

The Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

FIRST FRUITS

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, December 8, 2019 / Issue 48



“O Mary Conceived Without Sin,

PRAY FOR US WHO HAVE RECOURSE TO THEE.”

– From St. Catherine Labouré’s Vision of Our Lady and the Miraculous Medal



Dear Confreres, Family and Friends of the Bethlehem Priory,

Laudetur Jesus Christus! During this time of preparation for the sacred Christmas season, we turn to Our Blessed Mother, the most pure and holy Virgin Mary, that she may lead us to her Son.

In the beginning, when the devil tempted the first woman and the human race was tainted with sin, God promised a new Woman whose seed would crush the head of the serpent, the devil (cf. Genesis 3:15). That Woman is Mary, who, as shown in the book of Revelation, is a "great sign...clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1).

In our own days, when so many of God's children are being insidiously tempted by the ancient serpent, and the human race seems to be falling deeper and deeper into sin, we look to Mary, the Immaculate One, as our "great sign" of hope – for in God's loving plan, through her seed, Christ our Savior, she will crush the head of the serpent who is trying so fiercely to gain mastery over our hearts, our Church and our world. By remaining faithful to the Mother and her Son, we are assured of victory, for God has promised it, and through the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts of Jesus and Mary, He will carry it out.

May all of you have a fruitful Advent, and a very blessed Christmas, filled with God's grace, peace and divine love.

Prayerfully in Our Lord and Our Lady,

Mother Mary Augustine O. Praem.

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

"From the rising of the sun to its setting, may the Name of the Lord be praised."

As we celebrate
the solemn Advent season and
approach the sacred season of Christmas,

**WE CORDIALLY
INVITE ONE AND ALL**

to join us at our monastery for the
prayer of the whole Church, the Liturgy,
especially on the occasions of

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
December 9th (transferred from the 8th
due to falling on a Sunday)

THE "O" ANTIPHON SEASON
December 17th - 23rd, Solemn Vespers

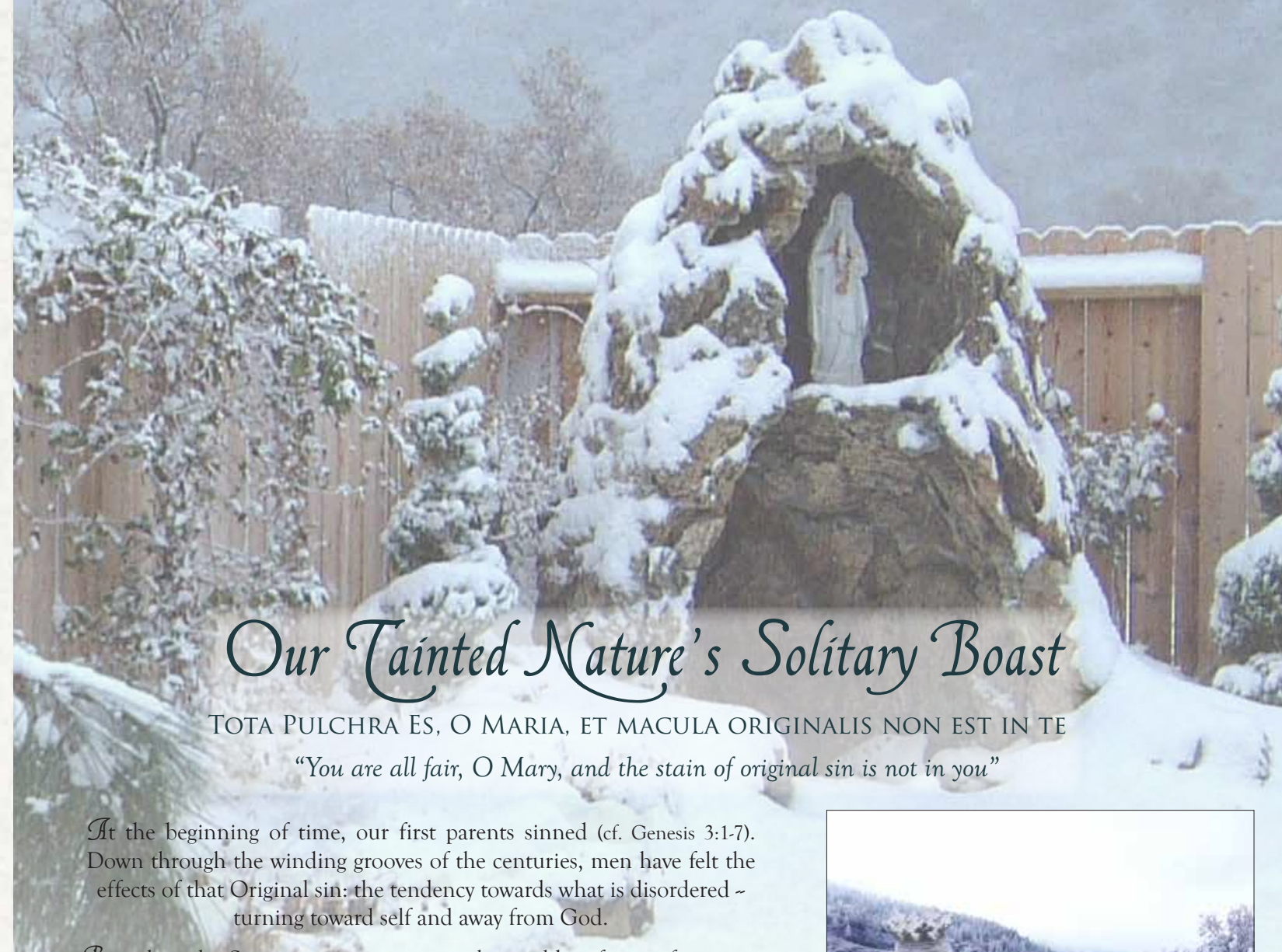
CHRISTMAS DAY
December 24th & 25th
Please call for Mass and Office times.



