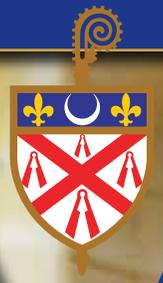


the st. norbert abbey community



# Abbey

magazine

A photograph of two men in a stone hallway. On the left, a young man with glasses and a grey sweater is talking to a man in a white clerical habit on the right. The background is a stone wall with a window and a bench.

Explore Communitio:  
A Norbertine Way of Life

**Special Vocations Edition**

[norbertines.org](http://norbertines.org)

# Dear Friends (and Families) of St. Norbert Abbey



## **I AM OFTEN ASKED, “HOW DID YOU KNOW YOU WANTED TO BECOME A PRIEST?”**

I always believed it had more to do with God than me. He surrounded me with people, opportunities, and challenges that would guide me to my decision to become His.  
*And so I suggest:*

## **SEEK THE GUIDANCE OF FAITH-FILLED PEOPLE.**

I grew up in a very Catholic, small village where the Catholic parish and local Polish customs were at the center of our community and my own family. We often had priests over to our house for dinner. These friendships showed me the realistic, human side of priests, and I was intrigued. I would later enroll in a Catholic high school so I could discern with Norbertines as my teachers. I specifically recall my theology teacher willingly helped me as I struggled with so many questions. Another Norbertine teacher taught me how to simultaneously think deeply and believe faithfully.

## **COMMIT TO A LIFE OF PRAYER.**

A man's faith and trust in God are essential to his calling to the priesthood. I felt close to God when I served as an altar boy; my family often attended church to pray the rosary; and my parents even had a traveling statue of Mary visit our home for a week of prayer. A lifelong discipline of prayer and the sacraments nurtures a strong relationship with Jesus Christ.

## **EMBRACE MYSTERY AND BE OPEN TO GOD'S WORK.**

When our culture offers so many options, both good and bad, it is exceptional to choose a life dedicated to God and ministry to others. Even more important is turning oneself over to God and the mystery that comes with it. When He takes over, we may find ourselves transformed in ways we never imagined.

## **EXPLORE COMMUNIO AS A WAY OF LIFE.**

Discerners will naturally consider whether to join a religious order or seek ministry as a diocesan priest. I knew early-on that I wanted to live in a community where the support of others and the beauty of sung, common prayer enriches each day. This Norbertine way of life is *communio*. After 51 years as a Norbertine, I am still learning how to be more holy and serve others in new ways. With openness to God and my confrères, I find mine is a happy vocation.

In Christ through Mary and Norbert,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abbot Dane". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Abbot Dane Radecki, O. Praem.



**ST. NORBERT ABBEY**  
DE PERE, WISCONSIN

Abbey Magazine - Fall/Winter 2019  
Special Vocations Edition  
Volume 12

*Abbey Magazine is a publication of the St. Norbert Abbey community that illumines life at the abbey and welcomes readers into that life, mind, and spirit.*

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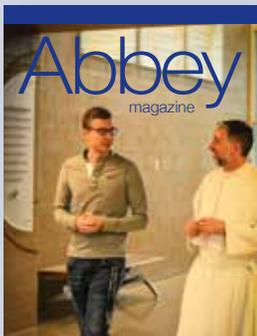
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*Fr. Michael Brennan, O. Praem., St. Norbert Abbey Vocations Director, chats with an inquirer about Norbertine life.*



Young families find inspiration and joy when they attend Mass and prayers with the men of St. Norbert Abbey.



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# Why Are Priests Such Happy People?

Reflection by Fr. Timothy Shillcox, O. Praem.

Translated by Sr. Patricia Vanden Bergh, CSJ, Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet

Years ago, I learned a powerful truth as I prepared to preach the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). I discovered the ancient Hebrew word Jesus uses to describe eight essential Christian behaviors, “*ashar*,” means both “happy” and “blessed.” Jesus desires our happiness; and finding our vocation not only blesses us, it makes us happy. And who doesn’t want to be happy?

But like so many other aspects of Jesus’ life and teaching, this is a paradox. Jesus is a “*sign of contradiction*” (Luke 2:34). Just look at the Beatitudes. Jesus finds happiness in being poor, in mourning, meekness, forgiveness, purity, hunger for justice, and persecution. Culture balks and worldly wisdom quickly dismisses, but by a leap of faith, Christians freely choose the minority report!

History helps us. The Communion of Saints, our heroes, have found happiness in such choices. Their positive impact in time and history is impossible to overestimate. For the saints, Jesus’ crazy value system isn’t crazy at all; it’s wisdom, fulfillment, happiness, and blessedness.

And over and over again, history shows that money, fame, popularity, and power fail to bring happiness and blessed contentment to those who manage to grab them.

In this search for happiness, and the paradox of Jesus, we Norbertines understand our vocation to community life and ministry. We embrace the irony of giving in order to receive and dying to live. We find true blessedness and happiness as we give ourselves away to the fraternity, the Church, and the world.

We also have front-row seats to the great moments of human life. We witness love and sin, birth and mercy, weakness and strength, doubt and death, and heroic virtue and struggle. The unsung heroes of the world let us in, to walk with them, and bless us with the “full life” Jesus came to give (John 10:10). No one is excluded from Jesus’ embrace, or ours! To be priests and Norbertines, we are fully alive and fully human, growing in the pattern of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Blessed and happy—yes, indeed!

To be a priest and a Norbertine, we are fully alive and fully human, growing in the pattern of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

*Blessed and happy—yes, indeed!*

Para ser sacerdotes y norbertinos, somos plenamente vivos y plenamente humanos, creciendo en el modelo de la vida, muerte, y resurrección de Jesús. *Benditos y felices, ¡sí, de hecho!*

## ¿Por qué los sacerdotes son tan felices?

Reflexión por el Padre Timothy Shillcox, O. Praem.

Traducido por la Hna. Patricia Vanden Bergh, CSJ, Hermana de San José de Carondelet

Hace años, aprendí una poderosa verdad mientras me preparaba para predicar sobre las Bienaventuranzas (Mateo 5:3-12). Descubrí que la antigua palabra hebrea que Jesús utilizó para describir ocho comportamientos cristianos esenciales, *"ashar"*, significa "feliz" y "bendito". Jesús desea nuestra felicidad, y encontrar nuestra vocación no sólo nos bendice; nos hace felices. ¿Y quién no quiere ser feliz?

