

Moving east into Thuringia, Boniface continued his crusade. At Ohrdruff, near Gotha, he established a second monastery, dedicated to saint Michael, as a missionary center. People were everywhere ready to listen, but there was a critical lack of teachers. Boniface appealed to the English monasteries and he received a wholehearted response for several years. The two monasteries already built were enlarged and new ones founded. Among the new English missionaries were Lullus, who succeed Boniface at Mainz, Eoban, who was to share his martyrdom, Burchard, and Wigbert.

Pope Gregory III sent Boniface the pallium in 731, appointing him archbishop and metropolitan of all Germany beyond the Rhine, with authority to found new bishoprics. A few years later Boniface made his third trip to Rome to confer about the churches he had founded, and at this time he was appointed apostolic legate...He went into Bavaria and organized the Church into four bishoprics. He also organized bishoprics at Erfurt, Buraburg, Wurzburg, and Erfurt. In 741 the great Benedictine abbey at Fulda was founded and in the early Middle Ages produced a host of scholars and teachers, and became known as the Monte Casino of Germany.

Charles Martel had been conquering and consolidating regions of western Europe. The Church in Gaul, was disintegrating. Many clergy were ignorant and undisciplined. Boniface presided over the first of many assemblies to reestablish discipline and bring fresh vigor into the Church in Gaul. A heretic named Adalbert of Neustria was creating much of the disturbance and was condemned by the synod of Soissons in 744. After five year's labor Boniface had succeeded in restoring order to the Church of Gaul to its former greatness.

The first converts in Friesland had relapsed into paganism with the death of Willibrord. Boniface went to work to reclaim them. Along the way he made contact with new tribes to the northeast, who he was going to confirm on Whitsun Eve on the plain of Dokkum, near the banks of the little river Borne. While awaiting the arrival of the converts, a band of armed pagans looking for riches killed Boniface and were disgusted when they found only holy relics. Boniface has been called the pro-consul of the papacy. His administrative and organizing genius left its mark on the German Church throughout the Middle Ages.

*(excerpted from: www.ewtn.com)

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Saint Boniface

Feast Day: June 5



Let us continue the fight on the day of the Lord.
The days of anguish and of tribulation have overtaken us;
if God so wills, "let us die for the holy laws of our fathers,"
so that we may deserve to obtain an eternal inheritance with them.

from a letter by Saint Boniface

Saint Boniface

*Saint Boniface, or Winfrid, to give him his baptismal name, was born into a Christian family of noble rank, probably in the kingdom of Wessex, probably at Crediton (now known as Devonshire, England), about the year 680. He was a missionary who propagated Christianity in the Frankish Empire during the 8th century. He is the patron saint of Germany and the first archbishop of Mainz.

Winfrid was a very small boy when he found himself listening to the conversation of some monks who were visiting his home. He resolved then to enter the Church, and his resolution never weakened. He was sent to the neighboring abbey of Exeter to be educated. Some years later, Winfrid went to the abbey of Bursling, in the diocese of Winchester. After completing his studies there, he was appointed head of the school.

His teaching skills attracted many students, and for their use he wrote a grammar which is still extant. The pupils diligently took notes at his classes, and these were copied and circulated in other monasteries, where they were eagerly studied. At the age of thirty he was ordained a priest, and now added preaching to teaching and administrative work.

Winfrid was assured of rapid advancement in the English Church, but God revealed to him that his work was to be in foreign lands. Both Northern and Central Europe were still in pagan darkness. In Friesland, which then included modern Netherlands and lands to the east, the Northumbrian missionary Willibrord was striving to bring the Gospel to the people. It was to this region that Winfrid felt himself called. Having obtained the consent of his abbot, he and two companions set out in the spring of 716. Soon after landing at Doerstadt, they learned that Duke Radbold of Friesland, an enemy of Christianity, was warring with Charles Martel, the Frankish Duke. Realizing that the time was inauspicious, the missionaries prudently returned to England. This attempt had shown Winfrid that to be effective as a missionary, he must have a direct commission from the Pope, so in 718, with commendatory letters from the bishop of Winchester, he presented himself in Rome before Gregory II. The

Pope welcomed him warmly, kept him in Rome until spring of the following year, when traveling conditions were favorable, and then sent him forth with a general commission to preach the word of God to the heathen. At this time Winfrid's name was changed to Boniface. Crossing the lower Alps, he went to Friesland where he labored for three years under Willibrord, who was very old. He declined to become Willibrord's coadjutor and successor as bishop of Utrecht, saying his commission had been general, "to the heathen," and he could not be limited to any one diocese. He now returned to work in Hesse. Boniface had little difficulty in making himself understood as a preacher, since the dialects of the various Teutonic tribes closely resembled his native Anglo-Saxon. He won the interest of two powerful local chieftains, Dettic and Deorulf, who at some previous time had been baptized. For lack of instruction they had remained pagans; now they became zealous Christians and influenced many others to be baptized.

In Rome on Saint Andrew's Day, November 30, 722, Pope Gregory II consecrated him as regionary bishop with a general jurisdiction over "the races in the parts of Germany and east of the Rhine who live in error, in the shadow of death." The Pope also gave him a letter to the powerful Charles Martel. When Boniface delivered it to the Frankish duke on his way back to Germany, he received the valuable gift of a sealed pledge of Frankish protection. On his return to Hesse, he decided to try to root out the pagan superstitions which seriously affected the stability of his converts. On a day publicly announced, and in the midst of an awe-struck crowd, Boniface attacked with an ax Thor's sacred oak. These German tribes were tree-worshippers. Thor, god of thunder, was one of the principle Teutonic deities, and this ancient oak, which stood on the summit of Mt. Gudenberg, was sacred to him. After a few blows, the huge tree crashed to earth, splitting into four parts. The terrified tribesmen, who had expected a punishment to fall instantly on the perpetrators of such an outrage, now saw that their god was powerless to protect even his own sanctuary. To signalize the victory, Boniface built a chapel on the spot and evangelization in Hesse proceeded steadily.