

# FIRSTFRUITS

*"Mary is the image and firstfruits of the heavenly Jerusalem."*

[Pope St. John Paul II, Homily for the Dedication of the Shrine of Divine Love, July 4, 1999]

*"You cannot understand Mary without Her motherhood;  
you cannot understand the Church without Her motherhood,  
and you are icons of Mary and the Church."*

— Pope Francis, Address to the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), May 8, 2013



*“O Mary, bright dawn of the new world,  
Mother of the living,  
to you do we entrust the cause of life.”*

Look down, O Mother, upon the vast numbers of babies not allowed to be born, of the poor whose lives are made difficult, of men and women who are victims of brutal violence, of the elderly and sick killed by indifference or out of misguided mercy. Grant that all who believe in your Son may proclaim the Gospel of Life with honesty and love to the people of our time. Obtain for them the grace to accept the Gospel as a gift ever new, the joy of celebrating it with gratitude throughout their lives, and the courage to bear witness to it resolutely, in order to build, together with all people of good will, a civilization of truth and love, to the praise and glory of God, the Creator and lover of life.”

[Pope St. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 105  
Icon prayer cards available at [www.hli.org/oceantoocean](http://www.hli.org/oceantoocean)]



Procession from our Chapter Room to the Choir



We were recently blessed to receive a visit from a copy of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa, on pilgrimage across the world for the intentions of an end to abortion and the culture of death and the protection of religious liberty.

Rev. Peter West of Human Life International (HLI) in his article “History of the Black Madonna” [See [www.hli.org/oceantoocean](http://www.hli.org/oceantoocean)] explains the impetus for this worldwide pilgrimage:

“[Many] historic events [connected with the Icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa] testify to the all-too-often forgotten power of prayer – particularly in asking for the intercession of the Blessed Mother to deliver the faithful from problems that seem too overwhelming for any practical human solution....”



Rev. Peter West of Human Life International preaches in our chapel during a votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary, concelebrated with our confrere Rev. Martin Benzoni, O. Praem.

Beloved Confreres, Parents, Family, Benefactors and Friends,  
*Laudetur Jesus Christus!* With her “fiat” at the Annunciation, her “yes” to God’s plan for her [LUKE 1:38], the Blessed Virgin Mary freely consented to be united to the redemptive mission of Christ, the “new Adam” [cf. 1 CORINTHIANS 15:22, 45]. Standing at the foot of the Cross as the “new Eve,” united with her Divine Son in boundless love and so participating most fully in His work of restoring to life those dead in sin, Mary truly became the “mother of all the living” [See St. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* III, 2, 78; cf. GENESIS 3:20, JOHN 19:27, REVELATION 12:17]. She ever intercedes for us, so that we, too, may become more and more transformed in Christ, and so drawn into His work of glorifying the Father and saving souls. Like Mary, as spiritual mothers, may we labor to bring Christ to spiritual birth in every heart.

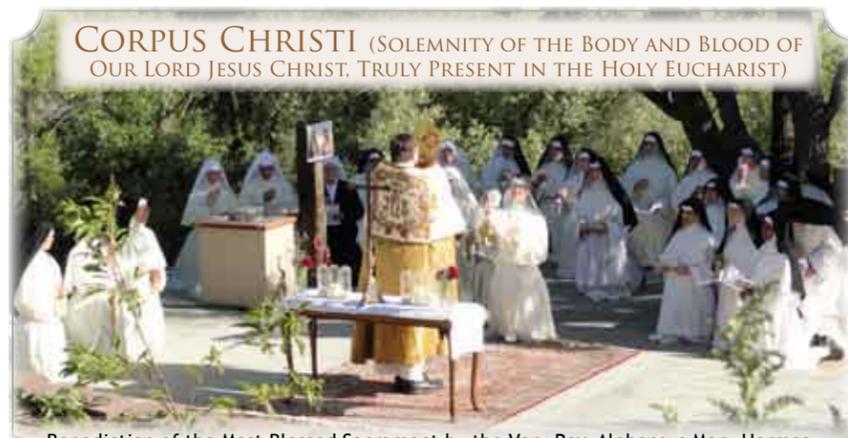
Amidst our life of prayer and sacrifice for the needs of the Church and the world, we are especially united with you at this time in asking Our Lady’s intercession for the dire plight of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. May we all join our prayers to those of Mary, asking that all nations and persons will come to realize the infinite love God has for each soul, the dignity of each human being, and that it is only Christ Who can bring healing to our troubled world.

