

The Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

FIRST FRUITS

Month of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, August 2020 / Issue 50



“AND SHE SHALL BE CALLED MOTHER,
For all shall be her children.”

— cf. Psalm 87



The Heart of the World

“It mattered little to Norbert and to these women that they were not the Church’s head or arms; it was enough that by their love, contemplation and devotion they were its heart.”
 — *The Order of Prémontré: History and Spirituality*, Rev. Bernard Ardura, O. Praem.

Contemplative monasteries are often referred to as the heart of the Church. For while Christ’s Mystical Body has many members and all are necessary, God has willed that His nuns, like the heart in a natural body, fulfill that role which is silent and hidden, yet essential to the life of the body and its members. And like the heart, they are protected by a sort of rib-cage, that is, the cloister.

renunciation not only of things but also of space, of contacts, of so many benefits of creation, at one with the fruitful silence of the Word on the Cross.” (Verbi Sponsa)

On the Cross, Jesus sacrificed Himself completely for the sake of all mankind. The cloister exists not because nuns who dwell within it seek isolation from the world, but because the Lord has called us to give ourselves, in union with our Divine Spouse, as a loving, voluntary offering for the needs of the world. The enclosure is meant to establish a disposition in the nun’s heart: in imitation of the Sacred Heart of Christ on the Cross, she sacrifices her whole self for the sake of all mankind, giving up all for her Beloved Bridegroom and souls.

This cloister – with its clearly defined limits, its inaccessibility to outside traffic, its separation underlined by the grille partitions – may confuse or raise questions for those unfamiliar with its true purpose.

And what is its true purpose?

“The enclosure, even in its physical form, is a special way of being with the Lord, of sharing in ‘Christ’s emptying of Himself by means of a radical poverty, expressed in...



The Grille – looking into the nuns’ choir from the lay chapel

Dear Confreres, Family and Friends of the Bethlehem Priory, *Laudetur Jesus Christus!* On the 5th of July, the day after we celebrate the founding of our nation, the Church in California celebrates the feast of Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners (though this year on a Sunday), patroness of our state. In light of recent events, it seems particularly poignant to have such a powerful patroness in our civil life, as our nation experiences very dramatically the effects of the fallen condition of our humanity. In the Virgin Mary, in her Immaculate Heart, we seek and find refuge from all the pandemonium, and we find a Mother who not only knows what it is to suffer (though she never sinned), but is present before God, bringing our many needs to Him.

Like Our Blessed Mother, we strive daily to live more and more in the presence of God, so that we may place before Him not only our own shortcomings and failures that need to be healed, but also all the many needs of our brothers and sisters throughout America, and indeed throughout the world.

May Jesus fill you with His true peace in this month of His Mother’s Heart.

In the Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Mother Mary Augustiny O. Praem.

Mother Mary Augustine, O. Praem., Prioress
 & the Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

ANNOUNCING WITH JOY
 THE UPCOMING

— Jubilee Year —

November 29, 2020 – December 31, 2021

Celebrating the 900th Anniversary
 OF THE
 Norbertine Order



“St. Norbert established a clergy dedicated to the ideals of the Gospel and the apostolic Church.

