I joined St. Norbert Abbey in August of 1969 seeking a life of service in community. During my first months, I was introduced to both the Rule of St. Augustine and the order’s constitutions. As an 18-year-old, I was fascinated by these documents. My own experience of community was primarily centered on family and among friends—and often unreflected. Other than homilies on the scriptural command to love one another, I had never contemplated community in such specific words and challenges.

St. Augustine challenges us at the very beginning of his Rule: “The first purpose for which you have come together is to live in unity in the house and to be of one mind and one heart on the way to God.”

Augustine was also very practical: “Whenever you leave the monastery, go together; when you reach your destination, remain together.”

Our constitutions amplify that very challenge. Communio signifies the existence of persons in relation to and for one another. Communio is our internal union expressed in external form. “Human communion ... consists in mutual esteem, trust, sincerity, faith, responsibility .... It is expressed through every kind of service, counsel, edification, and courtesy, and also through dialogue, communication, consultation, collaboration, and a truly common life.”

Our Holy Father Norbert knew of the importance of such friendships, especially in his bond with St. Bernard: “Norbert, on his part, also found in Bernard a safe counselor and guide .... The friendship between the two saints was very intimate, and we see them side by side, continually fighting the great evils of the times” (Kirkfleetc, History of Norbert).

In Norbertine religious life, men and women take Solemn Vows of service to God, the People of God, and each another. We prioritize true and virtuous friendships with one another so that we have a home, a hearth, and a table to which we return. There we draw our sustenance and support, discover our freedom to live our vocation more fully, and trust one another not to be abandoned in the midst of our journey. And what wonderful accompanied journeys we share.
On December 18, the fourth Sunday of Advent, Vespers were celebrated at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral in Green Bay, presided over by the Most Rev. David L. Ricken. He performed a special blessing of a statue of St. Norbert, gifted to the cathedral by the Norbertine Community of St. Norbert Abbey. The wooden statue was carved by Josef Albl and sons of Albl Oberammergau, Germany, based on a descriptive design provided by Fr. Stephen Rossey, O. Praem. View photo gallery online at www.norbertines.org.
Crash! Crash! Crash! The young Norbertines peeked out from behind the curtains in the rectory office to discover six or seven young men using an old railway tie to try to batter down the door. What to do? The fraters were alone in the rectory. It was nighttime in 1968. Finally, one of them—probably naïvely—decided to engage the gang members and went outside to confront them.

After a little yelling and ranting, the situation calmed down but the conversation continued. The gang members were curious about these white boys, who they were, and how they lived. As they heard that the religious lifestyle embraces vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the boys’ response was a mixture of awe and skepticism. The most memorable comment was, “You don’t have money; you don’t do drugs; you don’t have sex. What the ____ do you live for?”

Many people view religious life as a life of sacrifice; they see it in terms of what the vowed woman or man gives up. But this is a distortion, however innocent. While it is true that the vowed life involves asceticism, a distinct discipline, this way of living is ordered to maximum freedom—freedom for love, service, and community.

Commitment can be the path to freedom for any person. We all make choices that exclude other options. In marriage a person commits self to one person “forsaking all others” until “death do us part.” The vows of religious, or equally, of marriage, are not focused on deprivation, but on freedom. They are a purposeful choice for something that is perceived as a good, positive, and fulfilling way of living and loving.

Jesus said, “I have come that you might have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10). The vows of religious are one time-tested and honorable way of living in that fullness.

(Ruido ... Ruido ... ) Los jóvenes Norbertinos se asomaron desde atrás de las cortinas en la oficina de la rectoría para descubrir a seis o siete jóvenes utilizando un palo viejo de ferrocarril, intentando destruir la puerta. ¿Qué hacemos? Los frailes estaban solitos en la rectoría. Era de noche en 1968. En fin, uno de ellos, a lo mejor ingenuamente, decidió confrontar a los y salió a ver qué querían.

Después de un rato de gritar y argumentar, la situación se calmó pero la conversación siguió. Los miembros de la pandilla ... curiosos acerca de estos muchachos vestidos de blanco ... ¿Quiénes eran? y ¿Cómo vivían? ... Mientras escuchaban que el estilo de vida religiosa implica los votos de pobreza, castidad y obediencia, la respuesta de los jóvenes era una mezcla de pavor y escépticismo.

El comentario más memorable fue: “Ustedes no tienen dinero; no usan drogas; no tienen relaciones sexual. ¿Para qué, viven ... pues?”

Mucha gente considera la vida religiosa como vida de sacrificio; la ven en términos de lo que la mujer o el hombre con votos sacrifica. Pero esto es una distorsión, aunque sea inocente. Aunque es cierto que la vida con votos implica ascetismo, una disciplina distinta ... esta manera de vivir produce la máxima libertad para amar y para el servicio en comunidad.

