Community
at the Service of God’s People

Sharing Faith Fosters Vocations
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Author Pat Conroy:
Catholic to the Core
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From the Abbot

Pope Benedict XVI writes in his Prayer for Vocations of May 3, 2009:

“The vocation to the priesthood and to the consecrated life constitutes a special gift of God which becomes part of the great plan of love and salvation that God has for every man and woman and for the whole of humanity. Our first duty, therefore, is to keep alive in families and in parishes, in movements and in apostolic associations, in religious communities and in all the sectors of diocesan life this appeal to the divine initiative with unceasing prayer. We must pray that the whole Christian people grows in its trust in God, convinced that the ‘Lord of the harvest’ does not cease to ask some to place their entire existence freely at his service so as to work with him more closely in the mission of salvation.”

Some years ago we heard that it takes a village to raise a child. In a very real way, it also takes a community to foster and mature a vocation. The love and support of family, friends, parishes and faith-filled people are needed to encourage vocations in the church.

An individual may sense a call, but that is only the first step. While we often speak of a call from God, it can also be the voice of others working with God that makes that call heard in a personal and authentic way. Recent novices have noted that, while they had contemplated a church vocation, they didn’t pursue one until someone pointed out their gifts and asked them if they would consider using them to serve God’s people.

Pope John Paul II believed: “That is why we need a unified effort of the whole Christian community to ‘re-evangelise life.’ For this fundamental pastoral effort, there has to be the witness of men and women who show the fruitfulness of an existence that has its source in God, that has its strength in its docility to the workings of the Spirit, that has its guarantee of the authentic meaning of daily toil in its communion with Christ and the Church. Within the Christian community, each person must discover his or her own personal vocation and respond to it with generosity.”

Religious life is a call to live in community while serving the larger community. As John Paul II reflected, “We need men and women who, by their witness, ‘remind the baptized of the fundamental values of the Gospel,’ and who foster ‘in the People of God an awareness of the need to respond with holiness of life to the love of God poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit, by reflecting in their conduct the sacramental consecration which is brought about by God’s power in Baptism, Confirmation or Holy Orders.’”

As Norbertines we ask your prayers and efforts in inviting young men to join our community and thus continuing our many years of service to this local church. We pray that we may always be worthy of such generous gifts among us.

GARY MILLER, O.P.}

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Pat Conroy’s “South of Broad”
The student smiled as he said it: “What’s great about you Norbertines is that you really like each other!”

It was the 1970s at Prémontré High School in Green Bay, Wis., and he was noticing something that the 20 Norbertines living together and teaching there often took for granted. That we were together, that we enjoyed each other’s company and were friends was something that we brought into ministry — and that has its precedent in Christ himself.

In the Gospels, Jesus gathers his disciples around him and sends them out in pairs. The implication is clear: Following Jesus is not a solo activity. While it demands personal commitment and faith, it is also something shared.

The ancient Christian teacher Tertullian commented, “Solus Christianus, nullus Christianus” — “A Christian alone is no Christian.” It’s pretty strong language, but it’s true. We need one another, not just because friendship and companionship are nice, but because they are essential to a full and healthy human, Christian life.

The Rule of St. Augustine begins with the admonition, “The first purpose you have come together is to live in unity in the house and to be of one mind and heart on the way to God.” We sometimes idealize this as an abstract principle, but I would suggest that it is a springboard for effective ministry, one that marks the Norbertine ideal. Drawing strength from a life shared in Christ, we reach out in service, not simply as individuals, but as brothers, as persons in relationship.

Norbertines today typically live in community but minister singly. Nonetheless, even if I am “alone” in a classroom or serving in a parish, I am never alone. My community, rooted in Christ, supports and empowers me — and others can see it.

That student’s affirmation — “What’s great about you Norbertines is that you like each other!” — is not an isolated comment, but one that I have heard in various ways throughout my lifetime of ministry. Students, parishioners and others are aware of — and inspired by — the relationships they observe among Norbertines that sustain life on the front line of ministry.

By Fr. John Bostwick, O.Praem.
Translated by Fr. John Tourangeau, O.Praem.
The Habit

By Fr. Stephen Rossey, O.Praem.

With its roots in thrift, practicality and symbolism, the four-piece Norbertine habit has a fascinating history.

The tunic is the basic garment of the habit. It originates from the everyday vesture of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Worn as an outer garment over street clothes, it is a great equalizer; in it, everyone has the same status.

