Member of the noble Pappacarbone family. Ambassador for Duke Gisulf of Salerno, Italy. When he fell seriously ill at the abbey of Chiusa, Italy, he made the common promise to God that if he lived, he would enter religious life. When he recovered, he became a monk at Cluny, France, training under Saint Odilo of Cluny. Duke Gisulf recalled him to Salerno to reform the monasteries in his region.

Alferius met with little success, and in 1011 he became a hermit on Mount Fenestra near Salerno. His reputation for holiness and wisdom spread, and he attracted students. He selected twelve, and founded the Benedictine abbey Holy Trinity of La Cava under the Cluniac rule. The abbey became the motherhouse for scores of others in the region; this network of houses became a powerful force for civilization and religion in Sicily and southern Italy, and twelve of the motherhouse abbots have been beatified to date. Alferius lived to be 120, governing the abbey till the day he died; on that day, he celebrated Mass, and washed the feet of his brothers, including the future Pope Blessed Victor III.