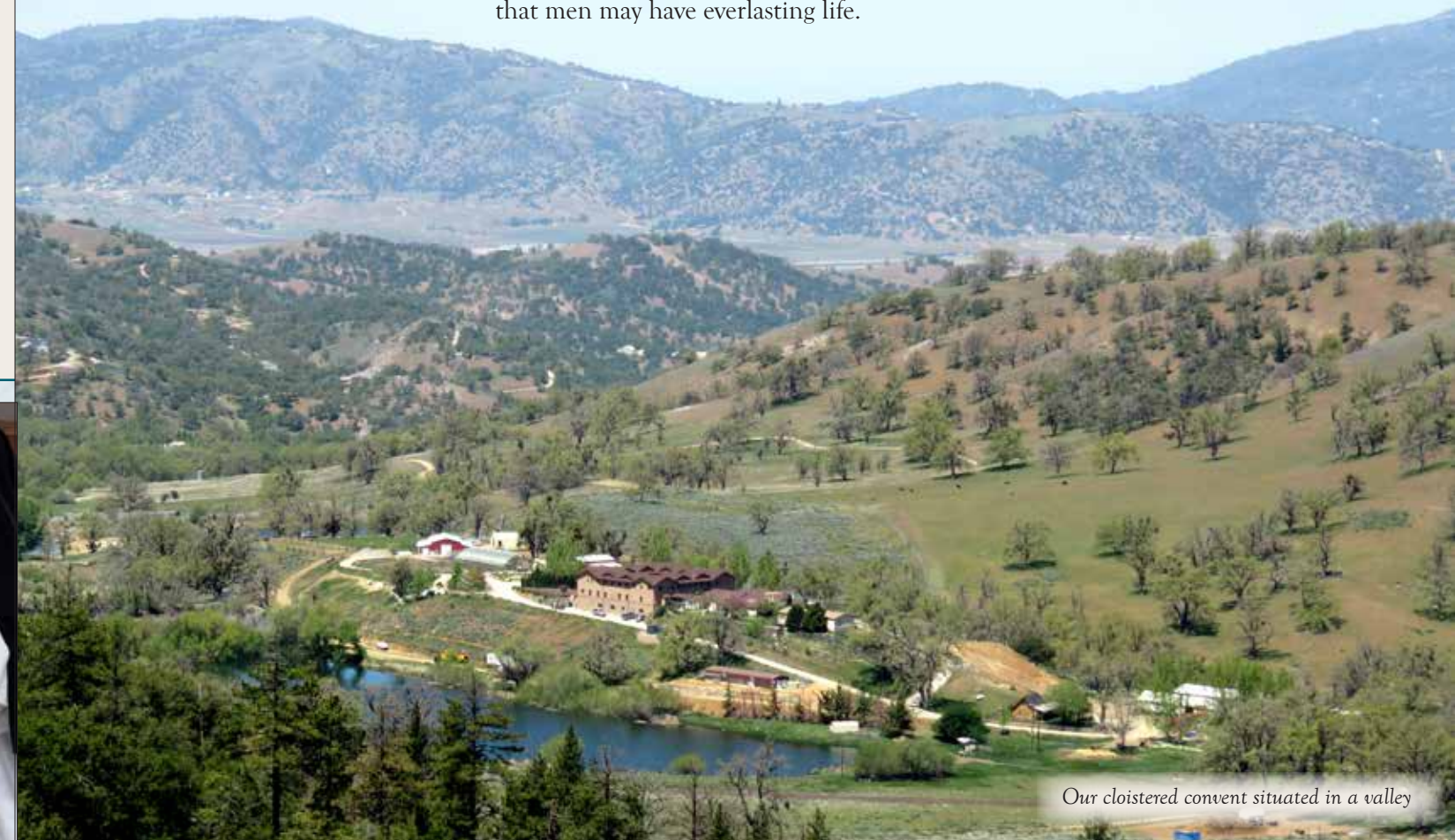
Inspired by the practice of the early Church, Norbert exhorted the faithful to join the monastic life in some capacity.

So many men and women responded to the invitation that many asserted that no man since the apostles themselves had inspired so many to embrace the monastic life.”

— From the Office of Readings for the Feast of St Norbert, June 6th

FIRST PROFESSION OF VOWS

On June 6th, 2020, the Feast of St Norbert, Sr. Dina Marie, O.Praem., made her First Profession of Vows, promising the conversion of her ways and life in community, especially in poverty, chastity and obedience, for three years, and received a black veil.



Our cloistered convent situated in a valley



— For God and For Souls —

“CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER IS A COMMUNION OF LOVE BEARING LIFE FOR THE MULTITUDE...”

— Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2719

Contemplatives, following the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, dedicate their lives — not exclusively, but intensely — to a particular spiritual work of mercy: *intercessory prayer for souls*.

Although she lives in heaven, Mary never takes her eyes of mercy off of this valley of tears. She knows the sorrows of life and has let them pierce her Immaculate Heart. This is why her gaze is so attentive. In her purity, Mary is a reminder of Paradise. She calls out to souls, hungry for peace, to a garden greater than Eden: “Come to me, all you who desire me, and eat of my fruits.” (Sirach 24:19)

How does Mary, and the contemplative nun who strives to imitate her, exercise mercy? Mercy means to bear the burden of another as one’s own in order to alleviate it. At the foot of the Cross, Jesus’ Mother stood near silently. Nevertheless, her heart was active. Contemplative nuns also may be silent and set apart, but are “intent on sharing to a more universal degree the fatigue, the misery and the hopes of all mankind.” (*Venite Seorsum*)

There is, however, one name, one face, one Heart, that occupies their hearts. In the light of the face of Jesus, the faces of people of every generation, lined with their joys and sorrows, shine. Contemplative life is a search for the face of Jesus, “*the human face of God and the divine face of man*,” (St. John Paul II) through assiduous prayer and meditation on Holy Scripture.