Pero, como tantos otros aspectos de Jesús, es una paradoja. El es un *"signo de contradicción"* (Lucas 2:34). Mira las Bienaventuranzas. Jesús encuentra felicidad en ser pobre, en el luto, la mansedumbre, el perdón, la pureza, el hambre de justicia y la persecución. La cultura opone y la sabiduría del mundo despide rápidamente esta manera de vivir, pero, con un salto de fe, los cristianos la eligen libremente, aun siendo la postura de la minoría.

La historia nos ayuda. La Comunión de los Santos, nuestros héroes, han encontrado la felicidad en tales decisiones. Su impacto positivo en el tiempo y la historia es imposible de sobreestimar. Para ellos, el loco sistema de valores de

Jesús no es una locura en absoluto; es sabiduría, satisfacción, felicidad y bendición. Y una y otra vez, la historia muestra que el dinero, la fama, la popularidad y el poder no logran traer felicidad y satisfacción bendita a aquellos que logran agarrarlos.

En esta búsqueda de la felicidad, y en la paradoja de Jesús, los padres norbertinos entendemos nuestra vocación a la vida comunitaria y al ministerio. Aceptamos la ironía de dar para recibir y morir para vivir. Encontramos verdadera bendición y felicidad al entregarnos a la fraternidad, a la Iglesia y al mundo.

También tenemos asientos en primera fila para los grandes momentos de la vida humana. Somos testigos del amor y el pecado, del nacimiento y de la misericordia, de la debilidad y de la fuerza, de la duda y de la muerte, y de la virtud y la lucha heroicas. Los héroes no cantados del mundo nos dejaron entrar, caminar con ellos y bendecirnos con la "vida plena" que Jesús vino a dar (Juan 10:10). ¡Nadie está excluido del abrazo de Jesús, ni del nuestro! Para ser sacerdotes y norbertinos, somos plenamente vivos y plenamente humanos, creciendo en el modelo de la vida, muerte y resurrección de Jesús. Benditos y felices, ¡sí, de hecho!

# Norbertine Life

One of the most frequently asked questions a Norbertine hears is, “Are Norbertines Catholic?” Absolutely! But we tend to discover that the real question is, “What’s the difference between a Norbertine and all of the other priests and religious I’ve met in my life?” That’s a good question!

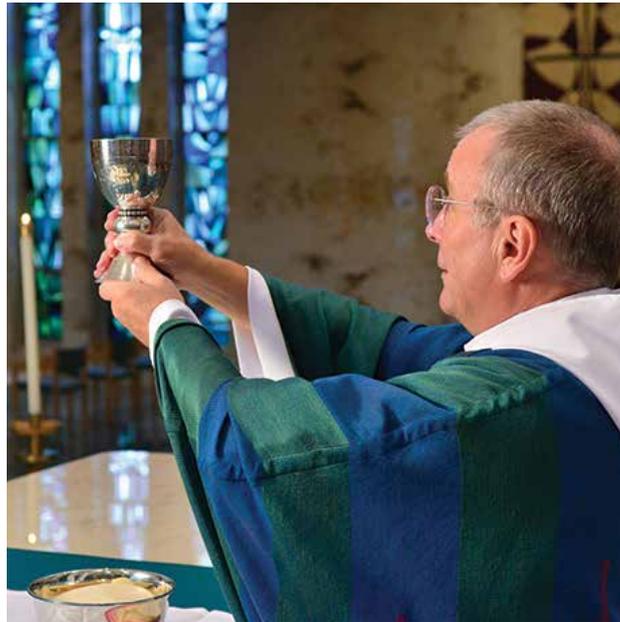


In Church speak, Norbertines are not monks, hermits, or diocesan clergy. Norbertines are known as Canon Regular. It’s a term that means that Norbertines live in community guided by a Rule of Life (from the Latin word *regula*). And since Norbert himself was a canon of a cathedral (meaning a priest of the cathedral), even today almost 900 years later, we still carry the identity of Canon Regular with us. As Norbert founded the community that bears his name, he chose for us to follow the Rule of St. Augustine.

What makes us different from diocesan clergy or other religious communities? Probably the biggest difference is our intentional and balanced life in community. Generally speaking, diocesan clergy do not live in community because of the demands of parish ministry and the distance between the parishes they serve. Other religious do tend to live together in monasteries or other houses while occasionally offering sacramental assistance outside; or they primarily provide assistance and live together in flexible and transient communities.



Norbertine life is structured around life in permanent community with the abbot (or, in some cases a prior) and the confrères in community. Our constitutions mandate that common praying of the Liturgy of the Hours and celebration of Mass stand at the center of our daily duties. From that flows the opportunity to teach and minister to one another by our very presence in the house. Our common life leads us to ministry and service in a variety of ministries that are needed by the local Church.



The challenge of being a Norbertine is keeping a list of priorities in the right order. Given the legitimate demands of the local Church, it can sometimes be hard to be home for common prayer and community times. In traditional speak, this *vita mixta* (mixed life) is a delicate balancing act to be present for the People of God and also our brothers in the community.

In today's reality, it is easy to miss the nuanced differences between religious life and diocesan priesthood, or even the differences between different religious communities. Yet, the driving force behind Norbertine life should be that community is a top priority for us. As the Rule states, "the *first* reason that you have come together in the house is to be of one mind and heart on the way to God." May it be so!



# A Unique Call



*When a man tells his family of origin about his desire to enter formation for the priesthood, it can raise a mix of powerful emotions: joy in his calling, a sense of loss, or simply a long anxious list of questions about what happens next. We asked some of our Abbey Families, as we know them, how they have come to know and love their son's (or brother's or uncle's) home and chosen family at St. Norbert Abbey. Happily, they report feeling welcome, cherished, and connected.*

*This is wonderful. The feeling is entirely mutual!*

Background Image: Mary and Terry LaPacz (center), parents of Fr. Patrick LaPacz, O. Praem., (at right), join fellow Norbertines and family members for a visit at St. Norbert Abbey.