— OUR HORARIUM —

(Please call for our Friday and Sunday schedules.)

Midnight	Vigils – Office of Readings (Matins)
6:00 am	Morning prayer (Lauds) & Angelus
6:35 am	Chapter (Martyrology & the Rule)
7:15 am	Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament & Mid-morning prayer (Terce)
8:15 am	Benediction
8:30 am	The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
10:00 am	Work, Class, or Study
11:40 am	Mid-day prayer (Sext), Angelus & Rosary
1:05 pm	Mid-afternoon prayer (None)
1:30 pm	Grand Silence - prayer, rest, exercise, etc
2:30 pm	Work, Class, or Study
5:10 pm	Evening prayer (Vespers) & Angelus
5:40 pm	Lectio Divina
6:25 pm	Supper, followed by Recreation
8:00 pm	Night prayer (Compline)
9:00 pm	"Lights Out"



Our Tainted Nature's Solitary Boast

TOTA PULCHRA ES, O MARIA, ET MACULA ORIGINALIS NON EST IN TE

"You are all fair, O Mary, and the stain of original sin is not in you"

At the beginning of time, our first parents sinned (cf. Genesis 3:1-7). Down through the winding grooves of the centuries, men have felt the effects of that Original sin: the tendency towards what is disordered ~ turning toward self and away from God.

But when the Savior was to come into the world to free us from our slavery to sin, the Redeemer - being Himself God - came to save our tainted nature as one utterly untainted. It was fitting, therefore, that the mother from whom He was to be born should likewise be immaculate.

By the foreseen merits of the passion and death that our Savior, Jesus Christ, would undergo, our Heavenly Father, God Almighty, by a singular and unique privilege, preserved the mother of His Son from ever being touched by that original wound.

For if God Himself was to be her Son, and she was to be His true mother, how could she carry out her unique vocation if in her heart she harbored an innate tendency to turn away from God and toward herself?

At the dawn of the new creation, the New Adam had as His mother this New Eve, the true mother of all the living. And so, once more mankind could lift up shamed faces in hope, marveling at what God could do in one of our own. For, as the Immaculate Virgin Mary herself exclaimed, "The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is His Name" (Luke 1:49).

Like her, we can rejoice in His Holiness, and, through the merits of the passion and death of her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, we can turn away from ourselves and back toward God, imitating her Immaculate Heart from which poured forth an unselfish and unceasing fiat:

"Be it done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).