In this issue of *FirstFruits*, we share with you the recent visit of the pro-life pilgrim icon of the Madonna of Czestochowa, as well as the five marks of our Norbertine spirituality and other central elements of our way of life. Rejoicing in the recent Vestitions and Professions of Vows within our community, we also continue the stages of religious life from our Christmas 2013 issue, highlighting the grace of Profession. As we await the upcoming “Year of Consecrated Life,” to begin on November 30, 2014, filled with gratitude for the grace of our Norbertine cloistered vocation, we recall Pope Francis’ words to women religious: “Be joyful, because it is beautiful to follow Jesus, it is beautiful to become living icons of Our Lady and of our hierarchic Holy Mother Church.” [Address to the International Union of Superiors General (IUSG), May 8, 2013].

To Jesus through Mary,

*Mother Mary Augustiny O. Praem.*

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



Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament by the Very Rev. Alphonsus Mary Hermes, O. Praem., our Provost, during our Eucharistic Procession, June 19, 2014

## For the Sake of the Kingdom...

### THE FIVE MARKS OF THE NORBERTINE ORDER

Spurred on by a profound conversion, our holy father St. Norbert wished to combine the duties of the canonical life with the rigors of monastic observance in accordance with the Gospel of Christ and a community vowed to the apostolic way of life found in the Rule of St. Augustine. The fundamental elements of Norbertine spirituality have traditionally been summarized in the following five marks:

### SOLEMN & REVERENTIAL CELEBRATION OF THE SACRED LITURGY IN CHOIR

Solemn and reverential liturgical prayer is the heart of Norbertine canonical life. As canonesses, participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and praying the seven canonical hours of the Divine Office in choir (i.e., chanted by the whole community in our chapel) is the *first and essential form of our apostolate*. Pride of place is given to Latin and ancient Gregorian chants because they are the official language and music of the Roman Catholic Church. [See Pope St. Pius X’s *motu proprio* on Sacred Music, *Tra le sollecitudini*, the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* nn. 36, 51; 54; 116]

*“The chief motivation for your sharing life together is to live harmoniously in the house, and to have one heart and one soul seeking God.”*  
[Opening chapter of the Rule of St. Augustine, I.2; see ACTS 4:32]



Our growing community in our “garth” (monastic enclosed garden) on the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 15, 2014

### DEVOTION TO THE HOLY EUCHARIST

Central to our Order’s spirituality is devotion to our Eucharistic Lord. St. Norbert, known as the “Apostle of the Eucharist,” was a defender of the Real Presence against the heretic Tanchelm, who falsely asserted that the validity of the sacraments is dependent on the sanctity of the priest rather than the saving action of Christ. A daily community Holy Hour of Eucharistic Adoration is one of our cherished expressions of this devotion.

### DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Norbertines have a deep devotion to the Immaculate Virgin Mary, whom Our Lord has given as Mother of the Church. Some of the many ways we express this devotion are: promoting the Act of Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary; our daily community Rosary; including Mary in our religious names; and honoring her on Saturdays with votive Mass and Office when the liturgical calendar permits.

**SPIRIT OF PENANCE** Realizing that “all men have sinned,” and conscious of the misery of a world far from God, our holy father St. Norbert bequeathed to us a personal commitment to penance, i.e, to continual conversion and reparation. Following in the monastic tradition, fasting and perpetual abstinence from meat, midnight Vigils, silence, and cloister form some of the principal means of our communal penance.

**ZEAL FOR SOULS** The last mark is the fervent will to do anything necessary to win souls for Christ. Filled with our Order’s apostolic spirit, the Norbertine canoness must seek to imbue her every action with maternal love, by which she embraces the entire world, desiring to bring Christ to spiritual birth in every heart.

## HANDING ON THE (ALMOST) 900-YEAR-OLD CHARISM OF ST. NORBERT...



*“[T]he charism of the founder has the power to awaken vocations for the life-situations which correspond to the special needs of the ‘Mystical Body,’ and to make fruitful the religious life of those who respond to this special calling. As the Spirit stirred the founder, so also He stirs up the vocations of the followers to service for the total benefit of the Church.”*

— The Very Rev. Bernard Ardura, O. Praem., “Reflections on the Charism of Prémontré”

### OUR NORBERTINE CHARISM OF “ECCLESIAL COMMUNIO”

The life of the Apostles and early Christians in Jerusalem formed St. Norbert’s ideal and led to his choice of St. Augustine’s Rule for Prémontré: “The *Vita Apostolica* is, under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ, to have one heart and one mind; to have all things in common; to persevere in the teaching of the Apostles; to persevere together in prayer with Mary, the mother of Jesus; to break bread with joy, that is, to have the Eucharist as the center of all life; to give witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ Our Lord by preaching, by good

example, and by every form of the apostolate [cf. ACTS 1:13-14; 2:42-27; 4:31-35; 6:1-7, etc.] This *Vita Apostolica* should be considered as the highest ideal, which ought to distinguish our entire life.”