# Abbey Families

By Lynn Neeck, mother of Fr. Jordan Neeck, O. Praem.



**M**y experiences at the abbey from day one have been some of the most blessed days of my life. This feeling started with my first-ever experience at Morning Prayer on the morning following Jordan's vestition. Listening to the men sing the psalms in beautiful harmony moved me so much, I can't even put the feelings into words. To this day, I love to stay at the abbey and partake in prayer with the Norbertines.

That's not to say that the abbey always felt peaceful to me. The first time my husband Howard and I arrived, it felt overwhelming. I didn't know what was expected of me, where to go, what to do, or what the agenda was for the day. All my senses were trying to take everything in: the beauty and meaning of the abbey stained glass windows, the aroma of incense (which I absolutely love), the serenity of the meticulously maintained gardens, and the sounds of the men singing their prayer together.

Then-prior **Fr. Jim Baraniak, O. Praem.**, was an anchor in my storm of questions and emotions. Both night owls, we would sit in the recreation room and talk for hours during our stays at the abbey. I had so many questions, and he patiently answered every single one. Many times throughout Jordan's second

year in particular, Fr. Jim would call me out of the blue and just check in. I told him how I was feeling as a mother of a seminarian, and he would help me understand what Jordan was experiencing. I ask lots of questions and need to know every aspect of what is happening, which has been known to aggravate Jordan (a common mother-son dynamic, I know), so Fr. Jim was my (and Jordan's) saving grace. When I expressed to Fr. Jim the "loss" I was feeling with Jordan's path, he was the first to tell me, "We are your family and always will be. You have not lost Jordan, you have gained a whole new family of Norbertines."

**Fr. Sal Cuccia, O. Praem.**, was a warm and powerful presence in our lives from the first time we stepped foot on the campus of St. Norbert College. As we explored the student organizations at Jordan's freshman orientation, Fr. Sal, who was then the associate pastor of Old St. Joe's, (also known as St. Norbert College Parish), approached Jordan and asked if he was involved in his home parish. Jordan said he was a reader and Eucharistic minister. "Good, you are now signed up for these ministries at Old St Joe's," he said. From this first encounter, Fr. Sal helped direct Jordan down the path he could see him being called. Fr. Sal will always be family, and our hearts broke when he passed away and could not be in person at Jordan's ordination.



Upper Left Above: Fr. Rossey, O. Praem., and fine artist, discusses how to best draw daisies with his great-niece Katherine, age 9. Lower Left Above: Fr. Rossey concelebrated his great-niece Anne's baccalaureate Mass at St. Norbert College. Above Right: Fr. Rossey remains a much-loved and influential part of his family of origin. Below: Fr. Rossey arranges flowers and branches from the abbey grounds for St. Norbert Abbey Church.

## Immeasurable Influence

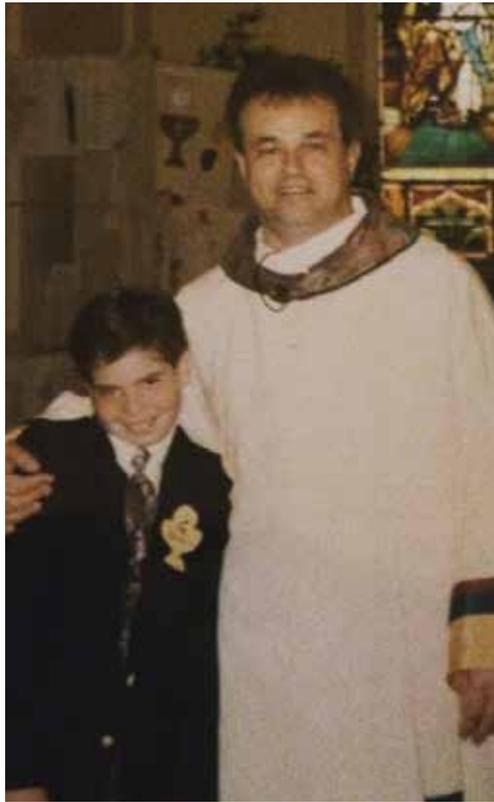
Uncle Jim is a force for good in the lives of his grown nieces and nephew Kate Geenen, Mary Greene, and Jim Sabish and their families. Uncle Jim is also **Fr. Stephen James Rossey, O. Praem.** Julie (Rossey) Sabish and her husband Ed consider themselves very blessed to have raised their three children with the added guidance, compassion, support, and dry humor that only their Uncle Jim could perfect. The three Sabish children, all eventual graduates of St. Norbert College, fondly recall their mother announcing, "The boys are coming over," and soon a group of Norbertine priests would arrive, take over the family's kitchen, and banter as they cooked Italian food from scratch. (The kids did the dishes.) Similarly, the family has always been welcome at Mass, Vespers, celebrations, and personal visits to Fr. Rossey's rooms and art studio at St. Norbert Abbey.

Fr. Rossey, a fine artist and teacher, traveled extensively throughout his active ministry. He never failed to send long, thoughtful letters, choose meaningful gifts, and collect stories to share upon his return. He remains the family expert on travel planning, European abbeys, interior decorating, genealogy, art collecting, color selection, and wry jokes. The great-nephews and nieces lovingly call him "Father Knowledge." Everyone has his original art in their homes.



Young Jim liked to enter the abbey church and seek out Uncle Jim's handiwork, especially the grand flower arrangements fresh-picked from the abbey gardens. Kate was moved when Fr. Rossey concelebrated her daughter's baccalaureate Mass at St. Norbert College. "I am incredibly awed by his deep faith, yet he allowed us to be kids," Mary said. "Uncle Jim is a very holy man, yet just a real guy. His influence in our lives is immeasurable."

*Learn more online. Read "The Joys of Religious Life" by Fr. Stephen Rossey, O. Praem., at [Norbertines.org/joysofreligiouslife](http://Norbertines.org/joysofreligiouslife)*



Left: Fr. Conrad Kratz, O. Praem., with a young Bradley Vanden Branden. Years ago, Joan Vanden Branden asked for Fr. Conrad's advice on a book of saints for her son's Christmas present. Young Bradley had the book memorized within a few short weeks. Right: Kally Vanden Branden, sister of Fr. Bradley Vanden Branden, O. Praem., marries Cody. With their parents Tom and Joan Vanden Branden. Fr. Brad celebrated the marriage for his sister.