TRUE DEVOTION TO *The Immaculate Conception*

— A NORBERTINE TRADITION —

“Ave Virgo quae Spiritu Sancto praeservante de tanto primi parentis peccato triumphasti innoxia!”

“Hail Virgin, who, having been preserved by the Holy Spirit from the sin of our first parents, has triumphed unharmed!”

— Our Holy Father, St. Norbert

During the nine days leading up to December 8th, we chant one of the most beautiful antiphons of the year: the “*Ave Virgo*,” traditionally attributed to our Holy Founder, St. Norbert, written as part of an office in honor of Our Lady’s Immaculate Conception. The antiphon forms part of our novena leading up to this Solemnity, as we commemorate and participate in our Order’s long devotion to this beautiful mystery.

The Premonstratensians were among the first of the Religious Orders to accept the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, centuries before it was proclaimed a dogma by Bl. Pope Pius IX. Bl. Guerric, a contemporary of our Founder, wrote that the very reason St. Norbert founded the Premonstratensians was “*in order to preach to the world of his time two particular mysteries, namely the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Immaculate Conception.*”

This devotion was one of the striking characteristics of St. Norbert and his early followers, who, according to some, saw their white, woolen, penitential habit as a symbol of the Immaculate Conception, and who, from the very beginning,

dedicated Norbertine churches to her, thus placing their houses under her protection. These canonries were particularly renowned for their austerity and penance, but with Mary they were as a paradise. Biographer Rev. François Petit, O. Praem. writes, “*The smile of Mary then cast a ray of grace, gentleness, sincere warmth, and poetry on the austere cloisters of the early Premonstratensians, tempering the harshness of penance and the canons’ absorption in apostolic work.... With her its cloisters became the vestibule of heaven*” (*The Spirituality of the Premonstratensians*).

So the Premonstratensian Order gave birth to deeply Marian souls, such as St. Herman Joseph (1150-1241), a great Norbertine Marian mystic, for in this Order of St. Norbert, souls found a safe haven beneath the mantle of their Mother: in her habit, in her houses and, indeed, in her heart.

Chanting our Founder’s hymn to his Lady, we join our voices to centuries of love and devotion given by Premonstratensian

Canons and Canonesses to their

— IMMACULATE MOTHER —



“The Virgin Shall Conceive and Bear a Son

AND SHALL NAME HIM EMMANUEL, THAT IS, GOD IS WITH US.”

— Isaiah 7:14

— Excerpt from a homily by Rev. Alan Benander O.Praem., our Confrere from St. Michael’s Abbey, Given to our Canonesses, December 20th, 2016

In the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola the saint exhorts his retreatants to consider the following meditation on the Annunciation: “*Call to mind how the three Divine Persons look down upon the whole expanse of the earth filled with human beings. They see that all are going down to hell. They decree that the Second Person should become man to save the human race. So when the fullness of time had come, they send the angel Gabriel to Our Lady.*”

But there’s more to the Incarnation than simply saving souls from being lost, as important as that is. Rather, the Incarnation, God becoming man, has an even more noble end: namely, that men might become like God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, puts it this way: “*The Word became flesh to make us partakers of the Divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4). The Only-Begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in His Divinity, assumed our nature, so that He, made man, might make men gods.*” And so it was decreed that this Incarnation should take place within the virginal womb of Our Lady...

Mary’s virginity was not a mere external observance, but rather it was both a sign and a cause of something much more important: her interior fidelity to Our Lord even prior to the Incarnation. Before conceiving Our Lord in her womb, she conceived Him in her soul. It was this which made her so pleasing to God, making her a fit dwelling place for the Incarnate God. Thus Mary became

the Mother of God, and served as the proximate occasion and even as a kind of cause of the Incarnation.

Just as God willed from all eternity that the Incarnation should take place only with and in the cooperating Virgin, so too God, we can safely say, continues to will that many incarnations (if you will), that is, men becoming God through grace, may more readily take place when He finds in the Church women who are faithful to living consecrated virginity. “*The virgin shall conceive and bear a son*” is true not only of the Holy Virgin herself, but also of all consecrated virgins. Through your fidelity to consecrated virginity, you become spiritual mothers bringing souls to birth in the order of grace: mini-Christ, mini-Incarnations.