— Constitutions of the Canonesses Regular of the Order of Prémontré, 34

## VESTITION AND ENTRANCE INTO THE NOVITIATE

June 6, 2014



Sr. Mary Juan (Jennifer) and Sr. Mary Gemma (Bernadette) are clothed in the traditional Norbertine habit and white veil of the novice and receive our Constitutions on the Solemnity of our holy father St. Norbert.



Our holy father and founder St. Norbert (c. 1080-1134)

# The Stages of Religious Life: Profession of Vows

With the recent first profession of vows of five of our sisters, we rejoice in continuing to share with you in our FirstFruits newsletter the stages of religious life, focusing on profession. (The first two stages of postulancy and novitiate are contained in our Christmas 2013 FirstFruits newsletter.)

*"We exhort you, dearest brethern, to be most diligent in the service of God, to Whom you have consecrated yourselves by the profession of special vows."*



Our Mother Mary Augustine leads us on the "arduous ascent" during our annual community hike on the monastery property.

*"Having of your own free will and purely for the love of God renounced your earthly possessions as well as your very selves, you are obliged to carry the Cross of Christ on your shoulders daily, that is: to bear patiently the continued difficulties of various sufferings while dedicating your entire life to penance. This indeed is the narrow road to heaven which leads those who walk it perfectly to their true homeland. This is the way which Jesus Christ vigorously manifested to you long ago in His life and death, in His words and deeds. Unless you approach this narrow road with confidence, and walk it to the best of your ability, you cannot come to Christ...."*

— From the "Sermon of our Holy Father St. Norbert, Archbishop of Magdeburg and Founder of the Order of Prémontré, to His Brothers"

## For the Sake of the Kingdom...

### SIMPLE PROFESSION

After completing the two-year period of novitiate, a novice makes her first profession of vows, promising poverty, chastity, obedience, the conversion of her ways, and life in community for three years. This time in temporary vows, which can be extended up to nine years, may be compared to the time of engagement before marriage: Sister has formally said "yes" to Jesus' call, and now seeks, relying on God's grace, to deepen her understanding of and fidelity to the vows, so that she may offer herself forever to Jesus in solemn profession with ultimate generosity and love.

*"I renounce the world, and I promise a conversion of my ways and life in community, especially in poverty, consecrated chastity and obedience, according to the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions of the Canonesses Regular of the Order of Prémontré, to you, Mother Prioress, and to the Sisters for three years."*

— Norbertine Vow Formula for Temporary Profession from the Order of Religious Profession for Canonesses Regular in the Order of Prémontré, n. 28

*"We should never forget that consecrated life, before being a commitment of men and women, is a gift which comes from on high, an initiative of the Father 'Who draws His creatures to Himself with a special love and for a special mission' [Vita Consecrata, 17]. This look of special love profoundly touches the heart of the one called, who is urged by the Holy Spirit to place himself or herself in the footsteps of Christ, in a particular way of following Him, by means of assuming the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. A stupendous gift!"*

— Message of Pope St. John Paul II for the First World Day of Consecrated Life, 1997

### SOLEMN PROFESSION

PERPETUAL CONSECRATION TO JESUS AS HIS BRIDE

At her solemn profession, Sister is espoused to Jesus Christ within the context of an individual "church" of our Order, to which she vows stability. As a Bride of Christ, she receives a wedding ring, as well as the canonical rochet (see Mother below in the First Profession photos).



*"I, Sister N., offer and dedicate myself to the Church of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, and I promise a conversion of my ways and life in community, especially in poverty, consecrated chastity, and obedience, according to the Gospel of Christ and the apostolic way of life, according to the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions of the Canonesses Regular of the Order of Prémontré, in the presence of Mother N., prioress of this church, and of the sisters."*

— Norbertine Vow Formula for Solemn Profession from the Order of Religious Profession for Canonesses Regular in the Order of Prémontré, n. 57

FROM OUR VOW FORMULA...  
*"and I promise a conversion of my ways"*

By the ancient monastic vow of conversion of ways, we commit ourselves to an ongoing (daily!) Christian conversion of heart. To this end, we further embrace the external change from a secular demeanor and way of life to the practice of the monastic observances (e.g. silence, enclosure, penance, the habit, etc.), which centuries of experience have shown are efficacious means of fostering this internal conversion.