## Just Our Style



Joan Vanden Branden, a hair stylist, and mother of Fr. Bradley Vanden Branden, O. Praem., has discovered her own Norbertine vocation as the abbey barber.

There were several hints that Joan and Tom Vanden Branden might be the parents of a priest someday. Maybe it was their little boy Bradley's insistence that he re-celebrate Mass in the basement on Sundays after the family returned home from church, complete with his sister Kally dressed in a nun's habit. Or maybe the time he begged for a book of the saints for Christmas ... and had it memorized by the time he returned to school in January. The boy would indeed grow up to become **Fr. Bradley Vanden Branden, O. Praem.**, and Prior of St. Norbert Abbey. Along for the journey are Joan, Tom, Kally and her husband Cody, and their little girl Sophie. Tom is retired from his career as a printer at Georgia Pacific, and Joan, from 40-plus years as a hair dresser and salon-owner. Joan has since discovered her own Norbertine vocation as the abbey barber who visits the nursing home wing and on-site barber shop about once every six weeks to cut Norbertines' hair. Tom goes with her, and together they have come to know and love the priests and brothers who share with them their stories, memories, and wisdom. The Vanden Brandens especially treasure their friendships with other parents of Norbertines and look forward to every opportunity to reunite. "We have never felt we lost a son to the Norbertines," Tom said. "It is a blessing as a parent to watch your child be what he has always been called to be, and we have gained a new family."



Above Left: A number of Norbertine confrères travelled north to celebrate Fr. Jordan Neeck's Mass of Thanksgiving at his home parish in Phillips, WI.  
 Top Right: Frater Johnathan Turba (left) and Fr. Jordan Neeck, O. Praem., (right) run the Chicago Marathon, joined by Johnathan's sister Tracy, and Jordan's mom Lynn.  
 Bottom Right: Parents of Norbertines form close bonds and become family to one another.

## *Relationships Thrive Between Norbertines and their Families of Origin*

When there is an event or gathering at the abbey, we parents of Norbertines sit together at Mass, prayer, meals, and rec time. Of our sons' group, each of the six young men was at a different step on his path to priesthood, so we learned from one another and passed it on. In the meantime, we bonded over our children's weddings, the arrival of grandchildren, retirements, and even the ordination of **Fr. Michael Brennan, O. Praem.**'s brother as a priest of the Holy Cross Fathers. We share Packers' games, explore supper clubs, and cheer for our sons from different vantage points along the Chicago Marathon route. Together we share in the joyful and devastating times of our lives, clinging to each other in times of sadness and thanksgiving.

Howard and I dearly love the people of the Norbertine Center for Spirituality and abbey staff. I formed a sisterly bond with Judy Turba, who held the role as director of the Center when we first met. Judy's welcoming, loving spirit and radiant smile made me feel I was home every time I visited the abbey. Little did I know the professional photographer who was ever-present at abbey events was her husband Jerry! Now he and I are partners as I round up the parents and other close family for group shots and we commiserate on photo opps. When Jerry came to take photos of Jordan's Mass of

Thanksgiving in our home parish right after his ordination, we were overwhelmed with his gift. These pictures are such a treasure to me. Then there is Nick, one of the abbey cooks, who has shared several of his recipes with me; and the servers are always welcoming, kind, and attentive.

### **A Mother's Advice**

*I have learned that as parents, we should encourage our sons in their discernment. However, don't ask your son the questions you want answered; instead, approach the community of priests and parents who have more experience. Also, be prepared for a rollercoaster of emotions. I cried throughout the entire Mass when Jordan professed his Solemn Vows, and this, for someone who hardly ever cries! Looking back, in my heart I knew this was his ultimate commitment to the Norbertine Community and God. Then there is the indescribable feeling of awe and elation as Jordan consecrated the body and blood for the first time and elevated the host. My advice is to soak up the entire glorious experience. Form friendships and bonds with the Norbertines, the other people of the abbey, and fellow Norbertine families. They will be your lifeline, and ultimately, your new big family.*



Fr. Rod Fenzl, O. Praem.