El compromiso puede ser camino hacia la libertad para cualquier persona. Todos hacemos elecciones que excluyen otras opciones. En el matrimonio una persona se compromete con otra persona “renunciando a todos los demás” hasta que “la muerte nos separe.” Los votos de religiosos, al igual que los del matrimonio, no
La Vida Religiosa – Una Vida Plena

Por Padre John Bostwick, O. Praem.
Traducido por Hermana Guadalupe Muñoz, RGS

Se enfocan en la privación, sino en la libertad. Son una opción a propósito para algo que se percibe como manera buena, positiva y satisfactoria para vivir y amar.

Jesús dijo, “He venido, para que tengan vida y la tengan en plenitud” (Juan 10:10). Los votos de la vida religiosa son una manera probada por los tiempos y una manera honorable de vivir en esa plenitud.
A Lifetime Friendship

By Fr. Stephen Rossey, O. Praem.

“How would you feel about my tagging along?”
At the time I never realized that simple question would lead to a lifetime friendship.

Fr. Xavier Colavechio, O. Praem., was planning a trip to Innsbruck, Austria, for a General Chapter of the order in 1968, a gathering of the Norbertine Order’s abbots and house delegates from around the world. I remarked that if I could tag along we could leave early and travel to European cities, churches, and museums before he went on to participate in the chapter meetings. For me it would be an occasion to see many of the places and objects about which I taught in art history classes, but had never really seen. For Xave it meant he could brush up on the numerous foreign languages he had learned during his student days in Rome and spend time with me, who knew something about art. It seemed like a win-win situation.

The trip was a great success. I could not have done it without Xave, as I knew no French, Dutch, or Italian. My friend’s previous trips had familiarized him with European train schedules and travel, menu selections, and cheap lodging. He knew how to barter, flatter, and cajole. He was a storehouse of knowledge: history, theology, philosophy, and national customs. Best of all, he was a great companion; he never complained about my idiosyncrasies. Whatever I wanted to see or do he made possible, with nary a complaint.

With my 1971 transfer to Archmere Academy, a college-prep high school founded by Abbot Bernard Pennings, O. Praem., just outside Wilmington, Delaware, again I called upon Xave to lend a helping hand as I endeavored to found an art department for the school. Student trips to Europe began in 1974 during the two-week Easter break. They were repeated each year, and in 1978 we spent a month in France with students. Xave set up the travel arrangements, booked the hotels, contacted our abbeys, and even drove a van.

While in France, we stopped at our Romanesque pilgrimage abbey of Conques. Conques is on the pilgrimage route from Paris to Santiago in Spain and is famous for its treasury of precious relics as well as an untouched architectural style. During a delightful tour
of the church, I was able to crawl above the galleries to see where medieval pilgrims slept. Xave was able to arrange such a feat by promising to send colostomy bags from the U.S. to an infirm French confere who was unable to get what he needed in France.

In 1979 Xave was granted a sabbatical from the St. Norbert College faculty. He studied at Oxford, and I accompanied him to attend classes and research the art and architecture that underlies the neo-renaissance villa of the Archmere Estate. Xave and I roomed and boarded at the Jesuit Campion Hall at Oxford, and by the end of the first term we rented our own flat in London, where Xave could do research at the British Library and I could spend hours at London’s many museums.

Here we soon found out that Xave was a much better cook than I, so my domestic duties were limited to laundry and house cleaning. It was a system that worked out very well. We spent our evenings watching Maggie Thatcher on the BBC and reminiscing on what we had seen and done each day. They were mutually rewarding days, to which our daily diaries attest.

We were fortunate to be in Florence for Easter and were invited to participate in the services at the cathedral. What a thrill it was to process down the main aisle with banners flying and bells ringing, cross the Duomo Piazza and enter the Baptistery through Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise, for the chanting of Morning Prayer. Another thrill came when Cardinal Benelli asked us both to help distribute Holy Communion during the Mass. What a privilege it was.

Another General Chapter, this time at our Mother Abbey of Berne in Holland, was held in 1984, the 800th anniversary of Berne’s founding. Our travels by rail took us through Bayeux in France, where we all headed to the depot restrooms. Mine had a tank of water mounted near the ceiling with a pipe running down to a hole near footprints embedded in the concrete floor. The floor around the hole was littered with bits of toilet paper.

The Norbertine Order has maintained administration of Conques for more than 100 years.
patience, and enduring friendship have changed my life. From him I have learned to have faith and trust in others as well as myself. I believe our mutual friendship has made me what I am today.

What is most difficult for me to accept today is to witness the diminution of my brilliant, faithful companion as Alzheimer’s disease erases all memories of our wonderful times together. Tears well in my eyes as I witness Xave shuffle aimlessly up and down Xanten cloister, fumble through the pages of our monastic prayer book, and ask repeatedly, “What’s next?” and “What time is it now?” Those are questions he never would have asked in the heyday of our excursions. My role now is to help him find the right book, the right page, and the ever-meandering chant line. Now it’s my time to lead him instead of his leading me—and this is indeed a privilege.

