

Bishop Vincent Wehrle

November 2nd is the anniversary of the death of Bishop Vincent Wehrle. He was born on December 19, 1855, in Berg, Canton St. Gall, Switzerland. He studied at Berg and then at Einsiedeln where he professed his vows as monk of Einsiedeln in September, 1876. He was ordained to the priesthood on April 23, 1882. Following his ordination, he came to the United States and to St. Meinrad Abbey, arriving on October 9, 1882. There he was under the obedience of Abbot Fintan Mundwiler, although he did not cease to be a Capitular of Einsiedeln.

In the summer of 1883, Abbot Fintan assigned Father Vincent to St. Benedict's foundation in Arkansas. Being newly ordained, he was a welcome addition to the fledgling monastery. His first mission was Paris, Arkansas, which he attended from the monastery by riding to the parish every second Sunday. He was also appointed master of novices and director of the brothers.

Father Vincent was gifted in many ways and displayed much zeal during the two years that he served our community. He felt uncertain about the community's survival in Arkansas, and in September, 1885, Abbot Fintan recalled him to Indiana to serve as assistant pastor in Jasper. In 1887, Abbot Fintan appointed Father Vincent to Yankton, in the Territory of the Dakotas, to work under Bishop Martin Marty.

In 1894, Father Vincent obtained permission from the Holy See for the erection of St. Gall's Monastery, located near Devils Lake, North Dakota. In 1899, he moved his little community to Richardton, North Dakota, where he established it as St. Mary's Monastery, with himself as prior.

In October 1902, the priory was admitted into the Swiss-American Congregation, and in 1903, Father Prior Vincent was named by Pope Pius X as the first abbot of Assumption Abbey, as the foundation was now known.

On April 9, 1910, Abbot Vincent was appointed by Pope Pius X as the first bishop of Bismarck, North Dakota, and on May 19, 1910, he was consecrated bishop of the newly-erected diocese. Simultaneously, he retained the office of abbot of Assumption Abbey until July 6, 1915.

On October 21, 1921, Subiaco Abbey celebrated the golden sacerdotal jubilee of Abbot Ignatius. This was the first 50th jubilee of priestly ordination ever celebrated in Arkansas. Bishop Vincent Wehrle, who as a young monk and priest from Einsiedeln had served our community for two years during the 1880s, was guest speaker on this occasion.

Bishop Wehrle retired from his episcopal see at Bismarck, North Dakota, on December 11, 1939, and was named Titular Bishop of Teos by Pope Pius XII.

During his lifetime, he witnessed the settlement and growth of western North Dakota. He came to the Dakotas to be a missionary, and at one time he was the only priest active in North Dakota between Devils Lake and the Montana border.

Bishop Vincent Wehrle died on All Souls Day, Sunday, November 2, 1941. The funeral was held at St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Bismarck where he was installed as bishop 31 years earlier. Reverend Vincent J. Ryan, Bishop of Bismarck, was celebrant of the Mass. The five absolutions prescribed for the funeral of a bishop were given by the Archbishop of St. Paul, and the Bishops of Rapid City, St. Cloud, Fargo, and Bismarck.



The body was then taken to Assumption Abbey in Richardton, North Dakota, where on Friday, November 7, final rites were held with Abbot Cuthbert Goeb as celebrant of the Mass.

At the time of his death, Bishop Vincent Wehrle was 85 years old and in the 65th year of his monastic profession, the 59th of his priesthood. He had been abbot of Assumption Abbey for 13 years, from 1902 to 1915, and bishop of Bismarck for 29 years, from 1910 until 1939. He is buried in the crypt at the entrance of Assumption Abbey Church, Richardton, North Dakota, the site he himself had selected as his place of burial.