



FATHER RICHARD WILLIAM ECKROTH, OSB

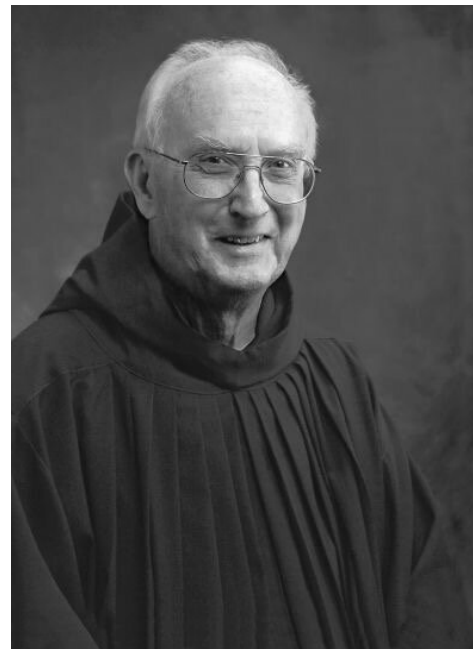
MONK OF SAINT JOHN'S
ABBEY
COLLEGEVILLE,
MINNESOTA

BORN: 21 JUNE 1926

PROFESSED: 11 JULY 1946

ORDAINED: 7 JUNE 1952

DIED: 24 MAY 2015



William Anthony Eckroth was born in Mandan, North Dakota, on June 21, 1926. William was the tenth child of fourteen born to Louis and Hattie (Gruenenfelder) Eckroth. His father was a German-Russian immigrant and worked for the Northern Pacific Railroad. William entered St. Joseph's School in Mandan in 1932, and by the time he received the sacrament of confirmation from Bishop Vincent Wehrle, OSB, he felt the call to become a priest. William frequently served Mass with his younger brother Eddie in their nearby parish church.

On a train trip to see his Benedictine sister Caroline, he visited Fr. Angelo Zankl, OSB (1901-2007) in St. Paul, who was once an assistant at Mandan. This visit increased William's desire to become a Benedictine monk.

When William finished grade school, Father Hildebrand Eickhoff, OSB (1885-1971) made arrangements for William to come to Saint John's Preparatory School. William graduated in 1944 as valedictorian and immediately enrolled in Saint John's University.

William entered the novitiate of Saint John's Abbey in 1945, receiving the religious name Richard. On July 11 of the following year, he professed vows as a Benedictine monk. Almost immediately he was sent to Rome to complete his studies in Philosophy at Sant' Anselmo,

the International Benedictine College and University. He fulfilled the requirements for the Bachelorate in 1948, then moved on to finish his Licentiate degree in 1949. Returning to Saint John's to continue his studies for the priesthood, he was ordained on June 7, 1952. Following ordination, Father Richard taught undergraduate philosophy at Saint John's University for almost twenty-five years (1952-76).

Father Richard had many jobs in his long monastic career: curator of abbey stamp and coin collection (1950-76); assistant to the novice master (1951-53); master of the brothers (1956-64); faculty resident (1964-67); and winemaker in charge of the abbey wine cellar (1963-76).

Father Richard had a love for constructing and demolishing. He did extensive work in the building of the new monastery residence (Breuer Wing) in 1954. On campus, he removed two barns, silos, sheds, a chicken coop, the old nursery as well as the old weather station. During the construction of Interstate 94, he cut lumber for its right of way.

Father Richard served as an instructor at St. Benedict's High School in St. Joseph, Minnesota (1967-73), chaplain of St. Benedict's Monastery (1967-73), and assistant pastor at St. Augustine's Parish, St. Cloud and Seven Dolors Parish, Albany, Minnesota.

In 1977 Father Richard was assigned to the abbey mission in the Bahama Islands at St. Augustine's Monastery, Nassau. Father Richard first served as assistant pastor of Holy Family church, Nassau. He then took charge of six churches on the Family Island of Andros where he did extensive repair and maintenance work, putting new roofs on the churches.

In 1987, Father Richard was assigned to Bimini Island where he supervised the construction of the new Holy Name Church. When the project was completed, he returned to St. Augustine's Monastery and continued his pastoral ministry to various island parishes.

Upon returning to Saint John's in 1993, he became the sexton of the Saint John's Abbey Cemetery (1993-99). Also during this time he was chaplain at both St. Raphael's Convent and at St. Scholastica Convent in St. Cloud.

During his retirement, Father Richard enjoyed spending time in the abbey woods with its peaceful setting, clearing damaged trees and cutting firewood. On September 20, 2001, a dead tree fell on Father Richard while he was working the woods. He sustained severe injuries to his neck and other parts of his body. A college student happened to be running in the area and came to his assistance. Father Richard recovered from his injuries and moved to St. Raphael Hall where, despite diminished capacities, enjoyed his retirement and participated as he could in the monastic horarium.