You’ve been a good and faithful friend, Xave. You have taught me more than you will ever realize. I couldn’t have made it this far without the constant gift of you to me and to our community. “What’s next?” you ask. God’s final call is all I can envision. My prayer is that when that call comes I might be granted the privilege of tagging along once more.
Fr. Steven Vanden Boogard, O. Praem., served honorably as U.S. Navy officer and Catholic chaplain until his medical retirement in 2010.

He graduated from high school in Kimberly, Wisconsin, at the height of the Vietnam War era and enlisted in the U.S. Navy just weeks later. After his service as a hospital corpsman, Fr. Steven Vanden Boogard, O. Praem., now 63, enrolled at St. Norbert College and was ordained a Norbertine priest in 1988. Fr. Vanden Boogard taught high school for five years and was then commissioned a U.S. Navy officer and Catholic chaplain, a role in which he served honorably until his medical retirement in 2010.

“I have been on more than 100 ships on official navy business, everything from harbor tugs, frigates, and destroyers to the John F. Kennedy aircraft carrier,” Fr. Vanden Boogard explained. At his busiest and most dangerous time, he was the only Catholic priest military chaplain on U.S. military bases in 2006 in Fallujah, Iraq, where he pastored two chapel parishes, served four battalions and an army brigade, and supervised five junior chaplains.

Today, Fr. Vanden Boogard lives at St. Norbert Abbey in the dedicated medical wing after enduring cancer while serving in the navy in 2007. Multiple myeloma attacked his kidneys and led to thrice-weekly dialysis before a kidney transplant in May 2015. His cancer is in remission, yet Fr. Vanden Boogard is awaiting a further surgery to remedy related medical complications.

“I feel as if I am just 10 percent of what I once was. I used to travel far and wide—the mountainsides, fields, valleys, and seas—‘looking for lost sheep.’ I ministered to both Catholics and non-Catholics. I helped people become full members of the Catholic Church, celebrated the sacraments, and wrote scores of benedictions and invocations,” Fr. Vanden Boogard said of his 17 years in the navy.

Despite his chronic health condition, Fr. Vanden Boogard still celebrates an occasional community Mass at the abbey for and with his confreres. The bishop asked him to serve as a priest celebrant at St. Hubert/St. Peter’s in Rosiere and Lincoln, and at St. Francis Xavier/St. Mary of the Snows in Brussels, Wisconsin, a role that leaves him free of administrative duties but vital to the spirit and people of these small rural parishes.

Admittedly, it’s now a different type of living in community, a switch from the U.S. Navy to the Norbertines, each with their own sets of rituals and routines. “Since August 1979 St. Norbert Abbey has been my home. After being away for a long time, it is good to be back.”
Fr. Andrew Cribben, O. Praem., 53, is one of 11 children born into a Dodge County, Wisconsin, farming family. No stranger to hard work, he is currently the pastor of the 1,400-family St. Willebrord Parish in downtown Green Bay, which just celebrated its 25th year as one of the region’s largest and most vital Hispanic Catholic churches. Seventy percent of parish families are Hispanic in language, culture, and tradition, and 30 percent are native English speakers.

“Our Hispanic families are primarily young with children, and our English-speaking members tend to be elderly,” Fr. Cribben said. “Changes in immigration law enforcement have caused a new wave of worry and uncertainty. We work every day to be companions to many long-term and well-established Hispanic people in Green Bay and the people who know them. My biggest challenge is parish unity in the midst of so many different pastoral needs.”

Fr. Cribben lives at the parish rectory and returns to St. Norbert Abbey, just a short car ride away, for meetings or supportive discussions with his confreres. “A group of us gathers intentionally to support one another in our active ministry. We share a desire to be happy, healthy, and holy. It’s where I experience the love and support I need to serve the people of our parish.”

The Norbertine Order’s personnel committee has been responsive to Fr. Cribben’s call for more help at the always-bustling St. Willebrord. Fr. Jack MacCarthy, O. Praem., came on as assistant pastor nearly two years ago, fluent in Spanish and Hispanic culture after decades of pastoral and medical service in the jungles of Peru. Fr. Cribben is confident in and thankful for his confrere’s expertise and compassion. “We can discuss pastoral and spiritual concerns of our parish members and community issues,” he said. “To have a confrere at my side is a great benefit to us both, I believe.”

Together with Fr. MacCarthy and Br. Jacob Sircy, O. Praem., up to 12 Norbertines regularly assist Fr. Cribben with twice-daily Masses and eight weekend Masses at the parish. “Several of our elderly priests speak Spanish, so we can gather up to eight bilingual confessors for special events like our recent women’s retreat,” Fr. Cribben said.

High on Fr. Cribben’s list of concerns is providing capable, Spanish-speaking Norbertines to serve at St. Willebrord Parish. “I hope and pray I have many more years at St. Willy’s, but given the size and complexity of our parish, I’ve already started discussions with the abbey personnel committee about a transition plan. How will we prepare? I rely on the members to help us with longer-term plans,” he said.

