

# Assumption

## ABBNEY NEWSLETTER

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## Abbot Brian Wangler 1943 - 2017

Abbot Brian Wangler, OSB, 73, died on May 25, 2017, at 2:56 a.m. from cancer. Greatly appreciated and loved by his monastic community, he was a model of right-living and of service to others.

Abbot Brian was born in St. Alexis Hospital in Bismarck, ND, on October 19, 1943, to Valentine and Mary (Wald) Wangler, and baptized as Henry. He grew up on the family farm southwest of Napoleon, ND, where he learned many skills which he found useful throughout his life. He was the fifth child of nine boys and two girls.

His elementary education was at a country school with one teacher for all eight grades. His first year of high school was at St. Francis Academy, Hankinson, ND, where two of his aunts were Franciscan sisters. He finished high school at Abbey Prep in 1961 and attended the Abbey's Junior College from 1961 to 1963, after which he entered Assumption Abbey to begin monastic life. He was given the name Brian, and made his monastic profession on July 11, 1964.

After completing college studies at St. John's University, Collegeville, MN, in 1966, he began theological studies at Assumption Abbey Seminary for the 1966-1967 school year. From 1967 to 1970 Frater Brian completed his seminary studies at St. Meinrad School of Theology, St. Meinrad, IN. He was ordained simplex on August 2, 1969.

From September to December 1970, Father Brian was a recruiter for Assumption College. In December of 1970, the decision was made to close the college, and in January of 1971 he was appointed assistant pastor of St. Joseph's Church, Devils Lake, ND. In August of 1972 he was called back to the Abbey to head up the Christian Life Center. In time he also became the Prior, Formation Director, and worked with Marriage Encounter. Abbot Robert West sent Father Brian to Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, in September of 1975 to earn an MA degree in Catholic Formative Spirituality. Father Brian graduated from Duquesne in May of 1978, and returned to the Abbey to serve as Formation Director. He was also reappointed Prior. During the spring of 1983, he was asked



Abbot Brian Wangler, O.S.B.

to become pastor of St. Mary's Parish, Richardton, a job he enjoyed for the next 21 years.

On May 28, 2004, Father Brian was elected the eighth abbot of Assumption Abbey. Abbot Brian came to be appreciated for his emotional balance, practical wisdom, and willingness to serve. He often rolled up his sleeves and did menial chores alongside his brother-monks. He seemed genuinely to love his job. In addition to his many duties as major superior, he took the Sunday evening Mass at Queen of Peace Church in Dickinson, ND, from the last Sunday of January, 2005, to Sunday, October 30, 2016.



Henry Wangler as a sixteen-year-old.

Abbot Brian received a diagnosis of cancer in October of 2015 and was on chemotherapy for eight months. He was very grateful to his four brothers living in Bismarck who came to visit him during chemo sessions. He was also most grateful to other family members who expressed their concern, remembered his birthday, and made the effort to visit him. One of Abbot Brian's regrets during his last year was in not being able to visit all family members as he would have liked, and in not being able to visit, one more time, Assumption Abbey's beloved daughter house, *Monasterio Benedictino de Tibatí* in Bogotá, Colombia. Abbot Brian enjoyed monastic life and was very grateful to his confreres for their dedication and good humor.

Abbot Brian is preceded in death by his parents, a sister, Elsie Weninger, and his sister-in-law Lucy. He is survived by eight brothers, Tony (Lucy) Wangler, Mark

(Luella) Wangler, Frank (Florence) Wangler, Alois (Erica) Wangler, Julius (Patricia Ann) Wangler, Valentine (JoAnn) Wangler, Jim (Diane) Wangler, Steven (Sherry) Wangler, one sister Ann Marie (Allyn) Wald, and by his brother-in-law Norbert (Phyllis) Weninger and many nieces and nephews.

A Vigil Service was held on Monday evening, May 29<sup>th</sup> at Assumption Abbey. On Tuesday, May 30<sup>th</sup> the Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at Assumption Abbey followed by burial in the Abbey cemetery. May he rest in peace! □



Frater Brian at St. John's University with his mother on his right and his father on his left. The other woman is his Aunt Elizabeth Wald-Braun.

## Love as Jesus Loves

*The following article was written by Abbot Brian shortly before he died.*

Our ability to describe how God loves us is poor, boring and, often, omitted in Sunday sermons. We are told in a general taken-for-granted way that God loves us. You might recall that from December 13, 2015 to November 20, 2016, we

Catholics had the Year of Mercy. For those who took the time to read what Pope Francis wrote, you will have received a good description of God's love for us and how we need God's help to put God's love for us into practice.

Jesus' death on the cross and the resurrection are the supreme acts of love by God for humanity. But we do not like to talk about this very much. We are incorporated into these acts of Jesus by baptism. We have heard many times: "Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from death by the glory of the Father, we might live in newness of life" (Rom 6:3-4).