Daily Chapter of Faults

Our holy father St. Norbert especially recommended the daily Chapter of Faults, promoting love of neighbor and forgiveness achieved in an examen and correction of faults against charity, which the living of the Rule is meant to engender. Thus the quest for sanctity becomes a community venture, as we strive to become more and more "one heart and one mind on the way to God."

## FIRST PROFESSION OF VOWS

ON THE OCCASION OF THE SOLEMNITY OF OUR HOLY FATHER ST. NORBERT  
June 6, 2014

*"You will soon make a consecration of your lives, of your love, to God. Like the white Host of Jesus, which does not move far from the altar, but is cloistered in the tabernacle or monstrance, in union with Jesus your lives are lived in quiet, ever interceding for the apostles and the Church and the entire world."*

— Our Provost, the Very Rev. Alphonsus Mary Hermes, O. Praem., Homily for First Profession, June 6, 2014

Sister professes her vows in Mother Prioress' hands



Sr. Mary Geneviève

Sister signs and dates the vow formula she had written out beforehand



Sr. Mary Pio

Mother Prioress, who receives the vows in the name of the Church, also signs



Sr. Mary Agnes

Our Provost presents the black veil of the professed to each, saying, "Receive this sacred veil by which your complete submission to Christ the Lord and your dedication to the service of the Church will be known."



Sr. Mary Thomas

Mother and the Novice Mistress clothe the newly professed in the black veil



Sr. Mary André

Profession is appropriately made within the context of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, since the aim of all religious life is to join in Christ's perfect self-offering to the Father



Our Provost, the Very Rev. Alphonsus Mary Hermes, O. Praem., and Rev. Dave Leon, of the Diocese of San Diego, offer the Holy Sacrifice



Making beds for our new postulants



Building and landscaping a multi-tiered garden



Mother brings dirt for our wall-building crew



Our Norbertine Sister shepherdess teaches our baby goats to process

*“Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being. Do it for the Lord rather than for men, since you know full well you will receive an inheritance from Him as your reward. Be slaves of Christ the Lord.”*

[COLOSSIANS 3:23-24]

### OUR HORARIUM (OR SCHEDULE)

*(Please call for our Friday and Sunday schedules)*

Midnight	Vigils – Office of Readings (Matins)
6:00 am	Morning prayer (Lauds) & Angelus
6:30 am	Martyrology & Chapter
7:15 am	Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament & Mid-morning prayer (Terce)
8:20 am	Benediction
8:30 am	The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
10:00 am	Work, Class, or Study
11:45 am	Mid-day prayer (Sext), Angelus & Rosary
1:00 pm	Mid-afternoon prayer (None)
1:30 pm	Grand Silence - prayer, rest, exercise, etc.
2:30 pm	Work, Class, or Study
5:15 pm	Evening prayer (Vespers) & Angelus
5:45 pm	Lectio Divina
6:30 pm	Supper, followed by Recreation
8:00 pm	Night prayer (Compline)
9:00 pm	“Lights Out”

#### Some of our work includes...

accounting ✦ administration ✦ archiving ✦ correspondence & thank you's ✦ logging prayer requests, prayer enrollments ✦ phones & reception ✦ Bethany Guest House ✦ gift shop ✦ apothecary ✦ artisanal cheese-making ✦ sacred vestments ✦ wreaths ✦ bees/honey ✦ chickens, baby cows & goats, cats & dogs ✦ preparing the Liturgy ✦ sacristy ✦ class & study ✦ library ✦ preparing for teaching classes ✦ cleaning ✦ cooking & dishes ✦ housekeeping ✦ ironing & laundry ✦ sewing & mending ✦ building ✦ maintenance & upkeep ✦ firewood ✦ gardening, harvesting, mowing, planting, lavender, pruning ✦ ...and more!

#### Mother of the Divine Shepherd and Lamb of God



Following a vision in 1703 of the Blessed Virgin dressed as a shepherdess and feeding roses to Her flock, the Spanish Capuchin Fray Isidore commissioned a painting depicting this scene. Similar depictions like that above became widespread in Spanish America.

– “La divina pastora,” a portable rolled sarga painting used for missionary work, from the Carmel Mission collection

*May God reward you for helping us in our efforts, following Norbertine tradition, toward becoming financially self-supporting through our own work...*

Here at the Bethlehem Priory, our “official” work period (including study and classes) is about four hours daily given our full schedule of prayer. As we continue to strive for self-sufficiency (a requirement of all Norbertine communities), our means of support include Bethany Guest House, our gift shop and bookstore, fine sacred vestments, and our fresh balsam Christmas wreaths (see back page), as we pursue licensing for our artisanal cheeses.



With God's grace, our artisanal cheeses will become a significant means of support once the necessary permits have been obtained.