Fr. Cribben said self-care is often sacrificed in the midst of his hectic schedule and the heavy emotional and spiritual demands of his flock. “As a farm boy, my exercise was our daily work on the farm, and that has gone away,” Fr. Cribben said. “I am working with Dr. John Gray (abbey health advisor) to try and regain some healthy habits so I can stay productive and available to the people who need me.”

“I am working to regain healthy habits so I can stay productive and available to the people who need me.” —Fr. Cribben
A Norbertine priest chooses a new family upon his entrance to the order—his confreres, or brothers—yet the man’s family of origin “is understood to be an important part of the community, too,” said Fr. Dane Radecki, O. Praem, current interim pastor of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish in Greenville, Wisconsin. Fr. Radecki, 66, has regular responsibilities to support his aging parents’ care and the care of his adult brother, Jeff, who has ongoing medical needs. “I manage my brother’s finances and I am his health care power of attorney. Mom is 86 and Dad is 90 and still living independently in Pulaski, but I expect my family caregiving will continue to increase,” Fr. Radecki said.

Up until his recent sabbatical and assignment to St. Mary’s, Fr. Radecki was a leader in the Green Bay Area Catholic Education (GRACE) system and called upon to consult for Catholic education programs across the country. As with so many other families, no amount of professional responsibility removes the obligation to family caregiving. “Those surprise calls in the middle of the night, or the decision to ‘clean the place,’ or an upcoming surgery, or someone losing her ability to drive—I rely on the generosity of my (Norbertine) community when it comes to caregiving. It’s something you step up and do as a son and a brother,” Fr. Radecki said, noting that his brother and sister also share these responsibilities.

Fr. Radecki returns to St. Norbert Abbey weekly, from Sunday afternoon to Tuesday afternoon. “The concept is to recharge, but that doesn’t always happen. I may have a funeral, or an emergency call from my brother in Pulaski, and this is when I catch up on his finances,” Fr. Radecki said.

While with his confreres at the abbey, Fr. Radecki slides into the comfortable daily ritual of his community. “Serving in a parish, I miss the communal prayer of the abbey.” Long morning walks are his healthy habit, Fr. Radecki says, but he’s been known to choose more sleep over long strolls. “Sometimes the fatigue wins out,” he said, laughing.

The future is uncertain for Fr. Radecki as he waits to see how his family’s needs will change in the coming months and years. He wonders about moving his mother into the rectory with him so he can be her primary caregiver. “Yet these responsibilities do not weigh heavily on me,” he said. “When someone is amazed I still have my parents with me, I realize each moment with them is a blessing.”

“When someone is amazed I still have my parents with me, I realize each moment with them is a blessing.” —Fr. Radecki
Colleague + Friend
Lessons on Virtuous Friendship from Dr. Paul Wadell

By Fr. James Neilson, O. Praem.

Maybe it was his smooth Kentucky accent or the fact that he greeted, by name, every student who walked into class. I immediately knew my time spent with Dr. Paul Wadell as a grad student at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago was going to be as enjoyable as it was instructive.

In a course referencing his own book, Friendship and the Moral Life, Paul’s class was more like an invigorating retreat with a group of friends than a series of lectures in a room of strangers. Exalting the virtues as essential components of true friendship, Paul revealed a glorious truth: Being in right relationship with others, cultivating and maintaining a circle of good friends, is nothing less than the very dream of God for each and every one of us.

He modeled for us in our teacher-student relationship the virtues to espouse in our own friendships:

Generosity: Paul clearly spent a great deal of time in preparing his classroom lectures. They were always rich in facts, personal insights applicable to everyday life, and wonderfully articulated in the most conversational tone. Our lectures were conversations with and among friends.

Inclusivity: Paul received us in an atmosphere that valued spiritual understanding and wisdom. We learned that cultivating genuine and deep friendships facilitates the growth and development of the spirit.

Sharing: Paul invited us to consider a variety of ideas and insights by way of many voices. His recommended reading list was an introduction to new friends; that is, authors we might never know personally, but would know via their writings. Sharing books, authors, works of art, and artists with new and old friends, with colleagues and students, is a lesson in friendship I practice to this day.

I find a wealth of virtuous friendships at my home, St. Norbert Abbey. As confreres, we share intellectual pursuits, mutual respect, collaboration in liturgical celebrations, and warm and inviting conversations at table. Together we believe God’s triune nature is an experience of mutuality. Therefore, as those created in the image and likeness of God, we enjoy a natural orientation toward being in mutual relationship with others. In our friendships we strive to mirror on earth what we believe is the very reflection of God’s own and true self.

Today my professor is my colleague at St. Norbert College. I count him as one of the single most influential educators in my life. And I treasure him as a friend.

Paul Wadell, Ph.D., is a professor of theology and religious studies at St. Norbert College.