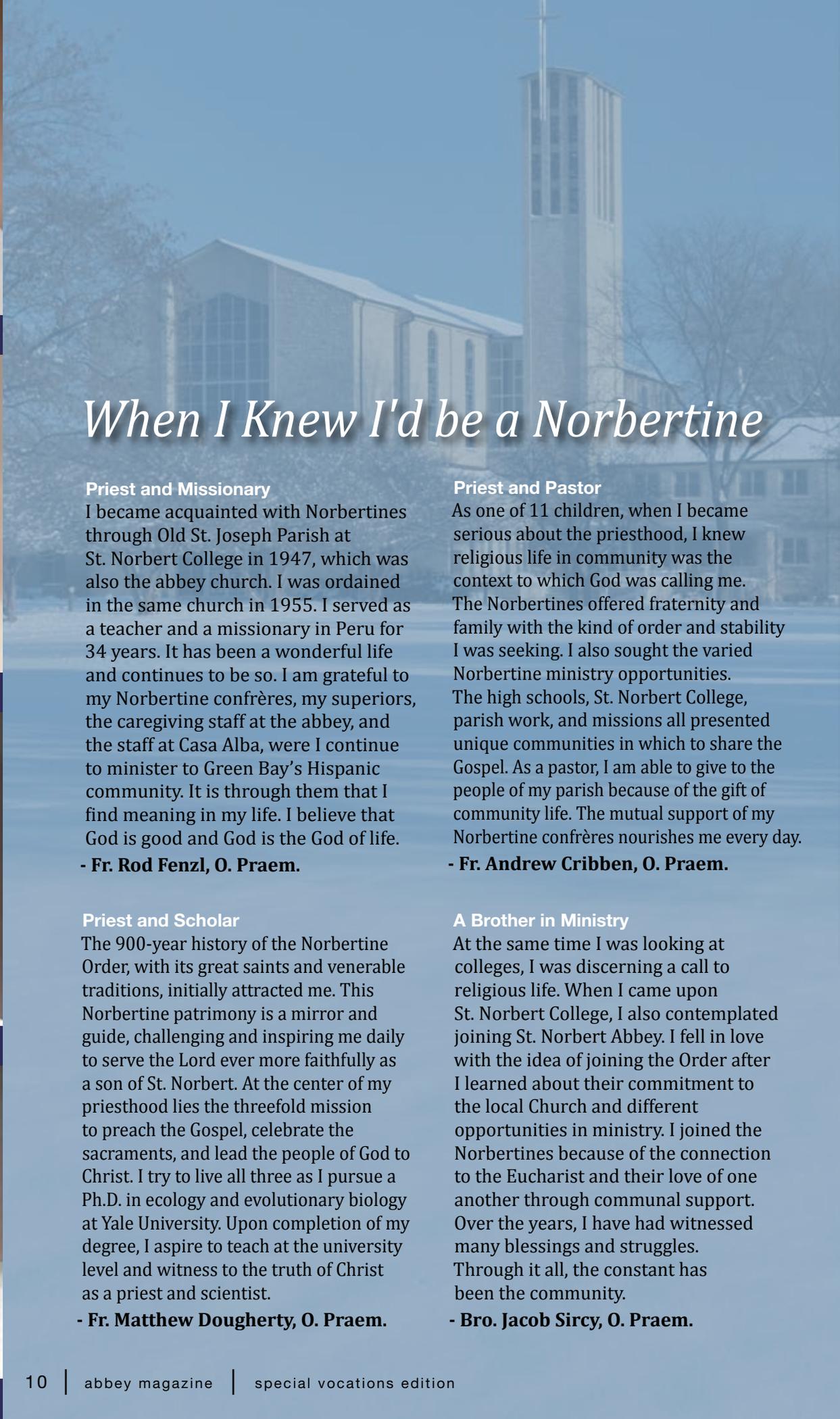
Fr. Andrew Cribben, O. Praem.



Fr. Matthew Dougherty, O. Praem.



Bro. Jacob Sircy, O. Praem.



## *When I Knew I'd be a Norbertine*

### **Priest and Missionary**

I became acquainted with Norbertines through Old St. Joseph Parish at St. Norbert College in 1947, which was also the abbey church. I was ordained in the same church in 1955. I served as a teacher and a missionary in Peru for 34 years. It has been a wonderful life and continues to be so. I am grateful to my Norbertine confrères, my superiors, the caregiving staff at the abbey, and the staff at Casa Alba, where I continue to minister to Green Bay's Hispanic community. It is through them that I find meaning in my life. I believe that God is good and God is the God of life.

- Fr. Rod Fenzl, O. Praem.

### **Priest and Scholar**

The 900-year history of the Norbertine Order, with its great saints and venerable traditions, initially attracted me. This Norbertine patrimony is a mirror and guide, challenging and inspiring me daily to serve the Lord ever more faithfully as a son of St. Norbert. At the center of my priesthood lies the threefold mission to preach the Gospel, celebrate the sacraments, and lead the people of God to Christ. I try to live all three as I pursue a Ph.D. in ecology and evolutionary biology at Yale University. Upon completion of my degree, I aspire to teach at the university level and witness to the truth of Christ as a priest and scientist.

- Fr. Matthew Dougherty, O. Praem.

### **Priest and Pastor**

As one of 11 children, when I became serious about the priesthood, I knew religious life in community was the context to which God was calling me. The Norbertines offered fraternity and family with the kind of order and stability I was seeking. I also sought the varied Norbertine ministry opportunities. The high schools, St. Norbert College, parish work, and missions all presented unique communities in which to share the Gospel. As a pastor, I am able to give to the people of my parish because of the gift of community life. The mutual support of my Norbertine confrères nourishes me every day.

- Fr. Andrew Cribben, O. Praem.

### **A Brother in Ministry**

At the same time I was looking at colleges, I was discerning a call to religious life. When I came upon St. Norbert College, I also contemplated joining St. Norbert Abbey. I fell in love with the idea of joining the Order after I learned about their commitment to the local Church and different opportunities in ministry. I joined the Norbertines because of the connection to the Eucharist and their love of one another through communal support. Over the years, I have had witnessed many blessings and struggles. Through it all, the constant has been the community.

- Bro. Jacob Sircy, O. Praem.



# Becoming Norbertine

*How to Choose and Follow the Path to Norbertine Life*



## Inquirer-Affiliate

Every man interested in becoming a Norbertine begins his exploration as an inquirer. He visits the abbey multiple times, is invited to stay at the abbey to share in community, prayer, and discernment, and stays in regular contact over e-mail and phone. Inquiry into Norbertine life can begin as early as high school. If interested, an inquirer may apply to be a live-in affiliate during or after college. The application process to be an affiliate or novice includes an in-depth interview and behavioral assessment by the vocations team to help determine his readiness for joining the Order.



## Novice

A man receives the white habit of St. Norbert, typically during Evening Prayer on the Feast of St. Augustine. This ceremony, called vestition, begins his first two years of formation in the Order. During this novitiate, he engages in prayer and contemplation, studies the history and spirituality of the Order, and receives spiritual direction. The first year includes a hermitage period when the novice withdraws from his former life to evaluate his unique call. The second year includes a part-time assignment at a Norbertine apostolate, like a school or parish.



*Simple Vows are professed by a man after his novitiate. Fraters\* make vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience for a period of three years during which his formation for the priesthood continues.*

\*Frater is the Latin word for brother. Norbertines are referred to as "fraters" during their years in formation.



