

SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF FR. FRANCIS DIETZLER

Fr. Francis Dietzler was born in the city of Philadelphia, USA, on May 10, 1923. His father was of German descent and his mother's family was Irish. They had four children, two boys and two girls. Francis, or Frank, was gifted with a friendly, helping spirit, which was put to the test during World War II, when he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force. He became a tail-gunner on one of the many bombers that flew at night from England to drop their bombs on German targets. On one of these missions, his plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire and the crew was forced to jump out with their parachutes.

Frank had been wounded and became unconscious while in his parachute. When he regained consciousness, he found himself on the ground in Bavaria, surrounded by a squad of German soldiers pointing their rifles at him. When the soldiers saw that his family name was German, they treated him well and took him to a hospital. He was then sent to a prisoner-of-war camp where he spent the rest of the war until its liberation 1945.

Returning to America, Frank finished his university studies and soon decided to enter monastic life with the Benedictines. However, during his novitiate he realized that his true vocation was with the Trappists and entered the monastery of Spencer in 1951. There he took the name, Alexander, making his solemn profession in 1956 and being ordained priest in 1957. Almost immediately, he was named father master of the many professed lay-brothers. When Spencer founded Azul, Argentina, in 1958 and two years later the future Miraflores in Chile, Fr. Alexander was named the founding superior of the Chilean monastery, but in 1964 the abbot of Spencer asked him to go to Azul as its superior, which he was for four years.

When Azul became semi-autonomous in 1969, the community elected another superior, but Fr. Alexander changed his stability and remained there until 1977, when the abbot of Genesee asked him to be the founding superior of Genesee's foundation in Brazil, the present abbey of Novo Mundo. In Brazil, Alexander returned to his baptismal name of Francis and was superior there until 1988, when Novo Mundo became an independent priory, and the community chose another superior. Thus Fr. Francis has been superior of three Latin American monasteries and founding superior of two of them. Since 1988, He has played a key role in the Brazilian community in several different positions and is both deeply loved and deeply revered. We congratulate him on his 100th birthday!