

Abbot Edward Burgert

January 23rd is the anniversary of the death of Abbot Edward Burgert. Joseph Andrew Burgert was born in Paris, Arkansas, on October 15, 1887. As a child he attended parochial schools at Sts. Peter and Paul in Morrison Bluff and at St. Edward's in Little Rock. When his family moved to Altus, he came to Subiaco. He was 10 years of age when he began his schooling at Subiaco.

On September 15, 1905, Joseph Burgert entered the novitiate of the abbey and professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on September 16, 1906, receiving the name Edward. He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop John B. Morris at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Little Rock on June 24, 1911.

Following his ordination, Father Edward served our community for seven years on the staff of the academy. His role as teacher was enlarged by leadership in student and school affairs. Together with this, he engaged in much missionary work in Arkansas and Texas, especially during the summer months and on weekends.

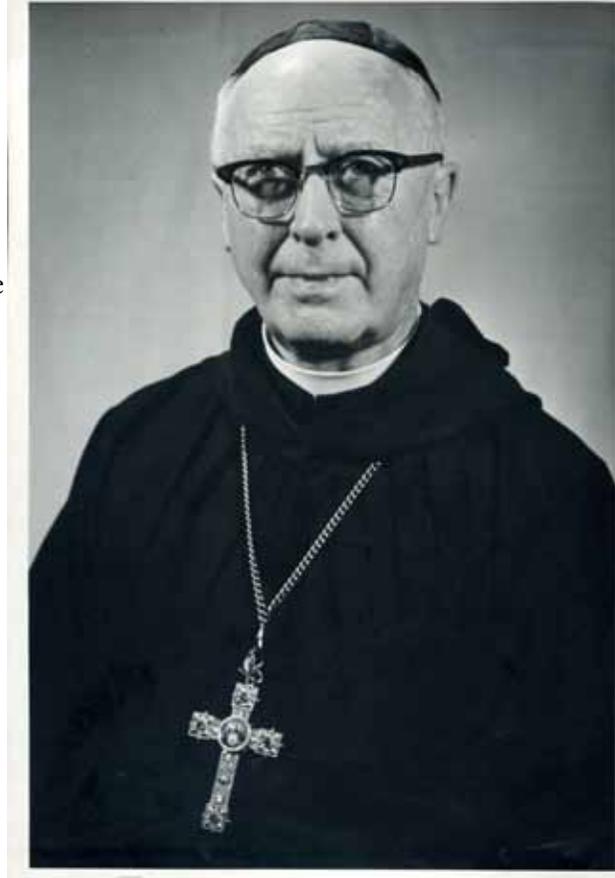
In the summer of 1918 he attended Notre Dame University to begin graduate studies. From that fall to the summer of 1921, Father Edward studied at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., where he earned a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in English.

In the fall of 1921, Father Edward returned to Subiaco to take his place once again on the staff of the academy with the added responsibility of the formation of young monks. He served as director of clerics and as novice master until January 4, 1923, when he was appointed prior of the monastery.

Abbot Ignatius Conrad's failing health led him to petition for the election of a coadjutor abbot with the right of succession. Father Edward was elected to this office on December 1, 1925. He succeeded to the full responsibility of abbot on March 13, 1926, with the death of Abbot Ignatius, our first abbot.

The tenure in office of our second abbot, Edward Burgert, was marked by many turning points in the history of Subiaco. In 1927, responding to the request of Bishop Emmanuel B. Ledvina of Corpus Christi, Texas, he sent monks to this south Texas diocese to establish a school, which eventually flowered into Corpus Christi Abbey. The flourishing religious life at Subiaco, its growing school, and the new foundation in Corpus Christi, seemed to be stages promising happy and prosperous years ahead for the young abbot. But God chose to extract from him the greater price of sorrow and suffering.

On the evening of December 20, 1927, fire ravaged the entire monastic building at Subiaco, utterly destroying the monastic church, library, monks' living quarters, and most of the school. Subiaco had to begin again. During the hard years after the fire, Abbot Edward rose to his greatness by inspiring a spirit of loyalty springing from his own monastic faith and uniting his community in determination to rebuild. A new Subiaco spirit was born, and the Subiaco Alumni Association, though hampered by the Great Depression, began to lend its encouraging support.



In the meantime, because Subiaco could not handle a large number of students, and not as many teachers were needed here, Abbot Edward found it possible in 1928 to agree to the request of Bishop Joseph Patrick Lynch of Dallas, Texas, to send a staff to operate Laneri High School in Fort Worth, Texas. For 30 years Subiaco continued to operate this school.

The Great Depression of the 1930s made any real rebuilding at Subiaco quite impossible. A basement church was completed to serve as the abbey and parish church. It fulfilled that function until the dedication of the present abbey church on March 15, 1959. Imperceptibly but steadily, the rubble disappeared and external signs began to confirm Abbot Edward's hope of rebuilding.

The first major reconstruction project began in 1938. Aided by Sir Charles Jewett, Knight of St. Gregory the Great, of Fort Smith, Arkansas, the Jewett Memorial Annex began to rise. It provided living space for monks, a monastic refectory, and a kitchen. Though financial burdens continued and would continue indefinitely, a turn had been made.

It was at this time, wearied by years of labor and worries that Abbot Edward resigned his office on February 21, 1939. He was succeeded by Father Paul Nahlen, the founder and head of the Corpus Christi foundation.

Abbot Edward thereafter spent his time in parochial ministry and in hospital chaplaincies. From 1939 until 1942 he served at St. Helena, Bow Valley, and Raeville in the Diocese of Omaha, Nebraska. From 1942 until 1951 he was pastor at St. Mary's in Windthorst, Texas. From 1951 to 1953 he was at St. Scholastica's in Shoal Creek. In 1953 he went to St. Edward's in Little Rock.

In July, 1954, he became chaplain at Spohn Hospital in Corpus Christi, Texas, where he stayed until 1959. At that time he was made chaplain at Refugio County Hospital in Refugio, Texas.

On January 11, 1968, Abbot Edward suffered a coronary attack and was partially paralyzed, but he remained conscious until his death.

In his final pains he told those gathered around him that he was glad he had something to suffer in union with Christ. At his bedside in his final days were two abbots whom he had welcomed to monastic life, had invested in the monastic habit, and whose professions he had received: Abbot Michael Lensing of Subiaco, and Abbot Alfred Hoenig of Corpus Christi.

Abbot Edward, the second abbot of Subiaco, died on Tuesday, January 23, 1968, at Refugio County Hospital in Refugio, Texas. The body was brought to Subiaco where funeral services were held on Monday, January 29. Bishop Albert L. Fletcher was celebrant of the funeral Mass and presided at the absolution. Abbot Michael conducted the final obsequies.

At the time of his death, Abbot Edward was 80 years old and in the 61st year of his monastic profession, the 56th of his priesthood. He had been abbot for 13 years: from 1925 until 1939. He is buried in our cemetery.