Just as God looked and called upon Mary, the Virgin of virgins, to save souls from falling into hell at the time of the Incarnation, so too He looks and calls upon you, and all women living consecrated virginity, to faithfully live out your consecration in order to save souls from perdition. And, more than that, to elevate them to the supernatural, to make them to be like God.

Your consecration to God is vitally important for the Church and for the world – *vitally* important. Without women who are willing to give themselves over to Christ as His brides, willing to become in a very hidden and mysterious way mothers of souls, who knows what would become of our already breaking world?

Above: Our Lady gives St. Norbert the white, woolen habit of a penitent.

Below top: Chanting Solemn Vespers during Advent
Below bottom: The antiphon attributed to St. Norbert



A ve, Virgo, * quae Spí-ri-tu Sancto praë-ser-ván-te, de tanto primi pa-réntis peccá-to tri-umphásti innó-xi-a.

Above Left: At her Solemn Profession, the Canoness receives a ring as a sign of her virginal espousal to Christ (Photo: Rudy Aguilar © Adoremus Photography).

Above Right: The youngest postulant carries the Infant Jesus as the community processes into Christmas Midnight Mass (from 2018 Christmas at the Priory).



IN AUGUST

– We welcomed Mother General Aurelia and Sr. Adriana of the Congregation of the Norbertine Sisters for Mother’s first visit to our monastery. We enjoyed their brief time with us and the opportunity to learn more about the history of their congregation, as well to discuss the challenges facing women religious in our modern culture, both in America and Eastern Europe, the location of their motherhouse.

– The fruits with which God blessed us were reaped! This year yielded a bountiful harvest of peaches, berries and more. What exceeded our immediate ability to use, we canned, froze for future use, and shared with other families. (1)

IN SEPTEMBER

– The Lord blessed us with an abundant harvest of vegetables, including winter squash which, after curing, will keep well in our storage room throughout the winter and spring. (2)

– On September 8th, the birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Sr. Maria, having completed one year of aspirancy, entered our community as a postulant.

– Additional prayers and fasting were added to our schedule on behalf of the needs of the Church, especially as the Amazonian Synod approached. (3)

– We prepared to welcome three litters of puppies, with our English Labrador Retriever and McNab puppies all having been reserved before birth. We are grateful to have placed some puppies as future therapy or service dogs. (4)

IN OCTOBER

– We were graced with the presence of the Very Rev. Bernard Ardura, O. Praem., Procurator General of our Order, and Rt. Rev. James Herring, O. Praem., Prior of the Immaculate Conception Priory in Bayview, Delaware for their first visit to our monastery. Their time with us was a beautiful visible manifestation of *communio* within our Order, and we look forward to when God will bring them again to Tehachapi. (5)

– In solidarity with thousands of families in California, we experienced the first of a number of planned power outages intended to reduce the risk of wildfires. During this time we remembered especially in our prayers those who lost lives, homes, and property in the fires, as well as the fire-fighters and first responders who risked their lives for others.

IN NOVEMBER

– From November 2nd - 10th our Priory’s daily conventual Masses were offered for the faithful departed whose names were shared with us through our Holy Souls novena mailing. We thank all who participated, and we kept the remembrance cards near the sanctuary in our chapel throughout the month.

– In mid-November, we received fresh wreath rounds for our annual fundraiser, and began assembling our Christmas wreaths for shipping throughout California and the country.

– On November 21st, the Presentation of Mary, the first anniversary of their entrance, Sr. Elisabeth Marie (St. Elisabeth of the Trinity) and Sr. Marie Christine (Christine of Christ) received the habit and their new religious names. (6)



