

Rev. Gerard Benson, O.Carm.
1917-2008



The Province of the Most Pure Heart of Mary, Order of Carmelites, mourns the death of the Reverend Gerard Benson, O.Carm., who died at the age of 90 on June 14, 2008, at Carmel at Mission Valley in Nokomis, Florida.

Father Gerard laid in state at the chapel of the National Shrine of Saint Therese, in Darien, Illinois, on June 20th, followed by a Mass of Christian Burial that evening. Interment occurred, June 21st, at Mount Olivet Cemetery, Chicago, Illinois.

Born Martin Francis Benson to (the late) Owen and Delia (Neylon) Benson on August 13, 1917, he was baptized on August 26th.

He began grammar school in 1923 at (the now closed) Our Lady of Solace Parish in Chicago. In 1931, he completed elementary education at nearby Saint Kilian Grade School. The young Martin Benson then entered the Carmelite seminary system at Mount Carmel College in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada.

In 1936, Martin Benson professed Simple Vows with the Province of the Most Pure Heart of Mary, taking the religious name of "Gerard." However, throughout his life he would be fraternally known as "Marty."

His college education in philosophy at Mount Carmel College included Brother Gerard's profession of Solemn Vows in 1939 shortly before departing for Washington, DC, for additional formation.

Newly arriving at Whitefriars Hall, the Province's major house of studies, Brother Gerard would simultaneously enroll in courses there at Whitefriars and at Catholic University of America. On May 23, 1942, before his first assignment in his hometown, Brother Gerard received the Sacrament of Holy Orders, being ordained a priest at the Carmelite Parish of Saint Clara in Chicago.

This would end Father Gerard's initial formation, which included study of liturgical music at Manhattanville College, New York, New York, in the late 1930s. However, he continued studies at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, and the University of

Chicago, where he completed a Master's degree in education, with a focus on mathematics.

Arriving at Mount Carmel High School in Chicago, in the summer of 1943 for his first assignment, Father Benson would begin a life-long teaching career. By December, 1945 he returned to Mount Carmel College, Niagara Falls, to lend his expertise on the faculty.

One year later he would return to Mount Carmel High School, Chicago, for a six year assignment as prefect of discipline and athletic director. Father Joel Schevers, O.Carm., Father Benson's classmate both at Saint Kilian school and the Carmelite seminary, remembers how alumni of Mount Carmel High School affectionately referred to Father Benson as "Jug Gerard" for the number of detentions he issued as disciplinary dean. His regard for the education and well being of his students was well known, taking special interest in students who required assistance during their time at Mount Carmel High School.

While serving as the high school's athletic director, Father Gerard hired Terence P. Brennan as coach of the Mount Carmel Caravan football team. Benson saw three city championship teams under Terry Brennan (1950-1952) and his competence in personnel management was only affirmed when Brennan was hired as the freshmen coach (later being promoted to head coach) at his alma mater, the University of Notre Dame.

Father Gerard Benson was chosen to open the new Mount Carmel High School in Houston, Texas, in 1956. Serving as principal until 1968, Father Gerard returned in 1977 for two additional years. In the interim years, beginning in 1953, he served at the school's neighboring parish, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, then administered by members of the Carmelite province.

In the late 1960s he worked at Mensana Clinic, Almeda, Texas, while residing at the Carmelite priory in Houston. This would be followed by work with Unicare Services in Dallas, during the mid 1970s.

Between 1979 and 1987 Father Gerard remained in Houston, Texas, taking up active ministry to divorced Catholics. He garnered much respect from the men and women who benefited from his pastoral care.

In 1987 the Bishop of Venice, Florida, requested Father Benson's expertise hiring him as director of the diocesan program for outreach to divorced Catholics. Residing at Carmel in Venice, Father Gerard would remain there until 2003 when he retired from active ministry and moved to Carmel at Mission Valley, Nokomis, Florida.

May he rest in peace