When Saint Norbert founded the Order of Prémontré, his purpose was to reform the priesthood. For this, he needed sons who, by their holiness of life, in word and in deed, through exemplary preaching and reverence about the altar, would call many to a conversion of ways. In the sermon attributed to him, however, Saint Norbert holds up, not a priest, but a penitent woman, as a model. He praises St. Mary Magdalene who, “*with an ear intent on contemplation*,” sat at the Lord’s feet and listened. The daughters of Saint Norbert, like this saint, choose “*the better part*.” (Luke 10:42) They are called to always look toward Him and for Him in prayer.



“Offer to God the praise of the whole Church, and gather the Christian people around their Lord...”

SO THAT THE NAME OF GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED IN EVERY HEART.”

— St. John Paul II, to the Praemonstratensian Order, 1993

In their personal search for God and for holiness, contemplative nuns are seeking to make their hearts fertile gardens for the Word of God, so that it may take root and bear fruit a hundred-fold.

After His Resurrection, Jesus concealed Himself as a gardener. As the Fathers of the Church teach us, His choice of disguise is significant. In the beginning, when God placed Adam and Eve in Eden, He surrounded them with beautiful trees. All of them were theirs to eat except one, if Adam would only fulfill God’s command to garden, to till soil, that is, to cleanse his heart, purifying and preparing it for evening, the time set for walking with God. Eve, too, was to work on the soil of her own heart, that she may become in fact what she was in name, “*the mother of all the living*.” (Genesis 3:20) However, Adam and Eve failed to obey God. Sin and death entered the world through their transgression, thus eliciting from God a new plan of mercy.

Jesus, the Divine Gardener, called St. Mary Magdalene by name, inviting her to join Him, the New Adam, and His Mother, the New Eve, to share in their work of giving life, effected through the tilling of the soil of men’s hearts by the Cross. It was beneath this Cross that the Blessed Virgin Mary had ratified the commitment she made at the Annunciation, when she gave herself not only to Him, but to the sons and daughters He was to bring to glory, whom He was not ashamed to call brethren (Cf. Hebrews 2:11-12).

With the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Mary Magdalene beneath the tree of the Cross, which has become the Tree of Life, the Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory kneel as they work to till the soil of their own hearts, striving to make them fertile ground for spiritual maternity, so that in turn, the hearts of all men may be made fertile and fruitful. Following St. Norbert, the Apostle of the Eucharist, they bring the intentions of Jesus’ brethren before this Cross, this Tree of Life, upon which hangs the source of every blessing, spiritual and temporal. He, the Eucharistic Lord, is the fruit of Mary’s Immaculate Heart. Contemplative nuns are joined to her as they strive to draw His graces down to feed their children.



Events at the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph



1)



3)



4)



5)



6)



8)



9)



2)



7)



10)



11)

✦ IN MARCH

1) Lest Our Lord come like a thief in the night and find us not ready, we began preparing the ground in our private cemetery, for burial of future deceased members of our community.

✦ IN APRIL

2) We welcomed a few new litters of puppies. Most of the puppies were reserved before birth, and we look forward to welcoming new litters of English Labradors in the fall.

3) For the first time in the history of our community, our lay chapel was empty during the Triduum and Easter liturgies, due to the COVID-19 situation. We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to our beloved confreres at St. Michael's Abbey and our other dear priest friends for continuing in their dedicated service to our community, enabling us to have daily Holy Mass as we carry in our hearts all those who have not had access to the Sacraments. With you, we continue to pray for all those most affected by the pandemic, for healing and strength, and for its end.

✦ IN MAY

4) As is our annual tradition, in May we had a full community "St. Joseph the Worker" outdoor work day, a five-hour hike and picnic through our cloister hills, and the "May Crowning" of Our Lady. (See also photo on page 2.)

5) We continue to be blessed by the friendship and generosity of many visiting priests, who celebrate Mass and the Liturgy with us when our confreres are unable to do so.