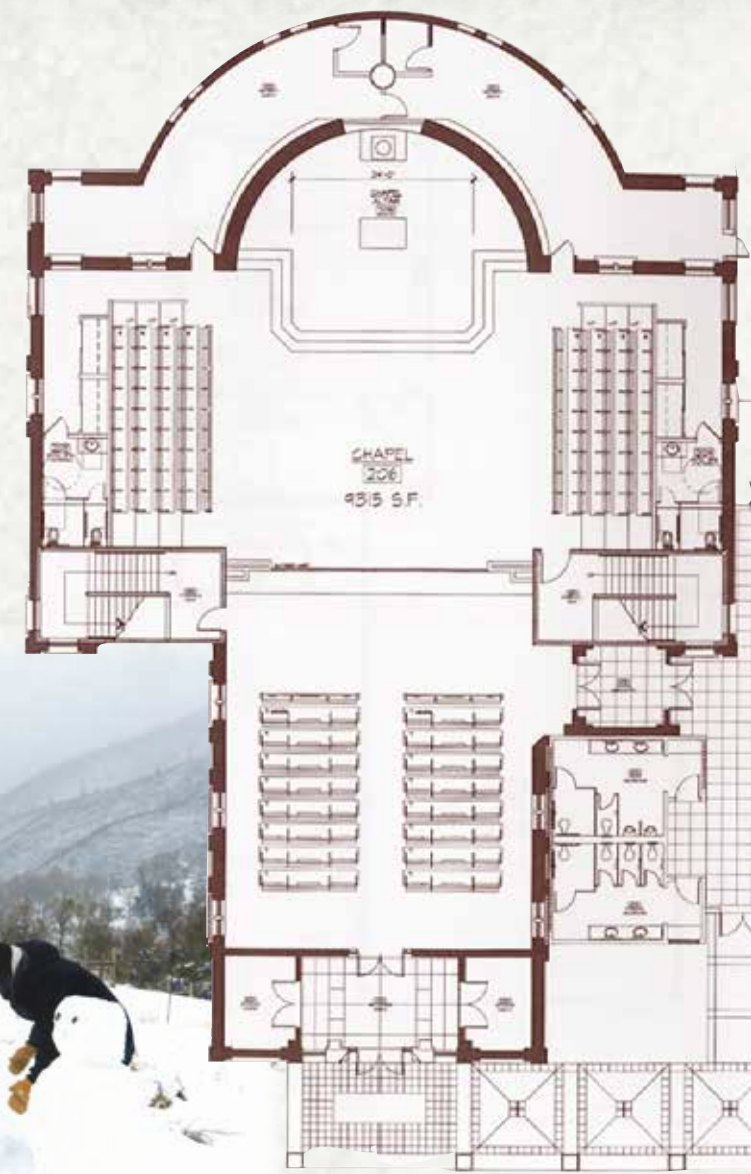
We invite you to help with Phase II of our Monastery Expansion Project and other pressing needs:

COMMUNITY LIVING EXPENSES:

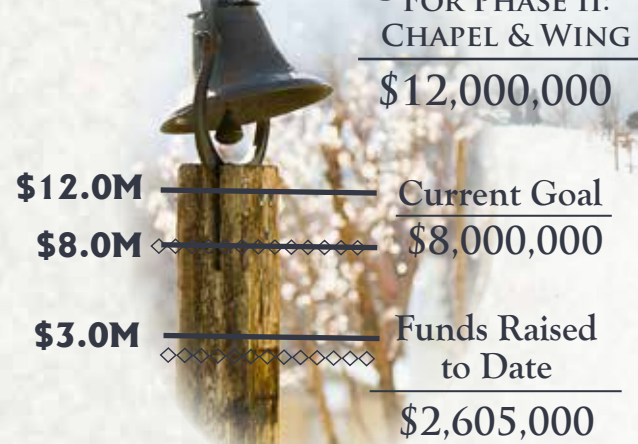
Not unlike a large family, our community’s household, kitchen, dairy kitchen, farm/animal, garden, vehicle, maintenance, utilities, office, clothing, medical, insurance, and other needs are significant. Your support is deeply appreciated, whether by check or cash, online credit card donations via PayPal (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. We continue to place all in God’s loving providence, trusting that He is blessing all of our benefactors and will raise up our chapel in His perfect timing and according to His good pleasure.



Monies Needed



R. Belcher

Postulants build a snowman.

Conceptual Floor plan of our future chapel



THE NORBERTINE CANONESSES
OF THE BETHLEHEM PRIORY OF ST. JOSEPH

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U.S. Postage
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— *A Special Thank You* —

To our many dear friends who assist us with us our farm and dog breeding needs ~ through generous donations of livestock, animal feed, supplies, and more, as well as volunteering time and professional services.

May God bless you all.

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:
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(661) 823-1066 - or -
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“O Come Let Us Adore Him...”

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