

Fr. Ralph March was born Rudolf Maitz on February 21, 1922 in Körmend, Hungary, a small town a few miles from the Austrian border to József Maitz and Ágnes Preininger. He was the youngest of three boys, two of whom became priests. In his early teens, he was accepted as an oblate of the Cistercian Monastery of Zirc and could thus pursue his high school studies at the Cistercian school of Saint Imre in Budapest. Upon his graduation in 1940, he entered the novitiate of the Cistercian Order in Zirc, where he also studied philosophy and theology in preparation for ordination to the priesthood. On the day World War II ended in Europe, May 8, 1945, he was ordained a priest in the Abbey of Zirc by József Mindszenty, later cardinal-archbishop of Esztergom. He returned to Budapest to continue his studies at the University of Budapest and at the Franz Liszt Music Conservatory there.

In 1947 his abbot sent him abroad to complete his studies in French and Music in Paris. After earning a master's of chant at the Sorbonne, he obtained his Ph.D. from the Faculty of Letters of the Institut Catholique. For his dissertation he wrote the first musicological study of the 12th-century origins of Cistercian chant. It was published in Rome in 1952 and continues to be foundational for chant studies. In the same year he emigrated to the United States because the Communist suppression of the Abbey of Zirc in 1950 had made it impossible for him to return to his homeland. He joined fellow Cistercians exiled from Hungary in the Cistercian monastery of Spring Bank in Wisconsin. He taught at Marquette University until the foundation of the University of Dallas, where he served on the first faculty in 1956 and, in the same year, was a founding member of the Cistercian Monastery Our Lady of Dallas. In addition to working at St. Bernard's Parish, he directed four choirs: The Dallas Catholic Choir, the Saint Bernard Chorus, the University Chorus, and the Madrigal Singers.

1966-1974 he served as editor of the quarterly Sacred Music, the oldest magazine of church music in the U.S. At the invitation of the cardinal-archbishop of Cologne, Fr. Ralph became the music director ("Domkapellmeister") of the city's monumental cathedral, a post he held for ten years (1977-1987). Afterwards he served as pastor in Landsberg am Lech in Germany, while also teaching music history at the University of Innsbruck in Austria.

In 2000 Fr. Ralph retired to his monastery in Dallas, continued teaching at the University of Dallas, and, in cooperation with Marilyn Walker, taught and conducted Gregorian chant for the Collegium Cantorum for the following twelve years. He died at the age of 93 on Feb. 6, 2016, surrounded by the monks who had grown to love him so dearly.



FR. RALPH

- 1922-2016
- Born: Feb. 21, 1922
- Profession in Zirc: Aug. 30, 1941
- Ordained: May 8, 1945
- Died: Feb. 6, 2016

