

Atchison,



Abbot Barnabas Senecal, died peacefully at the Abbey early on Tuesday morning, December 7. He had been fortified by the Sacraments of the Church and the Apostolic Pardon. Several monks and health care workers were present with him when he died.

On October 16, 1937, Tom Senecal (the future Abbot Barnabas) and his twin brother Tim became the newest members of the Senecal family. Growing up in Atwood, Kansas, all of the Senecal children would ultimately attend Catholic boarding school in Atchison, Kansas. There Tom would take his first steps on the journey toward the priesthood as a student at Maur Hill Prep School. After graduation, he became a “hilltopper” at St. Benedict’s College, the residence program for men interested in the priesthood and religious life. On July 10, 1957, he became a novice of St. Benedict’s Abbey, receiving the name Barnabas. One year and a day later on July 11, 1958, he professed his first vows as a monk. With the first phase of his collegiate education complete, he studied for the priesthood at the Abbey School of Theology in Atchison and was ordained to the priesthood on May 30, 1964. In the summers of 1963 and 1964 he did further theology studies at Conception Seminary in Missouri. Abbot Barnabas taught Religion and was a prefect in Freshmen Hall at St. Benedict’s College, 1964-1965. From 1965 until 1968 he was Assistant Pastor at St. Joseph Catholic Church, Atchison. In 1966, he combined his work as assistant pastor with part-time teaching at Maur Hill, spending his summers pursuing graduate studies in history at the University of Kansas. In 1968 he began teaching history full-time at the high school. He went on to be appointed assistant headmaster in 1969 and, upon completion of a Masters degree in Educational Administration in 1976 from Emporia State University, he was appointed headmaster. In 1990 he left Maur Hill and took a sabbatical year in Rome, and Menlo Park, CA. While on sabbatical he developed a love for photography – a craft that he expertly honed despite his lack of any formal training. Upon his return from sabbatical, he joined the staff of Holy Spirit Parish, serving as associate pastor and principal of the grade school. There he was a beloved parish priest and principal, making many life-long friends. In 1994 Father Barnabas was elected eighth Abbot of St. Benedict’s Abbey. During his eighteen-and-a-half-year leadership he guided the community faithfully, kindling the beginnings of a vocational renewal at St. Benedict’s Abbey. He is well known throughout the archdiocese for his work administering the Sacrament of Confirmation. His calm wisdom on the Maur Hill-Mount Academy and Benedictine College Boards of Directors was valuable during difficult times for those schools. He also faithfully served on the Personnel Board for the Archdiocese of

Kansas City in Kansas. He shared not only his wisdom, but song, and is well known as the “Singing Abbot.” His abbatial motto, “Sing a New Song to the Lord,” is taken from Psalms 98 and 149. Abbot Barnabas—in his own creative way—has attempted to make his service to the Church a work of art. Looking at snapshots from his camera and life, one sees that God has used him to create a beautiful monastic mosaic. An exhibit of his life would include images of compassion, beauty, encouragement, wisdom, brotherly love, and service in the name of Christ. The words of instruction that St. Benedict gave to the Abbot fit perfectly the personality of Abbot Barnabas: *[He should not be] Excitable, anxious, extreme, obstinate, jealous, or over suspicious he must not be. Such a man is never at rest.* (Rule of St. Benedict 64:16) After he retired as Abbot, he spent time as administrator of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, St. Marys, KS, and St. Stanislaus Catholic Church, Rossville, KS. He also served as Parochial Vicar of St. Benedict’s Catholic Church, Atchison, before retiring to the Abbey. Abbot Barnabas was one of the storytellers of the Abbey who remembered many of the giants of the monastic community, and people in the local community. If you mentioned someone from the past, he would give a full account of who the person was.

Abbot Barnabas was preceded in death by his parents John and Clara; his sister Clare; by his brothers Father Gerard Senecal, OSB, William, and Richard; by his nephews William Jr, and Steven; and a brother-in-law, Ronald Hansen. He is survived by his twin brother and sister-in-law Nicholas and Katy, Hyde Park, MA, and by his sister Mary Hansen, and numerous nephews and nieces. Vespers for the Dead, followed by visitation, will be prayed on Monday, December 13, at 7:00 p.m. in St. Benedict's Abbey Church. The Mass of Christian Burial for Abbot Barnabas will be celebrated in St. Benedict’s Abbey Church on Tuesday, December 14 at 10:30 AM., with interment following in the Abbey cemetery. Abbot will lie in state on Monday at the Arensberg-Pruett Funeral Home. Vespers for the Dead and the Mass of Christian Burial will be [streamed live on our Youtube Channel](#) and will be available for playback after the fact. A legacy fund has been established in Abbot Barnabas’ and [memorials in his honor may be made at this link](#) or by mailing a check to St. Benedict’s Abbey | 1020 N. Second St. | Atchison, KS 66002. We commend our brother, Abbot Barnabas, to your prayers.