The scapular is essentially an apron, such as was worn by manual laborers. It consists of a piece of cloth spanning nearly the width of the body and reaching to the feet in front and behind. It keeps the tunic clean.

The sash, or cincture, is a long, narrow strip of cloth that confines the loose, flowing tunic and scapular, preventing them from impeding the movement of the wearer. It circles the waist and is tied in a knot at the side.

The elbow-length shoulder cape fastens at the neck. It originally was worn only in choir but today is an essential part of the habit. Its small “hood” is a symbolic leftover of the full monastic hood worn during the medieval era.

Why White?

The choice of the Norbertine religious habit caused some lively disputes in its 12th-century day. Monks then wore unbleached wool dyed black. Canons regular — members of ministry-oriented rather than cloistered orders — wore fine white linen. St. Norbert himself wore a tunic, belt and cape of undyed wool, a poor man’s garment made from the cheapest material available in his native Germany, where flocks of sheep were numerous.

This unorthodox combination of a traditionally monastic fabric with a traditionally clerical color spawned great controversy and set the Norbertines apart. While no longer controversial, the Norbertine habit still does distinguish clearly members of this ancient order.
A Call to Be One
By Fr. Jeremy Tobin, O.Praem.

Hospitality is a central part of the Norbertine charism, and of life here at St. Moses the Black Priory in Raymond, Miss. We invite others to take part in our way of life at the Priory, and they come — sometimes to meet in a spirit-filled setting, and sometimes to join us in prayer and fellowship.

That those visitors are not all Catholic is especially meaningful here in Mississippi, where religion is still the most segregated element of the culture. Community means coming together and being reconciled, and we at the Priory cross religious boundaries to foster understanding and community.

Methodists come and pray their Methodist way, and we chat about John Wesley hymns we have in common. After singing Vespers with us from our hymnal — “Lead Me, Guide Me,” compiled by Sr. Thea Bowman — one Methodist remarked, “We know these hymns! See, we are like you Catholics.”

Catholic groups, too, feel a part of the family and visit us to experience something new, a form of religious life that did not exist in Mississippi before the Norbertines came here in 1990. Our early morning Liturgy of Praise and Mass attracts a small group of locals, and our collective presence at diocesan events advances our efforts to serve as a resource for the diocese.

Perhaps most nurturing are dinners at the Priory with members of differing denominations. Church similarities dominate the conversation, and friendships grow, along with our reputation as reconcilers and advocates for unity.

We invite others, and they come — and come together. This gentle hospitality, Norbertine at its heart, is a force that breaks down barriers to create community in Jackson and beyond.

Water in the Desert
By Br. Dennis Butler, O.Praem.

Santa María de la Vid Priory offers a desert oasis where seekers can draw close to God.

The prophet Hosea has God saying to his people, “I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her heart.” (Hosea 2:14) Many find that it is in the desert where God chooses to create them anew. That’s why Santa María de la Vid Priory, our community home on a desert plateau, offers facilities for individual and group retreats.

From everywhere on our land, one can see the Sandia mountains with the city of Albuquerque spread out below. Nowhere is that beauty more evident than from the meditation chapel in our church. We also have a small chapel dedicated to John the Baptist where one can pray in solitude.

Bethany Guest House and the Hermitages of Prémontré provide an environment for quiet renewal, relaxation and rest. Last year we opened The Norbertine Library, which has more than 12,000 books on theology and spirituality available both to retreat participants and to others who seek to deepen their knowledge of God and his creation.

The organizations that have used these facilities are many and ecumenical. Some are: the Sangre de Cristo Catholic Community; the Methodist Theological School of Ohio; the Laguna Pueblo; Called Back to the Well interdenominational retreats for religious leaders; Holy Cross Lutheran Church; and the Unitarian Universalist Ministers.

Not every group joins us at our prayer, but all of them tell us of their experience of the silence and peace of our desert environment:

“Thank you for providing this oasis of peace for those who, from time to time, feel called to withdraw to the desert with the Lord alone as companion.”

“This place is imbued with prayer and kindness. There is a spirit of generosity, well-being and healing here.”

“This hermitage weekend was simply perfect. The quiet was most helpful. I enjoyed the liturgies, which are done so simply and beautifully. The library is a great asset.”

