

FATHER NATHAN J. MUNSCH, O.S.B.



Father Nathan (James) Munsch, O.S.B., a monk of Saint Vincent Archabbey, died Wednesday, March 20, 2024, following a four-year struggle with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). Father Nathan served in parishes in the dioceses of Altoona-Johnstown and Greensburg and taught at both Saint Vincent College and Saint Vincent Seminary, serving as the Seminary's director of pastoral formation for a

number of years. At his request, he prepared his own obituary, which follows.

Father Nathan was born August 19, 1951, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to his parents, Thomas J. Munsch and Margaret A. (McKeon) Munsch, now deceased. The family home was in Glenshaw (Shaler Township), in the North Hills of Pittsburgh. He is one of nine children, his siblings being Margaret A. Cronin of Basking Ridge, N.J. (spouse: William); Thomas D. Munsch of Sammamish, WA; Robert N. Munsch of Guelph, Ontario, (spouse: Ann); Richard J. Munsch of Sewickley, PA, (spouse: Martha); William D. Munsch of Franklin Township, PA, (spouse: Roslyn); John L. Munsch of Greensburg, PA, (spouse: Marie) and Katherine A. DeSimone of Pittsburgh, PA, (spouse: David) and the late Mary G. Munsch. His brother Robert Munsch is a well-known author of children's stories, including the famous story, Love You Forever.

Father Nathan attended All Saints Elementary School in Etna for two years, and Saint Bonaventure Elementary School in Glenshaw for six years. He is a 1969 graduate of North Catholic High School, Pittsburgh, where he was taught by the Marianist brothers. He continued to be affiliated with the Marianist lay community, a sodality, for many years. In 1973, he graduated from the University of Notre Dame with a Bachelor of Arts degree in history. During a study abroad program, he came into contact with the Benedictines in France, which had a formative influence on his vocation. In 1976, he graduated from Duquesne University with a Master of Arts in Classical Languages and subsequently taught high school for three years. In the summer of 1979, he left teaching and, traveling alone with a backpack, embarked on an eight-month pilgrimage to Greece, Turkey, Israel, and Europe.

In July of 1980, he entered Mount Saviour Benedictine Monastery near Elmira, New York where he made simple profession of vows on the Feast of the Presentation on February 2, 1982, and made solemn profession on August 9, 1986. Mount Saviour is a contemplative monastery with a farm, a guest house, a gift shop, and several craft shops. In thirteen years at Mount Saviour, Father Nathan served variously as a sacristan, librarian, translator, dairy and sheep farmer, wood cutter, cook, sub-prior and novice master. From 1988 to 1991, he studied theology at the Catholic University of America, earning a Bachelor of Sacred Theology in 1991. In June of 1990, he was ordained to the diaconate at Mount Saviour by Bishop William G. Connare of Greensburg, Pennsylvania, who was a college classmate of his father and friend of the family. On June 29, 1991, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, he was ordained to the priesthood at Mount Saviour by Bishop Matthew Clark of the Diocese of Rochester, NY.

After returning to Mount Saviour, Father Nathan began to feel an attraction to a more active form of monastic life. In 1993 Father Nathan came to Saint Vincent Archabbey and in 1996 officially transferred monastic stability to Saint Vincent. Since arriving at Saint Vincent he has served as a hospital chaplain (1993-1994), an instructor in religious studies at Saint Vincent College (1994-1996, 2000-2020) and a Latin teacher in Saint Vincent Seminary (1994-1996). He also gave retreats in the Saint Vincent summer retreat program and taught in the summer program of catechetical formation in the Diocese of Harrisburg. In 2002 Father Nathan completed a doctorate in systematic theology at Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts after which he returned to full-time teaching at Saint Vincent College. While in the Boston area, he was resident at Saint Lawrence the Deacon Parish in Chestnut Hill where he assisted with pastoral work.

In the summer of 2004, he was named pastor of Saint Benedict Parish in Marguerite, about five miles from Latrobe. His four-year tenure as pastor of Saint Benedict was very eventful. A 75-year-old school building, which was still being used as a parish center, had to be demolished due to structural problems. This was followed by a collaborative parish effort, to design a new parish center, conduct a capital campaign, and oversee construction. This project was successful only due to the strong commitment and generosity of the parishioners and highly competent parish members.

In the fall of 2008, Father Nathan left Saint Benedict's Parish as part of a reconfiguration process in the Diocese of Greensburg and returned to teaching at Saint Vincent College and Saint Vincent Seminary. In 2009 he was assigned as Sacramental Minister with pastoral responsibilities to two parishes, St. Michael's in West Salisbury and St. Mary's in Pochontas, PA, both in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. In 2015 Father Nathan was named director of pastoral formation at Saint Vincent College, where his contacts with local institutions proved very useful. In 2020, he was diagnosed with ALS—Lou Gehrig's disease, leading to his retirement from active ministry later that year. Following his retirement, parishioners and friends established an endowed scholarship in his name for the support of undergraduate theology majors at Saint Vincent College.

During his remaining years, Father Nathan was a resident of the Saint Vincent infirmary. He was known for charging around campus in good weather on his large powerchair, but also for his cheerful manner for not complaining and for being thankful for God's goodness, even while living with a difficult disease.

The body of Father Nathan will be received at 1 p.m. Friday, March 22 in the parlor of the Elizabeth Roderick Center at Saint Vincent Seminary, with viewing from 1 to 5 p.m. A wake service will be held at 8 p.m. that evening, with Archabbot Martin de Porres Bartel, O.S.B., as celebrant and homilist. A concelebrated Mass of Christian Burial will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday, March 23 in the Archabbey Basilica, with Archabbot Martin as the celebrant and Father Edward Mazich, O.S.B., as the homilist. The Rite of Committal will follow in the Mary Mother of Mercy Mausoleum Chapel at Saint Vincent Cemetery.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Benedictine Health and Welfare Fund at Saint Vincent Archabbey, 300 Fraser Purchase Rd., Latrobe, PA 15650.

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