Fr. James Neilson, O. Praem., is a priest, artist, and teacher. He is an assistant professor of art at St. Norbert College.

Visit www.norbertines.org to read more.
I recently had the privilege of interviewing three Norbertine seminarians: Deacon Michael Brennan, O. Praem., Frater Patrick LaPacz, O. Praem., and Frater Jordan Neeck, O. Praem. We discussed their life together within the Norbertine community, specifically their time at Holy Spirit House of Studies, the Norbertine home in Chicago, located near Catholic Theological Union, where they are pursuing graduate studies. By living, working, and praying together throughout the past few years, these young men who once had been strangers have become not only brothers in Norbert, but also treasured and most likely lifelong friends. Here they share their journey of life and friendship.

Q: What are the joys and challenges of living in a home together, where you are responsible for cooking, cleaning, and other household chores, as well as praying and studying together? How has this environment enhanced your friendship with one another?

Deacon Mike: In America, we live in a culture that fosters individualism, where there’s not a lot of actual face-to-face interaction. Here, we rub elbows—we live together. And while we often study alone, Patrick, for instance, might suddenly pop in and say something like, “Talk to me.”

Frater Patrick: Or Mike will sneeze really loudly and I’ll yell back to him, “God bless you.”

Deacon Mike: These little interactions really pull us out of ourselves. I think that’s one of the reasons many of us have chosen community life. We long for relationships. Our tradition understands the Trinity as the God of relationship. Sometimes we want to isolate ourselves from one another, but in the end it’s good to bump elbows, it’s good to have someone intentionally come into our space and say, “I want to hang out.” It gets us out of our own heads a bit.

Frater Jordan: When I was taking classes at Notre Dame last summer, I got a call from Mike or Patrick every week, or I called them. Being away made me really appreciate them and the Norbertine way of life. And making each of us better people is what religious life is all about: growing in “one mind and one heart on the way to God.”

“In this world two things are essential: life and friendship. Both should be highly prized and we must not undervalue them. Life and friendship are nature’s gifts. God created us that we might exist and live: this is life. But if we are not to remain solitary, there must be friendship.”

—St. Augustine
Q: Realizing all relationships include a bit of conflict or misunderstanding, or simply a case of others getting on our nerves, how do you three handle conflict when it arises?

Deacon Mike: One of the ways we deal with conflict is we have fun with it. We really do enjoy each other’s company and all of us are good at teasing one another. I have a tendency to be a bit loud and assertive. When that happens, I’ll be referred to as “coach.” Meaning I don’t have to go on and on as I sometimes do. But we definitely have some serious conversations, too, depending upon the person, the topic, and the day.

Frater Jordan: Depending on the day—that’s important—being able to really read one another before we bring out the teasing. Also, humility plays a part in this. I know I have my own quirks and there are days I’m not easy to live with. But humor can ease that tension. Fraternal correction is in our Rule, but it’s so hard to directly correct someone. Humor softens those edges.

Q: Judith Viorst, author of Necessary Losses, asserts that it is much easier to stand by our friends in their sadness and their adversity, but that the true test of friendship is being able to stand by our friends in their joys and their successes. Is there truth for you in this statement, and if so, how?

Frater Jordan: I recently read that 94 percent of priests identify as “happy”—a rate higher than doctors, teachers, and lawyers. But most of the support and affirmation for these priests comes from family, friends, and people they shepherd; sadly, it does not always come from other clergy. We’re here to support each other when we’re down, but how often do we take time to celebrate each other’s successes? This is a challenge not only within priesthood, but also throughout humanity.

Frater Jordan: You heard us sing, Judy!

Deacon Mike: Yeah, it’s not always a “joyful song unto the Lord.”

Frater Patrick: I think prayer is time spent together in a special way, even though it can be a bit frustrating if someone is off pitch, or when I can’t get the right tones.

Deacon Mike: Living together, we know each other’s strengths and weaknesses. But it’s in communal prayer that I think we are most forgiving because everyone is making his best effort. In shared prayer, we are more charitable with one another—perhaps more so than in other aspects of life. When I’m away I’ll pray my breviary alone. But it’s worlds apart from communal prayer, which I desperately miss. Here in the house, praying together makes us more than roommates; we are a community of brothers.

Frater Jordan: I learned when people pray or sing or chant together, they start to breathe together, and their hearts become in sync. Even though there are differences among us, this aspect of our prayer life brings us together as Norbertines. Our lives are rooted in prayer.
Frater Jordan: When Mike is passionate and on fire, he goes for it. He is extroverted. I tend to be introverted and have to try to be more outgoing. I admire his care and concern for other people. Whenever an opportunity arises to build relationships, Mike is always willing to take me with him.

Deacon Mike: I have really good college buddies, but I don’t have the day-to-day conversations with those guys that I have with two of my best friends right now: Patrick and Jordan. I anticipate having them walk with me throughout life. It’s a blessing to reflect upon the idea of friendship this early in our religious life, and to anticipate the ways that will challenge and benefit us as we live out our Norbertine vocation.