As Isaiah prophesied centuries ago, “The parched wilderness will rejoice and blossom. And the desert will sing.” (Isaiah 35:1)

To view an autumn photo gallery of Santa María de la Vid priory, visit: http://community.webshots.com/user/stnorbertabbey
Serving Together

By Lisa Strandberg

With its new Norbertine Volunteer Community, St. Norbert Abbey reaffirms its century-old commitment to the Green Bay area.

In a modest house in the Old North neighborhood of Green Bay, Wis., six recent college graduates came together this fall to live and serve communally for one year as part of the new Norbertine Volunteer Community (NVC). The concept arose out of a desire at St. Norbert Abbey to further strengthen the Norbertines’ involvement in the greater Green Bay area.

“The Order as a whole is kind of getting back to what we call ‘the four pillars,’” said Fr. Jay Fostner, O.Praem., vice president of mission and heritage at St. Norbert College and one of the NVC’s founders. Those pillars emphasize the importance of community, contemplation, action and locality in Norbertine life.

Locality — the commitment of the Norbertines to serving the community in which they live — was the driving force behind the NVC’s creation. The Norbertines’ long-standing commitment to the area, initiated in 1893 with the arrival in Green Bay of Fr. Bernard Pennings, O.Praem., has been reinforced through the NVC, said Ellen Mommaerts, its director.

“(The Norbertines) were asked specifically to minister to people in this area. They want to do that in a deeper, more intentional way. They really feel connected to this community and want to give back in a way beyond pastoral care in a parish,” she said.

The idea of a Norbertine volunteer corps gained momentum a few years ago when St. Norbert Abbey hired Dan Robinson, now director of the Center for Community Service and Learning at St. Norbert College, to draft a proposal for the community.

The Norbertines approved that proposal in June 2008. Then work began to finalize plans.

First Mommaerts was hired. Then she recruited the inaugural class of six volunteers — four of them fresh from St. Norbert College — and worked with the Norbertines to select and purchase a home for the NVC, a sign of the Order’s thorough commitment to the neighborhood.

Mommaerts also assembled the NVC’s handbook and policies. Its aim, in her words: “To serve the local community and to give young adults the opportunity to spend a year of service to discern how God is calling them.”

The volunteers are doing so through various agencies in Green Bay, embodying Norbertine ideals both at work and through twice-daily common prayer as well as common meals.

Said Fostner, “They are living a communal life just as the Norbertines do.”
St. Norbert College
faith-sharing groups
help young men discern
God’s call — together.

By Fr. Tim Shillcox, O.Praem.

Sending the disciples out for ministry, Jesus observed, “The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few.” (Luke 10:2) That was true enough in his time — Jesus started with only 72 workers for the whole world! — and it’s true enough for St. Norbert Abbey in recent decades as the bumper crops of novices — newcomers seeking to try the Norbertine life — in the 15 years following World War II have significantly diminished.

But just as our Abbey has found laborers to gather in the rich harvest of wheat grown on its grounds, it has also found in recent years a few more men willing to consider our Order’s religious life, priesthood and ministry. Through faith-sharing groups at Abbey-founded St. Norbert College, several young men have worked together to discern their call in a setting that nurtures vocational seeds. And those seeds have begun to bear fruit.

A Dormant Curiosity

The dearth of novices in recent decades isn’t entirely for lack of interest in religious life. For many Catholic boys and young men, priesthood has always been on the radar screen, at least as a passing consideration. “When I grow up I would like to be a priest,” was my answer when Sr. Sara Hale posed that proverbial question in first grade (see illustration). And I wasn’t alone!

Such interest still exists today, according to Fr. Jim Baraniak, O.Praem., pastor at St. Norbert College Parish and former Abbey vocation director. “A decent number of men are looking at us (Norbertines) amidst their vocational discernment,” he said.

There is, however, a sticking point for many of those men. As a young teacher-priest, I heard from more than two dozen students, “What you do looks attractive to me, Fr. Tim, but I want to have a wife and kids.” For most of them, the discipline of celibacy became a deal-breaker.

Fortunately, the Norbertine community offers a specific, creative response to the celibacy deal-breaker. That’s precisely the genius of St. Augustine’s Rule, which Norbertines follow, and our fourth vow of Common Life: We live together as brothers in Christ. Our shared life seeks to provide mutual support, companionship, worship, mealtime conversation and collective wisdom as we serve in various ministries.