✦ IN JUNE

6) On the 6th, the Feast of St. Norbert, Sr. Dina Marie, O. Praem., made her first profession of vows.

(See also photos on page 2.)

7) Planting began in our large garden: squash, pumpkins, melons, tomatoes, chard and greens, green beans, leeks, onions and garlic, herbs, lettuce, carrots, cabbage, asparagus, and more. Due to the short growing season in Tehachapi, we start many of these vegetables inside our greenhouse, and then in June, plant the young shoots outside in the earth.

8) On the 10th, the Vigil of Corpus Christi, we had a Eucharistic Procession around our convent grounds, with our confrere, Rev. Adrian Sanchez, O. Praem.

9) Our private cemetery is completed with freshly-laid donated sod, thanks to the generous help of volunteers.

✦ IN JULY

10) On the 4th, we remembered, in a special way, our country, the United States of America, as we celebrated a votive Mass of the Immaculate Conception (our country's patroness), praying that God continue to bless America and keep her as "one nation under God... with liberty and justice for all."

11) By mid-July our garden had grown considerably, and harvesting of various fruits and vegetables had begun.

12) Our newest aspirant entered our community and several new and returning discerners made "come and see" visits.

Monastery Expansion & Our Current Needs

We invite you to help with Phase II of our Monastery Expansion Project and other pressing needs:

COMMUNITY LIVING EXPENSES:

Not unlike a large family, our community's household, kitchen, dairy kitchen, farm/animal, garden, vehicle, maintenance, utilities, office, clothing, medical, insurance, and other needs are significant. Your support is deeply appreciated, whether by check or cash, online credit card donations via PayPal (www.norbertinesisters.com/donate/), or donations which we can arrange in-house for you. Please call (661-823-1066) or email us if you have questions (norbertinecanonesses@gmail.com).

PHASE II OF OUR MONASTERY EXPANSION PROJECT:

We remain deeply grateful to all of you who are helping to build our future chapel, which will replace our current chapel, still housed in the twice-expanded converted game room and living room of the property's original 70-year-old ranch home. The estimated cost of Phase II's chapel and wing construction is \$12 million, with \$8 million required to take the next step of commissioning a complete architectural design and blueprints. With over \$3.1 million raised to date, thanks to the continuing generosity of our dear friends like you, we continue to place all in God's loving providence, trusting that He is blessing all of you, and will raise up our chapel in His perfect timing and according to His holy will.

www.norbertinesisters.org



Conceptual Drawing of our Future Chapel By Mark Russell, A.I.A., Radian Design Group, Inc.

God Bless You!



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— *A Special Thank You* —

We thank you, dear friends, near and far, for entrusting to us your prayer intentions via email, letter, telephone, and in person. We are truly blessed to accompany you on this earthly pilgrimage, remembering you in a special way in our daily prayers and sacrifices.

(Above: Each day, the nuns read our prayer board containing requests received that day, bringing them into our hearts and lifting them up to Our Eucharistic Lord.)

May God reward you for helping to build this first North American foundation of Norbertine Canonesses!

Norbertine Canonesses

— WEBSITE —

- ♣ Online Monastery Gift Shop
- ♣ Photo Gallery
- ♣ Horarium in Photos
- ♣ Information on our Holy Founder, St. Norbert

www.norbertinesisters.org

♣ MONASTERY GIFT SHOP HOURS:
 Daily 10-11:30 am, 2:30-5 pm
 (except Fridays, 2:30-4:15 pm)

♣ FOR GIFT SHOP PURCHASES:
 Please visit our website at
www.norbertinesisters.org

♣ WE ARE HERE TO OFFER PRAYERS FOR YOU AND YOUR INTENTIONS:
 You are welcome to call us:
 (661) 823-1066 – or –
 email us: pray_req@cybersurfers.net or
 MotherMaryA@aol.com

Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners

PATRONESS OF CALIFORNIA

– Pray for us –



“WITH SO GREAT A PATRONESS WHAT CAN WE NOT PROMISE OURSELVES?
 WHAT CAN BE WANTING AND WHOM NEED WE FEAR?”

– Bishop Francisco Garcia Diejo, 1st Bishop of the Californias, at the proclamation of patronage, 1843

Please kindly help us update our address & email database by sending us your current information.