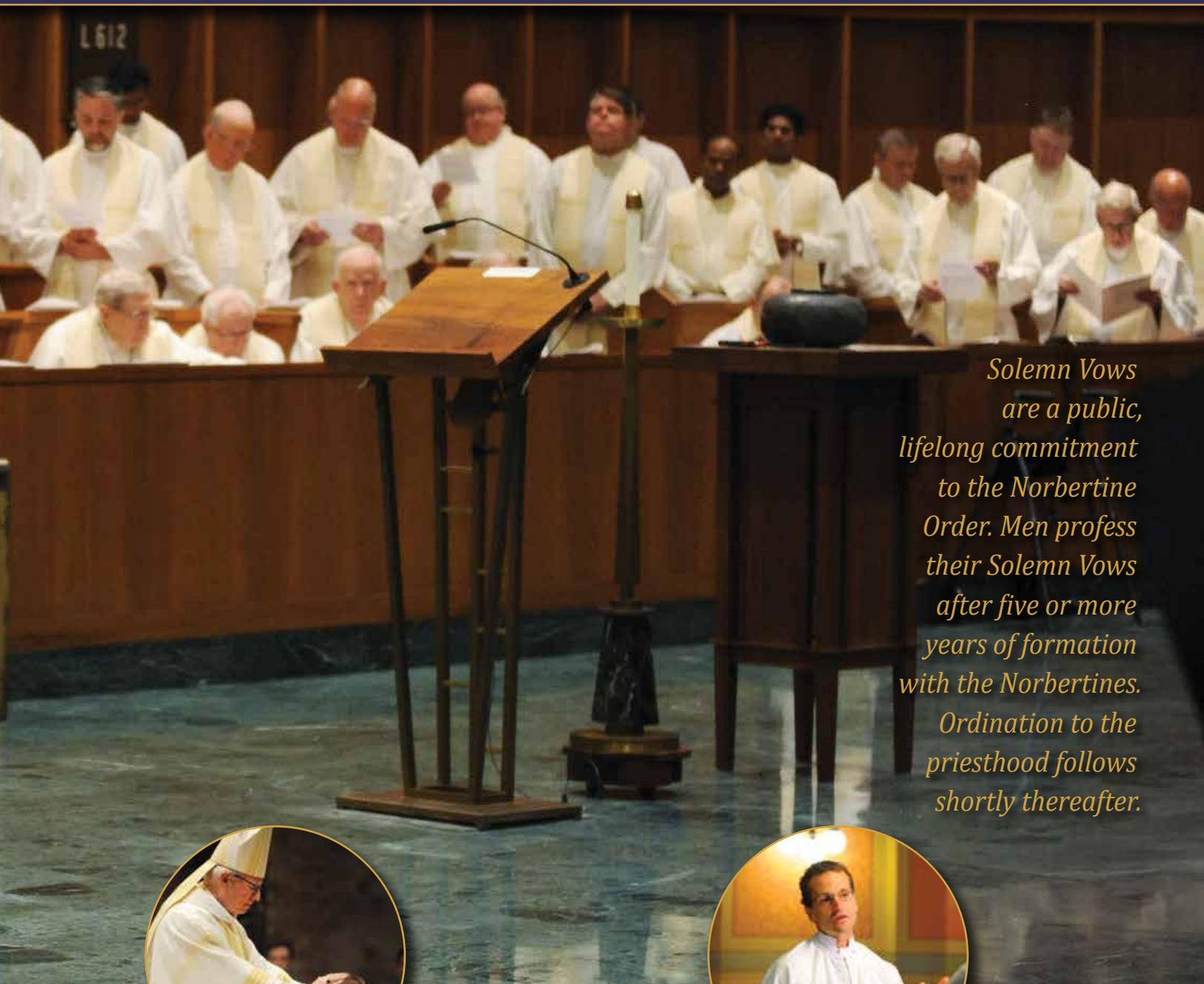
## Simple Vows

Simple Vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience are professed by a man after his novitiate. The vows are for three years during which his formation continues. He also begins studies toward a master's degree in divinity at Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in Chicago, the official theologate for Norbertines pursuing Holy Orders. He is typically ordained a deacon after three years of study and serves as a deacon during his fourth year at CTU.



## Solemn Vows

Solemn Vows are a public, lifelong commitment to the Norbertine Order. Men profess their Solemn Vows after five or more years of formation. Depending on his path, a man will then be ordained a temporary deacon on his path to priesthood or begin his life and ministry as a brother.



*Solemn Vows are a public, lifelong commitment to the Norbertine Order. Men profess their Solemn Vows after five or more years of formation with the Norbertines. Ordination to the priesthood follows shortly thereafter.*



## Priesthood

After serving as a deacon for at least six months, a man is ordained a Norbertine priest. From here, he begins a lifetime of sacramental ministry, helped in the beginning by priestly mentors within the Order.