#### OUR CURRENT PRESSING FUNDING NEEDS: OVER \$1 MILLION FOR MILKING PARLOR MODIFICATIONS & LAND

As a young and growing foundation of cloistered nuns, with the reality of needing to build a monastery, we trust that our goal to be self-supporting will be met over time, that is, in God's time. We are profoundly grateful to all of you who have helped to make our convent expansion project a reality, and we thank you in advance for your prayers and material help with our current pressing funding needs, for which we will have to raise over \$1 million:

1. We are in the process of addressing additional requirements for our milking parlor and the surrounding areas. These modifications are necessary to receive the licenses/permits for our now-required Grade A dairy for producing our cheese.
2. The purchase of our land from St. Michael's Abbey.

Your tax-deductible\* monetary gift, of whatever amount, will continue to make a difference in our lives:

1. Make checks to: “Norbertine Canonesses” (Memo: “Expansion & Land Fund”)
2. Donate via PayPal on our website: [www.norbertinesisters.org](http://www.norbertinesisters.org) for on-line credit card donations

\* We are a 501(c)(3) religious non-profit organization.

#### - BETHANY GUEST HOUSE - Sharing with you the Norbertine charism of prayer and hospitality



For parents visiting from afar, for those discerning religious vocations, for anyone seeking a time of

more intense prayer and solitude...it's for you. (Day visits and overnight stays are possible.)

Call now to schedule your visit and for details (weather, dress, etc.): (661) 823-1066



#### Handmade Rosaries and Chaplets

Custom-Made Rosaries Available Upon Request

#### In Corde Mariae

#### Chant CD

Selections of our Premonstratensian Gregorian Chant from the Liturgical Year in honor of the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary



#### Gift Items Made by the Sisters

Homemade Aprons, Baptismal Baby Blankets, Lavendar Sachets, Calligraphy & Dried Flower Cards, “Nun Cards” ...and more!

#### St. Norbert Statue and Medals

Please see our website, [www.norbertinesisters.org](http://www.norbertinesisters.org), to learn more about the medals and statue of St. Norbert especially commissioned by the Norbertine Canonesses, available through our gift shop.



Now Available: Bronze Medal



S. NORBERT



THE NORBERTINE CANONESSES OF THE BETHLEHEM PRIORY OF ST. JOSEPH  
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The father of one of our Sisters adds more stanchions for milking our dairy cows.

## THE NORBERTINE CANONESSES' 2014 CHRISTMAS WREATHS

ORDER FOR YOURSELF, OR AS GIFTS FOR FAMILY,  
FRIENDS, EMPLOYEES, CLIENTS, CUSTOMERS, ETC.

### FRESH HAND-MADE BALSAM WREATHS

24-inch pre-made rounds with full fresh Balsam (Northern White Fir) pine boughs: 2-3 pounds of balsam greenery, adorned with frosted and regular pine cones, & a large custom-design ribbon hand-made by the Sisters

Shipped across the country in specialty wreath boxes

- PLEASE SEE OUR WEBSITE,  
[WWW.NORBERTINESISTERS.ORG](http://WWW.NORBERTINESISTERS.ORG)

FOR OUR UPCOMING WREATH FLYER -

- Please see page 7 for more Christmas gift items -

## THE NORBERTINE CANONESSES' MONASTERY GIFT SHOP

Welcome!  
Open 10-11:30 am  
& 2:30-5:00 pm daily  
(Friday 4:15 pm)

Our inventory includes religious goods & books; home-made biscotti, jam, honey, & apothecary items; aprons, baptismal baby blankets; & dried flower, calligraphy & other greeting cards.



Ask about our gift certificates & prayer enrollment cards.



ON THE COVER: A copy of the Icon of Czestochowa on pro-life pilgrimage around the world with Human Life International. Please see page 2 of this issue for more information. Said to have been "written" by St. Luke on a table from the home of the Holy Family, the original icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa is venerated at the shrine of Jasna Gora in Poland. Many miracles and favors have been attributed to Mary's intercession invoked before this icon, including events leading to the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe. May our loving Mother bring an end to the culture of death.

A special thank you to the friends who funded this issue of our *FirstFruits* newsletter!

To learn more about our cloistered contemplative Norbertine way of life, make prayer requests, inquire about our vestments, gift shop, or Bethany Guest House, you are welcome to phone (661) 823-1066 or email us: pray\_req@cybersurfers.net or MotherMaryA@aol.com.

Also, please kindly help us update our address & email database by sending us your current information.  
Please check [www.norbertinesisters.org](http://www.norbertinesisters.org) for the downloadable version of this newsletter.

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