“Consistently over the years, men have echoed a similar sentiment about our community: The life of a Canon embraces both contemplative and active lifestyles,” Baraniak said. “Our men are engaged in a variety of active ministries, bolstered by a healthy and demanding grounding in community life.”
**A Touch of Water and Light**

In an effort to feed the quiet interest in religious life, newly arrived campus minister Shaun Johnson approached me in fall 2008 about facilitating a faith-sharing group. As a resident of St. Joe’s Priory on campus and pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in the surrounding community of West De Pere, I saw his invitation as a good way to help build the college’s Catholic and Norbertine character.

A varied group of interested students showed up for the initial meeting, and I was tagged to work with a group of three of them. We scheduled our first gathering, figuring “faith issues” would be the focus.

But when we met, I was in for a great surprise. Each of the three students expressed a desire to talk about priesthood. They risked sharing their consideration of religious vocation and made clear that they had questions about religious life and the “how do you know for sure” of God’s call.

Regular meetings, one-on-one visits and the celebration of Mass and supper at semester’s end provided non-threatening opportunities for us to speak of that call. As St. Norbert College senior Brad Vanden Branden put it, “It let me know that I’m not crazy and that others my own age also heard a whisper in their hearts and were willing to take the risk to listen and hear.”

During that spring semester, two of the three young men were away from De Pere, but the third group member returned — along with four others. With a variety of personalities, backgrounds, undergraduate majors and questions, group participants continued the process with increased vigor and focus.

The group joined the St. Joseph Priory community for Evening Prayer, supper and a discussion of the various ways God’s call has come to those already vowed and ordained. This allowed group members to have contact with a wider group of Norbertines; it also eliminated some of the mystique about the Priory and its place on the campus, getting the group past the front door and into casual conversation with the Norbertines inside. The community at St. Norbert Abbey offered the young men a similar experience.

On Aug. 28, 2009, two of the young men from that first faith-sharing group were vested as novices: Frater Matthew Dougherty and Frater Graham Golden. Two others, Francis Beaumier and Jake Sircy, are spending a year living and serving as part of the newly established Norbertine Volunteer Community in Green Bay, Wis. (see story on page 5). Another member intends to apply for next year’s novitiate.

Members say that our faith-sharing group contributed to this initial “harvest.” Golden observed, “We certainly bonded and still keep in touch. The beauty of the group was the bringing together of very different people to a mutual walk.”

With religious life and priesthood always a “minority report” among life choices, the faith-sharing group let participants know that there were others out there experiencing God’s “whisper.” St. Norbert College junior Benjamin Newman, a group member and regular participant in the campus Priory’s Morning and Evening Prayer, said that he benefited just by having the “opportunity to meet in a group to discuss about a shared calling.”

**Discovering New Life**

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The obvious goal for such a group is to help these men come closer to finding their call (if it please God, with us). But the true graciousness of the experience lies in their beginning to see themselves as God’s instruments through which others in the group hear God’s voice. Vanden Branden put it this way: “I was made aware of God working through me to reach others.”

The faith-sharing group also provided young men a setting in which to speak candidly about their own mixtures of motives, struggles, fears and concerns. It has been a place to discuss realistically the challenges of priesthood, the dangers of clericalism, and the humanity of the Order and the Church — along with the joys, needs and struggles of ministry. From that place, with eyes and hearts wide open, group members can dare to step ahead in faith, as God calls.

This fall, with Fr. John Tourangeau, O.Praem., as the newly appointed vocation coordinator, these groups will continue to provide a “seed bed” of fertile ground in which God’s call can be nurtured toward full maturity — perhaps, as in the past, in the “harvest” of Solemn Vows or ordination. If so, what an earthly and eternal difference that will make for those touched by the witness and ministry of even one new sister, brother or priest!

But for certain, the hope for all participants is that they identify and faithfully give themselves to whatever God’s call to them may be, growing to full stature for the harvest of Heaven.
It all began with an invitation to "come and see." My paternal uncle, Br. Clement Tourangeau, O.Praem., a holy, prayerful and discerning man of God, invited me to spend a weekend at St. Norbert Abbey with other young men who were contemplating religious life.

The experience of life together in a particular place centered in common prayer, shared table and Eucharist, and service to the people of God made an immediate impression upon me as a young man discerning God's call. It was a way of life that spoke to my heart and soul, and one that I wanted to share more intimately.


During 21 years in New Mexico, I served at several parishes, both Norbertine and archdiocesan. I departed from the Norbertine Community in 1989 to become a priest of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, fulfilling a desire to serve multilingual communities in economically depressed areas of New Mexico.