What does this mean for us ordinary people? It means working with God's grace, leading us away from all self-centeredness in its many forms. The motivating power of our self-purification is not human goodness, but the Holy Spirit. At baptism we were regenerated, remade, born again to live with God dwelling in us. It also means to love, not with self-centeredness leading the way, for that is not love, but with the Holy Spirit leading the way. The resolutions we make on New Year's Day or for Lent tend to be superficial and are soon forgotten. The baptismal promises are such that they are part of the *character* God seals

on our soul, a *character* that indicates a change of being (new birth), a work of God done in us at baptism.

The love of Jesus for us is intrinsically linked to this idea so well expressed in 1 John 3: 16 which says that "the way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 Jn 3:16). This is a new way to love. There was no self-centeredness in Jesus' love for us during his death and resurrection. There was nothing in it for him. We are to love our neighbor the same way. Jesus is the norm for our love, the pattern we are to follow. This means death to the selfishness that so pervades us and contaminates our love and actions. We are afraid that we will not be provided for, or that we will not be able to live up to our responsibilities. Because of this fear we manipulate, lie, keep secrets so we will look good or think we will have an advantage over someone else, emphasize work too much and neglect relationships. Of course we have responsibilities and we are expected to fulfill them, plan for the future, to work hard and be realistic. All of these things can be done expecting that the Lord is there and guiding us, though we do not know it.

Do not forget that loving as Jesus loves includes embracing the cross. The mistake many make is that because real godly love includes the cross they think that godly love is only the burden of self-denial and so they avoid it. The real attitude of godly love is found in Jesus' attitude toward the cross,



Father Brian in 1976.

namely, not my will, but yours, O heavenly Father, be done. Does this mean one is pushed around by God? No. Jesus freely and actively chose to do his Father's will. To repeat, there was nothing in it for himself. It was all for us. Loving as Jesus did and does right now is free. Jesus freely chooses to love us and we are to love with the same freedom. Love one another as I love you, Jesus says.

We have now clarified that the love of Jesus for us is a love that has no selfishness in it. This is so important that 1 Jn 3:16 bears repeating: "The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." This is hard to do. We are selfish, self-protective, easily frightened, we worry, are greedy and love money. Therefore repenting is a very big deal. We are far away from the disinterested love that Jesus lived. Repentance is God's grace at work, seeking to involve us in growing away from being centered on self, from weak faith and from the lack of trust in God, to a stronger faith in and desire to

imitate Christ Jesus and grow in loving as he does.

Here are two samples of examination of conscience. One is on money and one is on prayer. *On money:* Lord Jesus, please accompany me as I look at my life in regard to money. You know, Lord, that I need money. Everyone does. I have to live and so does my family. I have to pay taxes. Sometimes I have to buy something new. So how do I make and use money as you, Jesus Christ, want me to? As I look at my relationship with money I know I cling to it. I feel safe only if I have more money than I need. Help me, Jesus, to be detached at least a bit more. Increase my trust in you. When I confess my sins, help me to be especially open to this area in my heart. Help me to be a good and responsible steward. *On Prayer:* Jesus, you sometimes spent all night in prayer. How can that be? I am easily bored during prayer. The Mass and other public prayer is not so bad, but in personal prayer I am distracted easily. I am sorry for not enjoying talking more with you, Lord. Do not give up on me and keep me faithful to you, to your body the Church, and to your way of life. Please forgive me and increase in me my desire to please you.

If we do not ask Jesus to accompany and lead us when we examine our consciences we are on our own and will fail in doing an *examen* that will amount to repentance that has at least some impact on us. Also, we cannot examine our whole life at one time. It is too much. If we do that we will just

go back to a list of sins and pick out the ones we think we have committed. Such lists do not probe the heart. The key to a good examination of conscience is to take Jesus with us, who loves without self-interest, and take one area of our life asking Jesus to help us discern if we are loving and living that part of life as he did. Comparing ourselves to Jesus, who loves without hoping to get something out of it, is the key. Jesus wants only what is good for us, our salvation.

Recall that at baptism we were made a new creation, adopted by God and made a member of his household, the Church, the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Tim 3:15). Examination of conscience is to prepare ourselves to confess sins that are self-centered, and all of them are. It is very hard not to be self-centered. Recognize that sin has a very deep hold on all of us. It is not going away by one *examen* and one confession. Many are needed. Keep at it. Give yourself time. Sin has roots in all areas of your life. On the spiritual level we grow slowly. We have to be faithful to prayer, the sacraments, to reading of Scripture, and we must be patient. If we will not take Jesus with us and compare ourselves to him, we end up depending on ourselves. Remember to ask Jesus to lead the way as you examine an area of your life. Rely on him and not yourself. □