Q: Ideally, how do you imagine your friendship 10, 20, 30 years from now? What are your hopes and dreams, regarding not only your friendship with each other, but also relationships within your entire community?

Frater Jordan: A few questions were recently posed to us in class: How are we as Norbertines different from diocesan pastors? What is distinctive about our form of religious life, and how do we remain committed to it? For us, it’s not all about work. It’s also about community and being committed to one another. It’s about being intentional and constantly reminding ourselves about our commitment to one another. I’ll be there for my brothers, and I may have to sacrifice something at my work to be present to them.

Deacon Mike: I’ll be ordained a priest on May 27, and as I move closer to priesthood, I realize I’m not worthy to be a priest. None of us are. I’m not saying this in a self-deprecating way. As Jordan says, this life—this vocation—is such a grace. It reminds me how much I’ll need to rely upon my family, my friends, the People of God, my Norbertine brothers, and especially on God, for love and support.

Q: As you mentioned, none of you knew each other before you entered the community, yet today you call each other friends and brothers. What have these relationships brought to your life? How are you a better, more faithful Norbertine because of each other?

Deacon Mike: Patrick has this attention to detail, especially when it comes to anything liturgical or any project for that matter. While he might not be the first one to start the project, he’ll make sure it’s done right. He inspires me to be in tune to the sacredness of the liturgy. Jordan has a dedication to running and healthy living. Because of him, I’ve started running again and we both signed up for the Chicago Marathon.

Frater Patrick: Mike has a strong private prayer life, spending time in the chapel before communal prayer and at other times throughout the day. He motivates me to spend time on my own spiritual life. Jordan is a model of healthy living, consistently running and eating well. When it comes to academics he’s always on the ball. He never procrastinates. I trust both of them and am able to talk with them about deeper issues.
“What is taking up space in your heart?” asks Sr. Judy Miller, CSJ, a spiritual director at the Norbertine Center for Spirituality (NCS), at the beginning of her spiritual direction sessions. Responses, like individuals, vary significantly because people are in different places and spaces on their spiritual journey.

The good news is that all are welcome to grow in their relationship with God, self, and others through this ancient practice with contemporary relevance.

Spiritual direction provides the opportunity to grow in an awareness of God’s movements within oneself, explore questions of meaning and purpose, and consider issues that interfere with spiritual growth, thus helping one lead a more authentic, spiritual life.

The term “spiritual direction” can be a bit misleading—which is why it is sometimes referred to as spiritual guidance or spiritual companioning. Spiritual directors do not direct as much as they provide a safe space for individuals to share their stories and access their own inner wisdom. Likewise, spiritual directors do not give advice or solve problems, distinguishing spiritual direction from counseling or therapy.

At the NCS, spiritual direction is offered as a one-to-one experience in a private setting. Spiritual directors, men and women, both ordained and non-ordained, have received extensive training and have made a commitment to their own personal spiritual growth.

Throughout the years, the NCS has offered spiritual direction to hundreds of grateful people. While a donation is suggested, money is never meant to be an obstacle and financial assistance may be available. For many, the spiritual direction relationship has been a sacred, enriching experience.

“I am grateful beyond words for the opportunity,” shared one spiritual direction participant. “It brings alive my relationship with God and allows me to see God in all aspects of my life. What a difference this has made!”

Are you being led to something deeper? To learn more about spiritual direction contact Kathie Tilot, spiritual direction coordinator, at (920) 337-4340 or kathie.tilot@norbertines.org.
The Conrad J. Kratz, O. Praem. Abbey Lecture Series

Dr. David Poister, professor of chemistry and environmental science at St. Norbert College, presented *Integrating Science and Religion* on October 13. His lecture explored how science and religion can be used together to deepen our understanding of who we are as individuals and as a church. Given the overwhelming positive response, we hope to continue this dialogue at a future date.

A Day for Men


Morning of Spiritual Renewal for Women

More than 160 women were in attendance at this popular event held on January 21. Keynote speaker Jo Giarrante concluded the morning with her thought-provoking presentation entitled *Whispers from the Heart*. Ryanne Cunningham, Sr. Shawn Madigan, CSJ, Fr. James Neilson, O. Praem., Judy Roemer, Kathie Tilot, and Judy Turba offered six additional presentations.

Mark Your Calendar

- **April 13-16**, Triduum Retreat
  Facilitated by: Fr. Jack MacCarthy, O. Praem.
  Fr. Tim Shillcox, O. Praem.
  Fr. Matthew Dougherty, O. Praem.
  Fr. David Komatz, O. Praem.

