

For the third time within a month, the death knell announced the passing of a confrere; all were born in the early thirties of the last century.

Our dear
Brother Bonaventura (Heinrich Gottfried) Gruben OSB

died on the evening of 18 February 2019 at 7:40 p.m., in our infirmary where he had lived for the past few years.

Heinrich Gruben was born in Hilden, North Rhine-Westphalia on 4 August 1931. His father Heinrich was a pipe inspector, his mother a housewife for her husband and their five children.

From 1937 to 1945, during war time, Heinrich attended Hilden's primary school, followed by his apprenticeship as a gardener. His father died in the spring of 1945. After becoming a journeyman, Heinrich worked as a gardener.

Desiring to become a priest, he once again went back to the classroom in the seminary of the Salesians for late vocations, located in Essen-Borbeck. However, after two years, Heinrich discontinued this training as the hurdle seemed to him to be too high.

After sending his letter of application dated 10 August 1954, he very quickly made his way to the abbey. On 15 September 1954, he entered the monastery and on 19 September 1954, he began his postulancy. Abbot Burkhard admitted him into the novitiate on 20 September 1955 as Brother Bonaventura. He took his temporary vows on 26 September 1956 and made his perpetual profession on 15 May 1960. From 1954 to 1960, the young brother passed through various areas of work, the usual back and forth: house maintenance, procurator's office, farm and then gardening again.

In 1960, his life took a more stable turn. Brother Bonaventura was assigned to the mission house in London as the cook and to look after the house. When he was met by the superior in London, he told him, "You don't know any English, you cannot cook, but it will come in time!" And that is what happened. Without a language course, Brother Bonaventura, through his outgoing nature, learned the language and learned cooking. For 24 years, from 1960 to 1984, when the house was closed, he looked after the home of numerous young missionaries who were in London for their time of training.

Brother Bonaventura moved almost seamlessly into the priory at Damme in Oldenburg, where a change also was happening, from a boarding school to a guest house. Here, too, the friendly brother was again in the right place. His contacts in the neighborhood and the Wienerei Damme anchored the monastery in varied ways. The passionate gardener soon had the monastery property marvelously blooming everywhere, making it a place to meet. For many guests, his garden was the best memory.

Brother Bonaventura was accompanied from England by a special kind of benefactor's gift: the extraordinarily artistic Christmas crèche was painstakingly put up by him in the priory for thirteen years.

Serious health problems gradually set in that shook Brother Bonaventura very much physically and emotionally. He returned to the abbey at Christmas 1999. After regaining his strength again, he blossomed in creating his magnificent flower beds on the abbey property. That the approachable brother was a good substitute receptionist, hospitable toward guests and a reliable postman within the monastery suited his benevolent nature.

For five years, he lived withdrawn into the circle of the infirmary. What is not written but can be considered an essential contribution of his life is his obvious presence in the everyday life and common prayer within the small communities to which he belonged. In his initial application, Brother Bonaventura had declared explicitly his openness toward the missionary vocation. He fulfilled it through prayer, work and hospitality.

We expressed our thanks to God for his life among us at the Requiem Eucharist on Friday 22 February 2019 at 2:00 p.m., after which he was laid to rest in the monastery cemetery.

Münsterschwarzach, 21 February 2019
Abbot Michael and the community of Münsterschwarzach