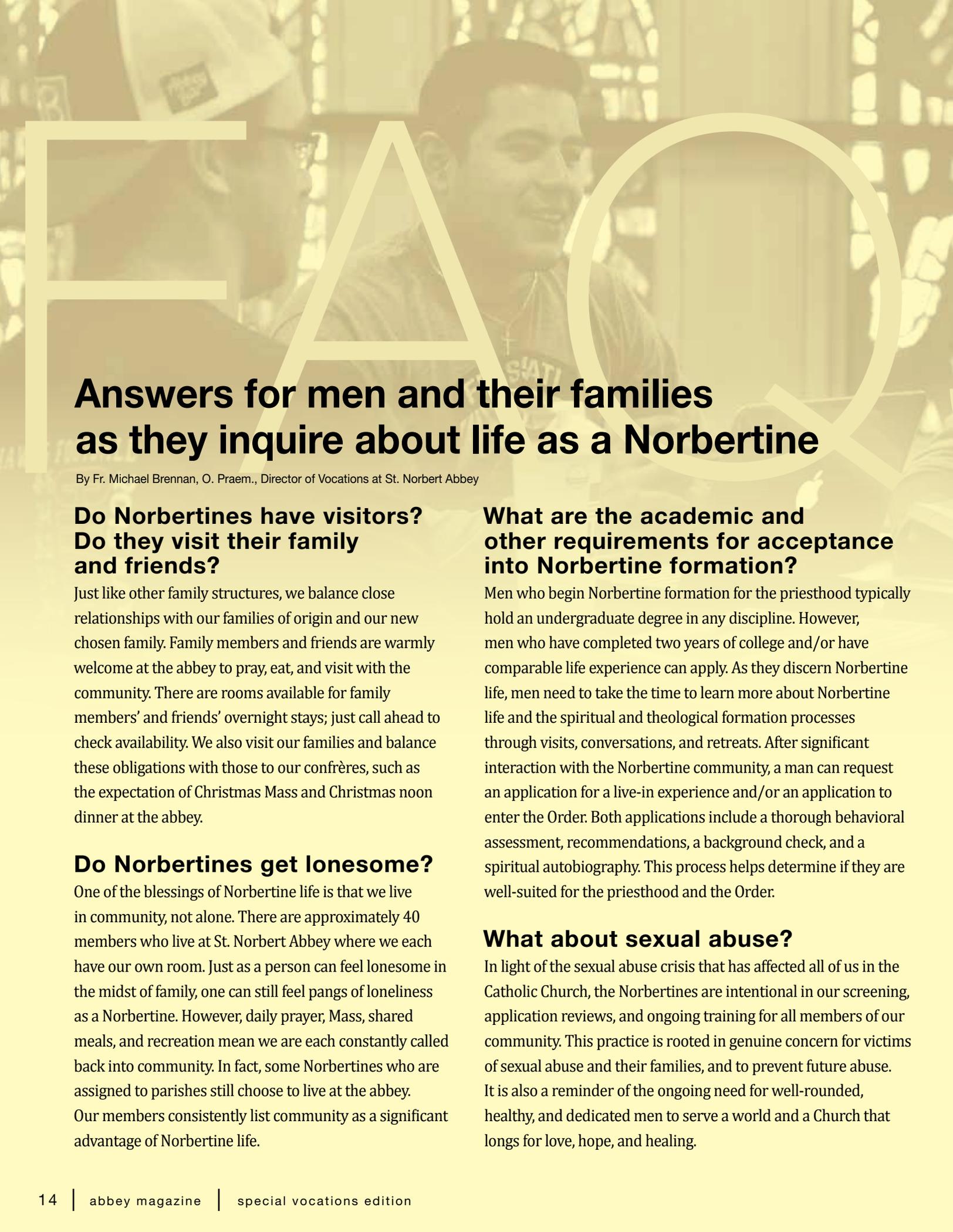


## Brotherhood

During formation, some men decide to pursue brotherhood instead of ordained ministry. Brothers profess Solemn Vows and perform vital non-sacramental ministries in parishes, schools, and non-profit organizations.

Are you interested in attending a *Come and See Weekend* at St. Norbert Abbey?

Please contact Fr. Michael Brennan, O. Praem., Director of Vocations, at [vocations@norbertines.org](mailto:vocations@norbertines.org) or (920) 337-4333.



# Answers for men and their families as they inquire about life as a Norbertine

By Fr. Michael Brennan, O. Praem., Director of Vocations at St. Norbert Abbey

## **Do Norbertines have visitors? Do they visit their family and friends?**

Just like other family structures, we balance close relationships with our families of origin and our new chosen family. Family members and friends are warmly welcome at the abbey to pray, eat, and visit with the community. There are rooms available for family members' and friends' overnight stays; just call ahead to check availability. We also visit our families and balance these obligations with those to our confrères, such as the expectation of Christmas Mass and Christmas noon dinner at the abbey.

## **Do Norbertines get lonesome?**

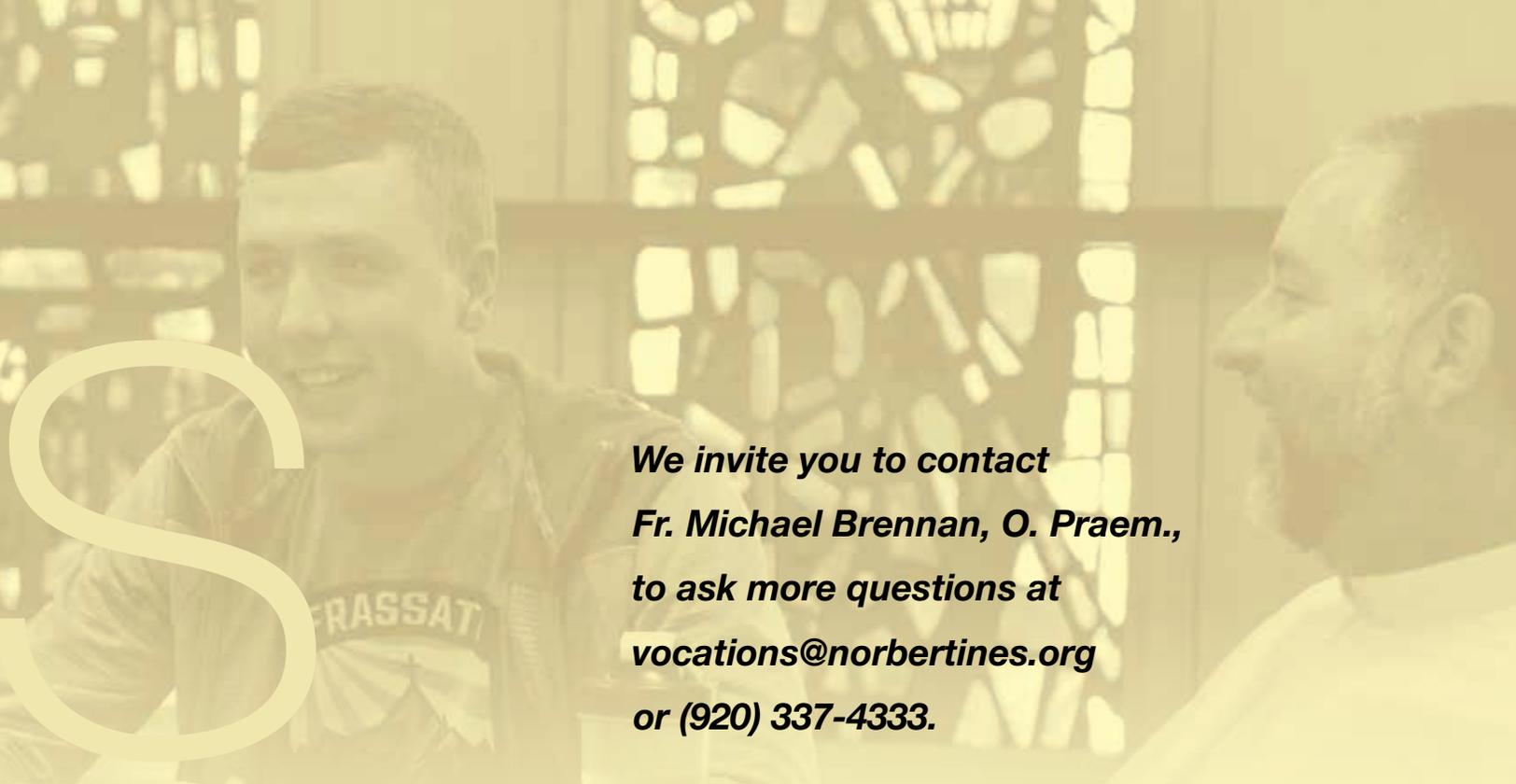
One of the blessings of Norbertine life is that we live in community, not alone. There are approximately 40 members who live at St. Norbert Abbey where we each have our own room. Just as a person can feel lonesome in the midst of family, one can still feel pangs of loneliness as a Norbertine. However, daily prayer, Mass, shared meals, and recreation mean we are each constantly called back into community. In fact, some Norbertines who are assigned to parishes still choose to live at the abbey. Our members consistently list community as a significant advantage of Norbertine life.

