



Father Epiphanius Deibele SDS
First Superior of the St. Nazianz Community
1873-1936

Though he was not among the first Salvatorians sent to the United States, Father Epiphanius Deibele was the man who began the lasting work of the Society in America. When Jordan appointed him to lead the new foundation at St. Nazianz in August 1896, he was 24 years old, a priest for barely 11 months. He served in provincial administration for the next 23 years.

Father Epiphanius Deibele (birth name: Albert) was born in Waeschenbeuren, Germany, in 1873. He entered the Novitiate of the Society in 1890 in Rome, Italy, and made his profession of vows on December 3, 1891. He received his theology degree from the Gregorian University, and a degree in Canon Law from the University of St. Apollinaris. In 1895, he was ordained a priest in the Lateran Basilica, and in the following year, he came to the United States with the Founder, Fr. Francis Jordan, and several others. Fr. Epiphanius devoted his life to the development and growth of the Salvatorian community and its ministries. He also directed the remaining years of the original community founded by the late Fr. Ambrose Oswald.

In 1898, he built St. Ambrose Chapel and in 1908, the monastery building, and the farm buildings. Under his direction, Salvatorian Seminary began and flourished. From 1909 to 1919, Fr. Epiphanius served as the first Provincial of the American Province. The first six American Salvatorians were ordained priests in St. Ambrose Church on August 28, 1921. Through the years, he was also pastor of several parishes in the St. Nazianz area in addition to his work in the Society.

Deibele faced many difficulties leading the new Salvatorians and caring for the Oswald community. He received little or no financial support from the motherhouse in Rome. Every project undertaken during his administration, St. Ambrose Church, the monastery school, the farm buildings, and opening and operation of the school, was accomplished with funds the community itself raised. Salvatorian Seminary was built with bricks that he himself and his helpers made from a sand pit on the property. Much of what was done, including the very earliest efforts with the press apostolate, was done under his supervision.

After forty years of dedicated and tireless ministry, he died following a lingering throat illness on November 6, 1936. His funeral Mass in St. Ambrose was attended by so many people that the chapel could not contain them all, so much was he loved by those who had come to know him. He was buried in the community cemetery on Loretto Hill.

“The first provincial was a determined man who knew what was expected of him and did it. He could be a formidable adversary to anyone who threatened to deter him from fulfilling the task the Founder gave him. Interviews with members who worked under Epiphanius or helped him in his last illness, all praised him as a kind man who cared deeply for the welfare of his confreres. He was, in a word, ideal for the task of establishing the Society in the United States.” (From *“The Moment of Grace - Part 1”* p. 111, by Fr. Jerome Schommer / edited by Fr. Daniel Pekarske)

(Other sources: *“A Noble Pioneer,”* by Fr. Winfrid Herbst in *“The Salvatorian”* magazine; and the life-story page of Father Epiphanius Deibele SDS in the USA Province Necrology: *“On Whose Shoulders We Stand”*)