of the 20th century there was a growing idea of establishing a priory in north Texas for the Benedictine monks serving the five parishes there. Muenster, being the largest of the parishes, was considered the logical place for such a priory. Father Bernard, pastor, was appointed prior. Later, the idea of an independent priory was abandoned.

From 1910 to 1923 Father Bernard was pastor of St. Peter's Church in Lindsay, Texas. During his two decades of work in north Texas, Father Bernard built up the parish plants in both Muenster and Lindsay. Notably, he was pastor when the present St. Peter's Church in Lindsay was completed in 1918. Today this church bears a Texas Historical Building Medallion signifying it as having been named a Recorded Texas Historical Landmark, significant to the history of the community and the state, and worthy of preservation. It is rated as one of the most unusual church buildings in Texas in that its size and architectural quality are seldom found in a small community.

In 1923, Father Bernard returned to the abbey to teach dogmatic theology, exegesis, and allied subjects. For a while during this period he also served as subprior of the community.

From 1928 to 1930 he served as assistant pastor of St. Edward's Church in Little Rock. From 1930 to 1937 he was chaplain to the Brothers of St. Francis at Searcy, Arkansas.

He was then called back to the abbey to teach. Although Father Bernard had to give up most of his work in the school because of poor health two years later, he continued some private instruction and was again appointed subprior of the abbey, an office he held until 1946.

Although he was in poor health and advanced age, Father Bernard died suddenly in the abbey infirmary on Sunday afternoon, September 5, 1948.

At the time of his death, Father Bernard was 80 years old and in the 59th year of his monastic profession, the 56th of his priesthood. He is buried in our cemetery.