- **April 27**, The Conrad J. Kratz, O. Praem. Abbey Lecture Series:
  The Meal that Changed the World
  Presented by Dr. Tom Thibodeau

- **April 29**, How Do I Know If I'm on the Right Path Spiritually?
  Facilitated by Sr. Melannie Svoboda, SND

- **June 23-25**, The Wisdom of Hymns
  Facilitated by Most Rev. Robert F. Morneau

- **September 22-24**, Spiritual Resilience: Strengthening Your Inner Life in Challenging Times
  Facilitated by Dr. Robert Wicks

- **October 13-15**, Opening to the Light
  Facilitated by Paula D’Arcy

For additional information or to receive a program guide, visit [www.norbertines.org](http://www.norbertines.org) or call the Norbertine Center for Spirituality at (920) 337-4315.
Finding Friends in Faith and Service

By Stephanie Birmingham and Kyle Cothern

The Norbertine Volunteer Community (NVC) is a full-time service and outreach program of the Norbertine Community of St. Norbert Abbey. Since its establishment in 2008, the NVC has seen nine groups of young adults enter the community, typically as complete strangers, only to become friends during their time living and working together. Steph and Kyle are two such friends and were members of the NVC between January and June 2011.

We came from different states—Steph from Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, and Kyle from Kokomo, Indiana—and backgrounds (even cheering for different NFL football teams!) to find a common experience in the NVC. That January we both joined during times of transition: Steph had just moved back home from working in the Washington, D.C., area, and Kyle was in the process of discerning religious life. Whether our meeting was circumstantial or through grace, we remain grateful to the Norbertines for their support of the NVC as an opportunity for young adults like us to come together and experience living in an intentional community grounded in faith (through shared meals and daily prayer at home) and service (by reaching out to the poor and marginalized in the local community).

As co-workers we volunteered at both Golden House, a domestic abuse shelter, and the Brown County Jail and Juvenile Detention Facility. Kyle was always drawing dinosaurs to entertain the little ones at Golden House and earned a reputation as “master dinosaur-drawer”! We worked in the chaplain’s office at the jail to assist with the spiritual and emotional needs of incarcerated men, women, and juveniles.

Although we were only together at the NVC for six short months, this distinctive opportunity to volunteer at two of the same sites gave us ample time to bond through our successes and setbacks. It took a lot of energy to be present to the people we served—especially working with those who had committed unimaginable crimes, challenging our hearts and sense of mercy. Relying on each other, especially between shifts, helped us process our collective experiences. We became more confident in our own paths of personal growth—learning not only from each other, but also from our fellow community members.

Much of our work together was serious, but there were plenty of ways to have fun, too. Whether it was walks around the neighborhood, evening sing-alongs, or movie and popcorn nights, as a community we found ways to balance work and play.

Our time in the NVC has long since passed, yet our friendship continues to grow. Steph lives in Green Bay and Kyle lives in Chicago, but we stay in touch through the occasional FaceTime call, text, greeting card, or visit. We love to laugh over Steph’s hilarious journey as a first-time cat owner, and Kyle’s adventures as a big-city dweller from a small town. We recently connected over a story shared by a former inmate, who vividly remembers the wordplay games from our days volunteering at the jail and still appreciates those joyful moments so many years ago.

Physical distance might keep us apart, but our memories of the NVC keep us close, and we look forward to being lifelong friends.

Read individual reflections from Steph and Kyle online at www.norbertines.org.

To learn more about the NVC, contact Ellen Mommaerts, director, at (920) 403-2944 or ellen.mommaerts@norbertines.org.
True Blue

Virtuous Friendship Defies Distance, Disease

By Fred Gallagher, Editor-in-Chief, Good Will Publishers

In the summer of 1988 Frank Sinatra gave a benefit concert in my hometown for a hospital run by Sisters of Mercy. That night Old Blue Eyes introduced me to a special man who would become a lifelong friend. Fr. Alfred McBride, O. Praem., was at the concert because he had been invited to write a set of family bible stories by my father, Bud Gallagher, the co-founder of Good Will Publishers of Gastonia, North Carolina. Another excellent priest, friend, and talented communicator, Fr. John Bradley, was the project editor who had come to know Fr. Al when he was a young Norbertine priest teaching at Catholic University.

After that first bible story project, Fr. Al continued to write and publish with our company and eventually joined Good Will’s board of directors. When he came to town for board meetings, I would pick him up at the airport, take him to dinner and then to the meeting the next morning. That time together has changed my life.

Through the years I came to learn of the dozens of books Fr. Al authored and his passion for catechetics. I learned of his time as a boy in Philadelphia, taken in as an orphan by an aunt and uncle whom he loved dearly. I know about his Norbertine high school there, of his studies in Brussels and his time as a university president. I learned of his time as professor of homiletics at Pope John XXIII Seminary, his time lecturing for the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) and with Relevant Radio, as well as his time associated with Aid to the Church in Need. I knew my friend was the first leader of the Religious Education Department of the National Catholic Education Association. And I heard his stories—great stories!