As a young man of 35, I experienced a heart attack and shortly thereafter took a leave of absence from active ministry in 1998. My near-death experience led me to reflect on other ways God might be calling me to serve in this life, and I chose to pursue one of them. After completing master's degrees in both social work and business administration, I established a very successful private practice as a mental health therapist in Santa Fe, N.M.

Three years later, at the invitation of the Archbishop of Santa Fe, Michael Sheehan, and the Norbertine Community of Santa María de la Vid, I returned to active ministry as a diocesan priest and, later, after realizing that I really wanted to be in community again, as a Norbertine. I professed Solemn Vows anew on Aug. 28, 2009, at St. Norbert Abbey. The meaning of communio, one of the pillars of our Order, in part captures why: Communio — a life lived in common — is essential to our life as Norbertines. We share Eucharist, prayer and table in common. We serve others, especially the poor and needy. We profess vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. We strive to be of one mind and heart on the way to God. We are a community at the service of all God's people.

To view a photo gallery of Fr. John’s profession of Solemn Vows, visit: http://community.webshots.com/user/stnorbertabbey
The Norbertine Center for Spirituality completed a very successful year with more than 10,000 participants in programs, retreats and days of reflection. "One of the reasons for this success is the strong commitment of my Norbertine brothers to this important apostolate," said Fr. Conrad Kratz, O.Praem., director. "Perhaps the excitement of what is happening here can be summed up by one of our recent retreatants who wrote, 'Everything about the Center is holy, from the hospitality of the Norbertine community to the humor, spiritual direction and gracious help of the staff. The varied programs have brought so many of us a renewal of understanding in our faith and an increase of hope and joy in our lives.'"

Sr. Judy Miller, CSJ, the Center’s newest staff member, has been very active, offering programs, retreats and spiritual direction. "So many people are desiring a deeper connection with God," she said. "The programs offered at the Spirituality Center provide a context and a path for personal growth. Spiritual direction assists persons in accessing their own inner wisdom. It is a privilege for me to be an instrument in this important ministry."

Bonnie Simonar, office manager, has retired after 17 years at the Center. Her warmth, smile and gracious hospitality will be sorely missed, but the entire Center staff wishes her well as she begins a new and exciting chapter of her life.

The fall lineup of programs is proving very popular and well attended, including the two series Risk-Takers for the Faith: The Year of the Priest and Conscience and the Moral Life. The Winter/Spring/Summer 2010 brochures will be available in late November with a variety of programs for the body, mind and soul, including the ever-popular Morning of Spirituality for Women held on Jan. 23.
One Heart and Mind in Christ

As the hallmark of Norbertine life, community takes on many meanings.

By Lisa Strandberg

An Effective Team

As a parishioner at Christ the King Catholic Church in Jackson, Miss., Charity Cannon is very familiar with the Norbertines living at St. Moses the Black Priory in nearby Raymond. For more than a decade, one of them served her parish as pastor.

Cannon said that the Norbertines’ communal existence sets them apart from other Catholic priests, most of whom live singly in a rectory. To her church, the Priory’s communal life means that when pastoral needs arise, the Norbertines collectively are there to help.

“If we call on Fr. Rick (Chiles) and he’s not there, Fr. Jeremy (Tobin) will come and fill in,” Cannon said.

Besides working together to assist churches like Christ the King, Priory residents also work together to keep their shared household running. Cannon said. Each resident handles his own set of tasks to maintain order and harmony in their shared home. Similarly, each Norbertine engages in the ministry to which he and his brothers discern he is called, simultaneously serving and building the greater community.

An Inclusive Brotherhood

Steve Nooyen has gotten to know the Norbertines in many ways. First, since 1904, Norbertines have served as pastors of his home parish, Holy Cross in Bay Settlement, on the northeast edge of Green Bay, Wis. Additionally, his uncle by marriage is brother to former abbot Fr. Jerome Tremel, O.Praem. Nooyen also attended Prémontré High School, a Norbertine-established institution in Green Bay.

“It’s a really neat brotherhood, very welcoming, with great senses of humor across the board,” he said.

Of his time at Prémontré, he said, “I always perceived the Norbertine fathers and brothers as mentors to myself and the students around me. I always felt like the Norbertines there were older brothers in many ways, someone you joke with and laugh with but also seek wisdom from.”

