



**FR. MELCHIOR ISTVAN CHLADEK
(1931-2017)**

Istvan Chladek was born on July 26, 1931, in Budapest, Hungary. He attended the Saint Emery School run by Cistercian monks and graduated in 1948. On August 29, 1949, he entered the Cistercian

Monastery in Zirc, Hungary and received the name Melchior, one of the three wise men. Less than a year later he took his first vows on June 22, 1950. The communist government, however, published within months its decree abolishing the Cistercian Order in Hungary and several other religious communities. Melchior and 20 other Cistercian monks fled Hungary through the Iron Curtain in what has come to be known as “The Great Escape.” Eight of the escapees were captured and imprisoned. Melchior was among the thirteen who managed to reach Rome in October, 1950, where he studied philosophy and theology in preparation for the priesthood.

At the request of his superiors, Melchior immigrated in 1954 to the Cistercian Monastery in Spring Bank, Wisconsin, completing the last year of his theological studies at St. Francis Seminary. On May 14, 1955, he was ordained to the priesthood in Milwaukee but waited five days to say his First Mass in Dallas with the recently founded Cistercian community. He then began the study of biology at Southern Methodist University, transferring to Saint Louis University, where he earned his Master’s degree in 1961. Fr. Melchior was the last survivor of the group of Hungarian Cistercians who founded the Cistercian Monastery Our Lady of Dallas. He was member of the original faculty of Cistercian Preparatory School, which opened its doors in the fall of 1962 in rented facilities on the Ursuline Campus before moving to its present site in Irving in 1964. He served as the Form Master of Class ’70, the first class to graduate from the Prep School. Afterwards, he served as Form Master for Class ’75 and Class ’81, while also teaching biology from 1962 to 1979. Fr. Melchior is remembered fondly by his students as a dear friend and, as one medical doctor recalled, one of “the best science teachers I ever had, the one who taught me how to really think.” Others enthusiastically tell stories of his genetics experiments with fruit flies and his conscientious care for the varied animals he kept in the school.

After working as the Abbot's secretary from 1979-1981, Fr. Melchior served in various pastoral assignments, including St. Monica's Catholic Church and the Catholic chaplaincy at Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth. Throughout his later years, he suffered from debilitating health problems. And, when no longer able to celebrate Mass, he looked forward to receiving Holy Communion daily.

Fr. Melchior was preceded in death by a brother, killed as a teenager in the siege of Budapest in 1945, his parents, Antal Chladek and Irene Maywald. He is survived by two sisters, Irene and Maria, as well as nieces and nephews, all in Hungary.