## **What are the academic and other requirements for acceptance into Norbertine formation?**

Men who begin Norbertine formation for the priesthood typically hold an undergraduate degree in any discipline. However, men who have completed two years of college and/or have comparable life experience can apply. As they discern Norbertine life, men need to take the time to learn more about Norbertine life and the spiritual and theological formation processes through visits, conversations, and retreats. After significant interaction with the Norbertine community, a man can request an application for a live-in experience and/or an application to enter the Order. Both applications include a thorough behavioral assessment, recommendations, a background check, and a spiritual autobiography. This process helps determine if they are well-suited for the priesthood and the Order.

## **What about sexual abuse?**

In light of the sexual abuse crisis that has affected all of us in the Catholic Church, the Norbertines are intentional in our screening, application reviews, and ongoing training for all members of our community. This practice is rooted in genuine concern for victims of sexual abuse and their families, and to prevent future abuse. It is also a reminder of the ongoing need for well-rounded, healthy, and dedicated men to serve a world and a Church that longs for love, hope, and healing.



***We invite you to contact  
Fr. Michael Brennan, O. Praem.,  
to ask more questions at  
[vocations@norbertines.org](mailto:vocations@norbertines.org)  
or (920) 337-4333.***

### **Can a Norbertine have hobbies?**

Yes! We believe it is right to embrace our God-given talents, share them with others, and live healthfully. Our members are first obedient to the needs of the Order and then free to pursue their hobbies and creative pursuits. We are a community of potters, marathoners, fishermen, photographers, artists, podcasters, writers, cooks, Packers' fans, and musicians—among many other interests.

### **Do Norbertines have health coverage?**

Yes, due to early investments by the Norbertines of St. Norbert Abbey, we are able to provide lifelong health care to our members. In fact, the abbey includes a full nursing home wing so our members can age in place with the community they have come to know and love.

### **What about student debt?**

Men who carry student debt from their undergraduate studies should discuss their situation with the vocations director. The existence of student debt should not preclude a man from discerning with and applying to St. Norbert Abbey.

### **Are Norbertines required to wear their habits?**

Norbertines are not required to wear their habits; however, some men choose to wear the habit the majority of the time—both at home at St. Norbert Abbey and while serving the local community. Others, depending on their activities and environment, choose to wear either the Roman collar or “regular” clothes. Whether in habit or not, we recognize our white habit as an outward sign of inner conversion.

### **Do Norbertines have “jobs”?**

Our members have a wide range of professional qualifications in addition to their vocations as Norbertines. In conjunction with the needs of the Order and the local Church, the Order and individual Norbertine work together to determine a man's further education and professional development. At this time in our local history, our members are most often called to service at Notre Dame Academy, St. Norbert College, parish ministry, and social justice work.

### **What is a typical day like for Norbertines at St. Norbert Abbey?**

At 7:30 a.m., we come together as a community to sing Morning Prayer (Lauds). After breakfast, we head off to our assigned ministries. Those who can be present, participate in noon prayer and lunch at the abbey. Every afternoon, we come together again for 4:30 Mass, 5:00 Vespers, 5:30 recreation, and 6:00 dinner. Sometimes after dinner, confrères also head out for evening ministry obligations.



**ST. NORBERT ABBEY**  
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## Something to Contemplate

# The Upside of Name Calling

By Fr. Michael Brennan, O. Praem.,  
Director of Vocations St. Norbert Abbey



Do you remember the times in your life when you were called by name? Maybe your mom calling you by your first and middle name (never a good sign), or being chosen first, last, or somewhere in between for the kickball team? In fourth grade, I remember Sr. Macrina calling us by name to be trained to serve as altar boys at Queen of All Saints. I also remember being called out by my high school algebra teacher when I shared my homework answers with the girl in front of me. In contrast, being named to lead Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) retreats and serve as student government president were a bit more honorable, thank God.

As adults, our opportunities for being summoned, awarded, or shamed by name seem to precipitously decrease. We tend to get in a groove of life-as-usual, whether it's study, work, family obligations, or a combination thereof. It takes special effort to pause and listen for our name because, after a certain point, it tends not to be announced out loud. Often, these callings are more subtle, and like Samuel, they may even keep us awake at night (1 Sam 3:7-11). Should I continue in my



current major? Rent or buy? Marry this person? Investigate this quiet yet persistent interest in the priesthood or religious life? Our calls become less of something to do and more of something—or someone—to become.

I think it's fair to say that the major, mortgage, and marriage questions will invite plenty of well-intentioned advice. People will want to help you choose, offer opinions, or plan your bachelor party. The priesthood calling, on the other hand, also involves lots of prayer—yours and those who will help pray you into the best place for you. In fact, you will have no idea how many times your name is raised to heaven! It still humbles me to think of all those prayers offered up for me as I discerned my call to the priesthood. I was carried here by name; I was ultimately named a priest.

If you know a young man of faith who would be a compassionate and holy priest, tell him. Call him by name when you speak with him. Start to pray him into this place by name. Then give him mine.

**Fr. Michael Brennan, O. Praem.**  
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