Nooyen now works alongside one of his high school mentors as a trustee at Norbertine-pastored Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in De Pere, Wis. He also serves the Order’s retirement home through his business, Home Instead Senior Care.

“Everyone I’ve met has just portrayed such a fantastic sense of brotherhood” — one you can’t help being drawn to, he said.
Most people hear the words “religious order” and quickly conjure an image of a solitary robed figure hunched silently in prayer. Religious life is quiet and contemplative, they assume, and focused on fostering a rock-solid relationship with God.

While the pillars of Norbertine life do call for such singular contemplation and prayer, they just as strongly exhort members of the Order to participate in community — to connect with their brothers as well as the world around them. Norbertines deem meaningful relationship with others essential in developing the relationship with God that fuels their many ministries.

Those both inside and outside the Order observe the impact that this commitment to community has on the Norbertines, as well as on those they serve. Here, several people connected to the Order share their varied perspectives on Norbertine community:

**A Strong Family**

Deb Santoski’s connection to the community of St. Norbert Abbey is long and deep. As niece to the late Fr. Glen Siebers, O.Praem., and twin sister to Fr. Tim Shillcox, O.Praem., she has had many opportunities to witness intimately life at the Abbey and its priories.

“It was obvious to me growing up that to my uncle … his Norbertine brothers were his family, having a very close sense of community,” Santoski said. That familial bond connected them in their faith, she added.

Her brother’s Norbertine friends also share that bond, she said: “It’s a common thread that connects any other friends — when you share beliefs, laughter, joys and sorrows with each other.”

In Santoski’s view, the Norbertines are eager to draw others into their family, too. “When we have been at St. Joe’s Priory, where Tim lives, we have always been welcomed and made to feel at home,” she said. “It’s a very relaxed place. Meal time is the big draw, like with a lot of families — a chance to be together, share food, drink and conversation.”

**A Global Village**

When Michael Dockry and his wife, Eleanor, were invited to join the Norbertine Associates, a group of lay women and men with a desire to learn and share in the traditions of the Norbertine Order, they said an enthusiastic yes. Michael had attended Norbertine educational institutions, and he and his wife wanted to involve themselves in the charitable projects the Norbertines lead.

“We feel that by helping them, we are able to thank them for all the good they do, not only for this community but for so many people and places around the world,” said Michael, now president of the Norbertine Associates.

Through their involvement, he and Eleanor have been welcomed into a global village, Michael said: “By working alongside (the Norbertines), we are all brought together with a family-like bond. That bond extends across the U.S., South America and Europe.”

Nowhere has that connection been made more real for the Dockrys than at the international Norbertine Associates’ meeting they recently attended in Tongerlo, Belgium.

Said Michael, “We met a lot of Norbertines and Associates from all over the world, and that brought all of us closer together.”

**An Outward Reach**

Fr. Jack MacCarthy, O.Praem., has spent nearly 30 years doing medical mission work, most of it in the Amazon River Basin in rural Peru. The first long-term physician at a clinic established by nuns from Montreal, he has worked with other doctors and local volunteers to serve some 23,000 people in 100 villages along the Napo River.

Though this work has long kept him physically distant from many of his Norbertine brothers, he still has maintained a strong sense of connection with his Order. Daily shortwave radio contact with two Norbertine-pastored parishes in Lima and occasional trips to the city to transfer patients or preach reinforced his Norbertine ties.

More than that, though, sharing Norbertine ideals with those serving beside him and among those he cares for has, in his mind, extended the Norbertine family. “The give and take and the community-building is not only among the people from De Pere,” McCarthy said.

“I think St. Norbert Abbey is rediscovering that ancient idea among the Norbertines of establishing new communities and including other people in those communities, and it’s been very satisfying to be a part of that.”
Conroy’s Catholic Connection

In the rich prose of “South of Broad,” Pat Conroy once again reveals his Catholic roots.

By Fr. David Komatz, O.Praem.

Though he is a bestselling author, Pat Conroy is largely overlooked in Catholic circles. He is, in fact, among the greatest living Roman Catholic novelists. Moreover, Conroy has a Norbertine connection: He is the cousin of our own Fr. James Huth, O.Praem (Conroy did not attend Fr. Jim’s ordination, but his father, Donald — reputed to be the model for Conroy’s Great Santini — did.)

