



SR0784

LRB097 21606 KXB 69847 r

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SENATE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois Senate are saddened to
3 learn of the death of Abbot Emeritus Gerald Benkert, O.S.B., of
4 Marmion Abbey in Aurora, who passed away on May 16, 2012; at
5 the time of his passing he was the oldest known Benedictine
6 Abbot in the world; and

7 WHEREAS, Abbot Gerald was born on October 24, 1909, in
8 Louisville, Kentucky; he was the second of 6 children born to
9 Constantine and Pauline Benkert; after completing his
10 elementary education at Holy Name School in Louisville, Francis
11 Benkert entered St. Meinrad Minor Seminary in southern Indiana
12 in September 1923, where he had 2 uncles in St. Meinrad Abbey
13 and a great-uncle, Abbot Athanasius Schmitt, who was the abbot
14 of St. Meinrad; and

15 WHEREAS, After a 5-year course of studies in the Minor
16 Seminary, he was accepted into the novitiate of St. Meinrad
17 Abbey in 1928; two of his 6 fellow novices, Raymond Battaglia
18 (Father Joseph) and John Schuck (Father Hugh), would later join
19 him as founding members of Marmion Abbey; on August 16, 1929,
20 Francis made his first profession of vows, taking the name
21 Gerald; on November 30, 1932, he made his solemn profession of
22 vows as a Benedictine monk; he was ordained to the priesthood
23 by Bishop Joseph Ritter of Indianapolis on May 22, 1934; and

1 WHEREAS, Father Gerald's first assignment was to pursue
2 graduate studies at DePaul University, Chicago; he was assigned
3 to reside at Marmion Academy in Aurora, where the monks of St.
4 Meinrad had taken over the school in 1933; Father Gerald
5 returned to St. Meinrad in 1935 to teach in the Minor Seminary;
6 he also began summer studies in philosophy at The Catholic
7 University in Washington, D.C., obtaining a Master's Degree in
8 1938; in the same year, he was appointed Headmaster of Marmion
9 Military Academy; and

10 WHEREAS, He remained headmaster at Marmion Military
11 Academy from 1938 to 1940, before returning to The Catholic
12 University to continue his doctoral studies in philosophy,
13 obtaining his Ph.D. in 1944; he was then appointed as Rector of
14 the Minor Seminary at St. Meinrad; on March 21, 1947, Father
15 Gerald Benkert was named the first abbot of Marmion Abbey when
16 it was raised to the status of an independent Benedictine
17 Abbey; he was blessed as abbot on May 22, 1947 by Bishop John
18 Boylan of Rockford; and

19 WHEREAS, For the next 22 years, Abbot Gerald guided the
20 Marmion monastic community in its founding decades; he was
21 responsible for the purchase of the property on Butterfield
22 Road and the construction of the present monastery building in
23 1952; he oversaw the construction of the resident campus of

1 Marmion Military Academy on Butterfield Road that opened in
2 1959; and

3 WHEREAS, Responding to the request of Pope John XXIII, he
4 founded the mission Priory and Seminary of San Josè in Sololá
5 (and later in Quetzaltenango), Guatemala in 1965; in 1969,
6 Abbot Gerald decided to resign as Abbot of Marmion Abbey; he
7 chose to begin a new period in his life as teacher and
8 spiritual director in the Priory and Seminary of San Josè in
9 Guatemala; from 1970 to 2002 he taught philosophy and theology;
10 after 1989, Abbot Gerald played a key role in helping to raise
11 funds for the construction of a new complex of buildings for
12 the Priory and Seminary in its move to Quetzaltenango,
13 Guatemala; and

14 WHEREAS, In 2002, Abbot Gerald returned to Marmion Abbey on
15 a permanent basis; he continued to contribute to the spiritual
16 life and public witness of the monastery, and to raise funds
17 for the Guatemala mission; on the occasion of his 100th
18 birthday in 2009, he published his book "*Memoirs of the*
19 *Founding Abbot of Marmion Abbey*"; and

20 WHEREAS, He was preceded in death by his parents and 5
21 brothers and sisters; and

22 WHEREAS, Abbot Emeritus Gerald Benkert is survived by the

1 members of his monastic community and many nieces and nephews;
2 therefore, be it

3 RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-SEVENTH GENERAL
4 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we mourn, along with
5 his family, friends, and members of his monastic community, the
6 passing of Abbot Emeritus Gerald Benkert, O.S.B.; and be it
7 further

8 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
9 presented to the family of Abbot Emeritus Gerald Benkert,
10 O.S.B., as a symbol of our sincere sympathy.