Once I walked into Fr. John’s office as he was visiting with Fr. Al. I was so excited to tell my dear priest friends about my new discovery, the wonderful writings of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. After going on about Rabbi Heschel, I asked if either of the two clergymen knew of him. They looked at each other knowingly and, with great humility, Fr. Al said, “Why, yes, Fred. I wrote a book about him.” It had been his doctoral dissertation! We’ve joked about it ever since.

Fr. McBride and I still recall Old Blue Eyes and remember fondly our old friend, Fr. John. Each time I drove Fr. Al to one of our board meetings, I went to confession there in the car. When we learned he had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, he joked, “Talk to me now before I go all ga-ga!” I told him it was reassuring to have a confessor who wouldn’t remember my sins. He said, “I don’t remember them anyway!”

I don’t know what the future will be like with my good, good friend. All I know is that from the time we listened to Sinatra together, we’ve been friends and nothing will change that, not distance nor memory nor disease nor death. Ad multos annos, my dearest friend!

For more information about the dozens of books written by Fr. Alfred McBride, O. Praem., visit www.norbertines.org.

Fr. Alfred McBride, O. Praem., at his writing desk at St. Norbert Abbey

Fred Gallagher is the author of three children’s books and a number of volumes on bereavement, marriage, and family life. He is a regular writer for the newspaper of the Diocese of Charlotte, North Carolina.

In Memoriam

“Come let us worship the newborn King, who crowns with joy all these men who died for Him.”

In a touching tribute to their confreres who have passed into God’s Eternal Kingdom, members of the Norbertine community placed a Christmas wreath on each headstone in the St. Norbert Abbey cemetery. Video and reflections available online at www.norbertines.org.
2017 SPRING/SUMMER CALENDAR FOR ST. NORBERT ABBEY

APRIL

1 – Lenten Series: Life Lessons from the Gospel (Fr. Tim Shillcox), 9:15-10:15 a.m.
2 – Lenten Lessons and Chants, Abbey Church, 7 p.m.
4 – Between the Pages Book Discussion Series: Seven Last Words (Tony Pichler), 10-11 a.m.
5 – Catholic Social Teaching Series: A Call to Family, Community, and Participation (Jane Angha), 6:30-8 p.m.
13-16 – Triduum Retreat (Fr. Jack MacCarthy, Fr. Tim Shillcox, Fr. Matthew Dougherty, Fr. David Komatz), Thursday, 4 p.m.-Sunday, 10 a.m.
16 – Easter Sunday Liturgy, Abbey Church, 10 a.m.
17, 24 – Walking the Road to Emmaus, Fox River Trail, 6:30 a.m.
26 – Catholic Social Teaching Series: Rights and Responsibilities (Fr. Brendan Mc Keough), 6:30-8 p.m.
27 – The Conrad J. Kratz, O. Praem. Abbey Lecture Series: The Meal that Changed the World (Dr. Tom Thibodeau), 6:30-8 p.m.
29 – How Do I Know If I'm on the Right Path Spiritually? (Sr. Melannie Svoboda), 8:30 a.m.-Noon
22 – Canon John O. Bruce Memorial Organ Concert (Colin Lynch), Abbey Church, 2 p.m.
30 – Schola d’Arezzo Concert (Gregorian chant of the Easter season), Abbey Church, 2:30 p.m.

MAY

1, 8, 15, 22 – Walking the Road to Emmaus, Fox River Trail, 6:30 a.m.
4, 11, 18 – American Pilgrimage Series (Fr. Tim Shillcox, Fr. Matthew Dougherty, Tony Pichler), 6:30-8 p.m.
9 – Mary: First Responder—Model for Our Time (Sr. Diane Baumann), 6:30-8 p.m.
20 – Canon John O. Bruce Memorial Organ Concert (David Enlow), Abbey Church, 2 p.m.
21 – Taizé Prayer, Abbey Church, 7 p.m.
24 – Coffee and Conversation with Deacon Michael Brennan, 10-11 a.m.
27 – Mass of Priestly Ordination of Michael J. Brennan, O. Praem.

JUNE

6 – Solemnity of St. Norbert
16-22 – Summer Directed Retreat, Friday, 4 p.m.-Thursday, 1 p.m.
18 – Taizé Prayer, Abbey Church, 7 p.m.
20 – Summer Sunset Labyrinth Walk (Kathie Tilot, cellist Frater Johnathan Turba), 6:15 p.m.
23-25 – The Wisdom of Hymns (Bishop Robert F. Morneau), Friday, 4:30 p.m.-Sunday, 11 a.m.
28 – Wisdom Circles (Kathie Tilot), 10-11 a.m.

SAVE THE DATE, FALL 2017

September 22-24 – Spiritual Resilience: Strengthening Your Inner Life in Challenging Times (Dr. Robert Wicks)
October 13-15 – Opening to the Light (Paula D’Arcy)

For a complete list of programs and retreats at the Norbertine Center for Spirituality at St. Norbert Abbey, please visit www.norbertines.org or call (920) 337-4315 to receive our latest program guide.

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