Conroy’s latest novel, “South of Broad,” released on Aug. 11, ends the 13-year hiatus that followed “The Prince of Tides,” his last novel and my personal favorite. While it may not come to be one of the great American Catholic classics, “South of Broad” is still a darn good read.

Like some of his other novels, this one has a bit of everything: a charming coming-of-age story, a murder mystery and a colossal shocker about which I was warned but could never have predicted. It breathes its last with a lovely testimony to friendship.

Though his writing suggests that Catholicism is enmeshed in the very fiber of his being, Conroy is not a Catholic apologist. On the contrary, like James Joyce — and “South of Broad” is replete with Joycean connections — Conroy exhibits a love-hate relationship with the Church that he cannot sever.

Conroy’s Catholicism comes up again and again in the thoughts of his main character, “Toad” (whose real name is Leo, after Joyce’s Leopold Bloom). When Toad first meets the beautiful Sheba Poe, the narrative reads, “...as Sheba stood tall in her doorway, her presence suggested a carnality that took me to the borderline of a cardinal sin just because of what I thought about as I gaped at her.” Only an inveterate Catholic writer could utter such a line.

Conroy’s prose is so rich that one has to pause and rest while reading as if one has eaten too much sugary candy. One of his frequent prose-poem paeans to his beloved Charleston, reminiscent of Joyce’s lifelong love affair with Dublin, serves as an example:

“I carry the delicate porcelain beauty of Charleston like the hinged shell of some soft-tissue mollusk. My soul is peninsula-shaped and sun-hardened and river-swollen. The high tides of the city flood my consciousness each day, subject to the whims and harmonies of full moons rising out of the Atlantic. I grow calm when I see the ranks of palmetto trees pulling guard duty on the banks of Colonial Lake or hear the bells of St. Michael’s calling cadence in the cicada-filled trees along Meeting Street. Deep in my bones, I knew early that I was one of those incorrigible creatures known as Charlestonians.”

This is not literary fast food. This is fictional dining, and a feast, while not perhaps fit for a king, certainly fit for a literary gourmet.
FR. JOHN TOURANGEAU, O.PRAEM., professed Solemn Vows on the Feast of St. Augustine, Aug. 28. He has served more than 21 years in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, N.M. (See profile on page 8.)

MATTHEW DOUGHERTY, STEVE GAERTNER AND GRAHAM GOLDEN were vested in the Norbertine habit on Aug. 27. They have begun their formation program at the Norbertine Holy Spirit House of Studies in Chicago, where they will continue their education at Catholic Theological Union.

To view a photo gallery of the new fraters’ vestition, visit: http://community.webshots.com/user/stnorbertabbey

In Memoriam

FR. ROBERT JOHN CORNELL, O.PRAEM.,
died on May 10, 2009, at age 89.

Cornell was born on Dec. 16, 1919, in Gladstone, Mich. He graduated from St. Norbert High School, De Pere, Wis., in 1937. He received bachelor’s degrees in philosophy and sociology from St. Norbert College, De Pere, Wis., in 1941 and was awarded a master’s degree and a Ph.D. in history in 1945 and 1957, respectively, both from Catholic University, Washington, D.C.

Cornell was vested as a novice at St. Norbert Abbey on Aug. 28, 1938. He professed Simple Vows on June 17, 1940, and Solemn Vows on June 17, 1943. He was ordained to the priesthood on June 17, 1944.

From 1975 to 1979, Cornell represented Wisconsin’s Eighth District in the U.S. Congress — only the second Catholic priest elected to the body. He was particularly involved in efforts to reform the welfare system and to enhance educational benefits for Vietnam vets. In 1984, the governor of Wisconsin proclaimed Dec. 16 — Cornell’s birthday — Bob Cornell Day in recognition of his service.

Cornell is the author of the standard work on the role of Theodore Roosevelt in the great anthracite coal strike of 1902. He has also written his political memoirs as well as numerous articles on historical and educational topics. He taught history at several institutions.

FR. ROBERT CLARENCE VANDE HEY, O.PRAEM.,
passed into God’s eternal kingdom on June 10, 2009, at age 84.

Vande Hey was born on July 19, 1924, in Hollandtown, Wis. In 1942, Vande Hey graduated from the Salvatorian Seminary, St. Nazianz, Wis. He received a bachelor’s degree in philosophy from St. Norbert College, De Pere, Wis., in 1946 and a Ph.D. in biology from the University of Notre Dame in 1961.

