

## Father Denis Soerries

December 13 is the anniversary of the death of Father Denis Soerries. Clarence Soerries was born February 18, 1931, in Hartman, Arkansas. He attended Sacred Heart Elementary school in his hometown and came to Subiaco Academy for his secondary education, graduating with the class of 1949. He entered Subiaco Abbey, professing his vows as a Benedictine monk on September 14, 1951, receiving the name Denis. He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Albert L. Fletcher at the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Little Rock on May 26, 1956.

Immediately following ordination, Father Denis went to Missouri for summer courses in English at St. Louis University. He was on the faculty of Subiaco Academy the following year. He then began summer classes at the University of Notre Dame, and also enrolled for the school year 1957-58.

With the opening of the 1958-59 school year, Father Denis was assigned to the faculty of Laneri High School in Fort Worth, Texas. During the summer session of 1959, he completed his advanced studies at the University of Notre Dame, receiving an M.A. degree in English. He remained on the faculty of Laneri High School until 1962.

By mid-1962, the monks of Subiaco Abbey voted to send their college seminarians for study at St. Bernard College in Cullman, Alabama, and monks of St. Bernard voted to send their minor seminarians to Subiaco Academy for their high school studies. Each monastery agreed to send a monk along with the students, so Father Denis accompanied the Arkansas group to Cullman, Alabama, where he was prefect of Subiaco's college students and a teacher of English. For four years he retained his position at St. Bernard College. In 1966, he was recalled to Arkansas to teach at Subiaco Academy and to be editor of the monastery's newspaper, *The Abbey Message*. In 1967 he was a dean and teacher in the Academy.

In the autumn of 1968 Father Denis was sent to Corpus Christi, Texas, to be on the faculty of Corpus Christi Academy. He remained in this position for three years before being recalled to Arkansas to teach again at Subiaco Academy and become commuting pastor of Sacred Heart of Mary Church in Barling, Arkansas.

In 1976 he began three decades of residential pastoral ministry, the first at St. Mary Church in Fort Worth, Texas, where he served for two years. His longest tenure in residential pastoral work was at Sacred Heart Church in Muenster, Texas, from 1978-89. While there, he was among a group of 500 priests from across the U.S. sent by their bishops to greet Pope John Paul II on his arrival in Miami, Florida, in 1982, and to concelebrate an open-air Mass with the Pope. His last Texas pastorate was at Saint Peter Church in Lindsay 1989-90.

Returning to Arkansas in 1990, he was appointed pastor of St. Edward Church in Little Rock, and then in 1992 he was recalled to Subiaco to serve the pastoral needs of St. Benedict Church. In 1999 he was appointed pastor of St. Joseph Church in Paris, Arkansas, and four years later he was assigned the pastorates of St. Ignatius Church, Scranton, and its mission church of St. Meinrad in Prairie View. His final assignment was as pastor of St. Scholastica Church in Shoal Creek from 2008 until his death.



In retrospect, Father Denis said, “My vocation was not a dramatic pounding like St. Paul’s conversion; it just grew gradually from a family whose parents took their faith seriously and insisted that their children did, too.” Of his time as a pastor in parishes with elementary schools he said, “I have enjoyed working with the school children on both high school and elementary levels. Children are another revelation of the mystery of God. They are like creation in slow motion.”

At the time of his death, Father Denis was 81 years old. He had been a professed monk for 61 years and a priest for 56 years. He is buried in our cemetery.