

Father Bartholomew Letory Sayles OSB, 88, died at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN, September 17. Letory Sayles was born in New Orleans. He enrolled in Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans during the fall of 1935 and graduated magna cum laude in 1939, majoring in music. While attending Xavier University he participated in operas both as an accompanist and as a singer. His local pastor encouraged young Letory by making him director of the parish choir. The pastor said he did not know of any Benedictine abbey that would accept African-Americans. He suggested that he try instead the Society of the Divine Word, a religious congregation for men that the pastor knew had black members. Letory spent two years at Saint Augustine's Minor Seminary in St. Louis concentrating mostly on Latin and Greek. After five months as a novice in Techy, IL, his thoughts about a Benedictine vocation remained so strong that his spiritual director suggested that he return home to New Orleans. While working in the registrar's office of Xavier University, he learned from a cousin that a certain Father Harvey Shepherd OSB, an African-American, was a monk of Saint John's Abbey. In 1942 Abbot Alcuin Deutsch OSB accepted Letory as a candidate for the novitiate in Saint John's Abbey. During his time as a candidate, Letory founded the first Saint John's Preparatory School Glee Club that was known as "The Barbers." He entered the novitiate in the summer of 1943 receiving the religious name of Bartholomew and made first vows on July 11, 1944. He continued his seminary studies, made solemn vows in 1947 and was ordained a priest on June 5, 1948. Father Bartholomew went to the Pius X School of Liturgical Music in New York City. He attended sessions during the summers from 1948 through 1950.

During his service as assistant organist at the abbey from 1949 to 1952, Father Bartholomew instituted the daily singing of Vespers in the spring of 1950. Father Bartholomew served as music instructor at Saint John's University from 1948 to 1957. In the summer of 1955 he began graduate studies at the University of Minnesota where, in 1959, he earned a master's degree in Music Education. Father Bartholomew was sent in 1957 to St. Augustine's College in The Bahamas to teach religion, English and music for thirteen years. There he founded the first chorus for St. Augustine's College that lasted more than ten years. He also sang with a semi-professional group in Nassau called the Renaissance Singers. Father Bartholomew served as part-time chaplain to the local prison in Fox Hill while he was stationed in The Bahamas. In 1970 Father Bartholomew became associate pastor at St. Anselm's Parish in The Bronx, New York. While there he studied music at the Teacher's College in Columbia University. In the fall of 1975 he returned to the Saint John's University faculty where he taught voice, music theory and Gregorian Chant until 1984. In 1981, Father Bartholomew began working with Sister Cecile Gertken OSB to adapt English translations of Latin texts to chant melodies as well as working with her to write modal accompaniments -- many of these appeared in hymnals published by Liturgical Press.

At the abbey in 1977 Father Bartholomew began the Schola Gregoriana that he also directed. The schola helped to preserve the ancient tradition of Gregorian

Chant sung by Benedictine monks. He generously made himself available to teach chant as an independent study for students. He participated regularly in the Chant Study Week sponsored by the National Pastoral Musicians Association. He reveled in the annual visits from 1948 to 1986 of the Metropolitan Opera that performed at Northrop Auditorium in Minneapolis. From 1982 to 1992 he was secretary to the abbey's Senior Council and also helped in the liturgy office from 1987 to 1993. In 1994 he celebrated 50 years as a Benedictine monk and in 1998 he celebrated his 50th anniversary of priesthood. A highlight of his later years was to be part of the canonization festivities of Sister Katharine Drexel, SBS, on October 1, 2000, in Rome. He felt privileged to have been a student at Xavier University that she had founded and to be the first priestly vocation from that university. It was there that his religious vocation was nurtured. Father Bartholomew said the pilgrimage and canonization were "a deeply religious experience for me, an enrichment of faith and spiritual growth, but most of all an inward peace." Father Bartholomew's health and mobility steadily decreased, and he gladly moved to the Abbey Health Center in 2002. He faithfully maintained correspondence with family and friends, and he never lost his love of good music. His place at table was enriched by containers of the piquant condiments he remembered from the native cuisine of his beloved New Orleans.