Upon entering St. Norbert Abbey, he was vested as a novice on Aug. 28, 1943. He professed Simple Vows on Aug. 28, 1945, Solemn Vows on Aug. 28, 1948, and was ordained to the priesthood on June 11, 1949.

Father Vande Hey taught at Southeast Catholic High School in Philadelphia before his assignment to the biology faculty at St. Norbert College in 1955. He retired as professor emeritus in 1989. Vande Hey received a post-doctoral fellowship from the National Institutes of Health to continue his mosquito research at the University of Mainz, Germany, under the world authority on mosquito genetics. Vande Hey’s research results were published in various professional journals.

Other ministries included student formation at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago; chaplaincies at St. Mary’s Hospital, Duluth, Minn., and at Benedictine monasteries of nuns in Duluth and in Idaho; and associate pastorates in Madison, Wis., and Wyoming.

To read more about the lives of Cornell and Vande Hey, visit www.norbertines.org/whats_new_in_memoriam.html
2009-2010 Fall and Winter Calendar for St. Norbert Abbey

DECEMBER
1 – Risk-Takers for the Faith: Year of the Priest Series (Dr. Howard Ebert on Karl Rahner), 6:30–8 p.m.
5, 12 – Visual and Scriptural Images of Mary (the Rev. Dr. Tricia Matthew, Sr. Diane Baumann), 9:15–11:15 a.m.
12 – Canon John Bruce Organ Concert Series (Isabelle Demers, organist), Abbey Church, 2 p.m.
20 – Taizé Prayer, Abbey Church, 7 p.m.

JANUARY
3 – Schola d’ Arezzo Concert, Abbey Church, 2:30 p.m.
14 – Ten Prayers God Always Answers “Yes” To, Part 2 (Fr. Alfred McBride), 6:30–8 p.m.
17 – Taizé Prayer, Abbey Church, 7 p.m.
21 – Risk-Takers for the Faith: Year of the Priest Series (Fr. David McElroy on Henri Nouwen), 6:30–8 p.m.
23 – Morning of Spiritual Renewal for Women, 8 a.m.–1 p.m.

FEBRUARY
4 – Catholic Sexual Ethics: Contemporary Questions and Challenges (Dr. Bridget Burke Ravizza), 6:30–8 p.m.
10 – Catholic Social Teaching Series (Fr. Brendan McKeough), 6:30–8 p.m.
18 – Risk-Takers for the Faith: Year of the Priest Series (Fr. John Tourangeau on Gustavo Gutiérrez), 6:30–8 p.m.
20, 27 – Lenten Series (Fr. John Bostwick, Fr. Tim Shillcox), 9:15–11:15 a.m.
21 – Taizé Prayer, Abbey Church, 7 p.m.

MARCH
4 – Christian Parenting in a Technological Age (Dr. Bridget Burke Ravizza), 6:30–8 p.m.
6, 13, 20 – Lenten Series (Fr. James Baraniak, Sr. Shawn Madigan, Msgr. Jim Feely), 9:15–11:15 a.m.
10 – Catholic Social Teaching Series (Fr. Brendan McKeough), 6:30–8 p.m.
18 – Risk-Takers for the Faith: Year of the Priest Series (Fr. Tim Shillcox on Oscar Romero), 6:30–8 p.m.
20 – Canon John Bruce Organ Concert Series (Thomas Murray, organist), Abbey Church, 2 p.m.
21 – Taizé Prayer, Abbey Church, 7 p.m.

APRIL
6, 13, 20 – Splashes of Spirit (the Rev. Dr. Tricia Matthew), 6:30–8:30 p.m.
11 – Schola d’ Arezzo Concert, Abbey Church, 2:30 p.m.
14 – Catholic Social Teaching Series (Fr. Brendan McKeough), 6:30–8 p.m.
15 – Compassionate Catholic Care for Ill and Dying Persons (Fr. James Huth), 6:30–8 p.m.
17 – Canon John Bruce Organ Concert Series (Ken Cowan, organist), Abbey Church, 2 p.m.
18 – Taizé Prayer, Abbey Church, 7 p.m.
22 – The Story of the Church: Revised and Expanded (Fr. Alfred McBride), 6:30–8 p.m.

The Norbertine Center for Spirituality winter/spring/summer brochure is available now, with a complete list of programs/retreats. Please call 920-337-4315 for a copy. The listings also will be posted online at www.norbertines.org/programs.html

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