



Norbertine Community News

NORBERTINE COMMUNITY OF NEW MEXICO

From the Prior's Desk...



The Norbertines of Santa Maria de la Vid Priory arrived in New Mexico in 1985. We were missioned by our brothers of St. Norbert Abbey in Wisconsin to establish a permanent foundation of our

community in the southwest. This simply means that our goal is to become an independent abbey someday. Until that day arrives, we are still dependent upon St. Norbert Abbey for both some personnel and financial support. In other words, we remain members of St. Norbert Abbey.

The priests and brothers of St. Norbert Abbey are preparing for the election of their sixth abbot on April 23rd of this year. All solemnly professed members of the abbey are the electors. Eight of us at Santa Maria de la Vid Priory will have the privilege of participating in the election of our new abbot.

What is an abbot? Our constitutions, *The Day of Pentecost*, indicate that the abbot, as a member and head of the community, should preside over and enliven the community he governs. It further states:

While on a human level equal to his brethren, he is distinguished by the service of his leadership; he should "deem himself happy to serve them in loving care" (Rule of St. Augustine, Chapter 7). Placed over a community in the ministry of leadership and exercising his office with pastoral care in word and example, he above all should maintain a careful balance between the members as individuals and the community as a whole, always carefully seeking the spiritual and material advancement of both.

In early January of this year six of us traveled to our abbey in De Pere, Wisconsin, to participate in a Renewal Chapter, a week-long dialogue in preparation for the election in April. Our exchange centered around identifying the unmet needs of the universal Church and local churches in which we serve as well as the unmet needs of our own community. Then we discussed what kind of leadership these needs demand.

In light of that conversation a final area of dialogue centered on that to which the Holy Spirit is calling each and every one of us. This prayerful and spiritual discussion led to our "lifting up" the names of some of our members as the election approaches. The men who have been "lifted up" are to discern by April 2nd whether they are willing to be considered for election. We committed ourselves to praying for and affirming these men through personal calls and letters.

We will all share in a day of reflection on the day before the election itself. We ask that all of the *Friends of the New Mexico Norbertines* join us in prayer as we move toward this historic event of electing a new leader.



Classmates: Fr. Lambert Baeten and Fr. Fran Dorff

Our Norbertine brother, Fr. Lambert Baeten, visited us recently just prior to his returning to his mission work in Peru. Father Lambert has served in Peru for thirty-six years. His present ministry is as pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption Mission in the jungle, 192 miles upriver from the Northern city of Iquitos. It is accessible by boat.

"Our only worry," he said, "is the drug traffickers." Traffickers recruit natives to transport drugs into Columbia. People have been killed when rival gangs hijack shipments and prey on the traffickers. American anti-drug efforts, led by the Drug Enforcement Administration, have eliminated much trafficking.

"We have the best school in the Amazon," he said. Fr. Lambert serves many villages up and down the Napo River. The children come to board at the school during the school year. Peru has become Fr. Lambert's home spiritually. His heart is there and he looks forward

Continued on page 4...



During the past two years I was spiritual director for five candidates in the Santa Fe Archdiocese diaconate program. In the course of their program, they were required to explore a range of ministerial possibilities for deacons by assisting in a variety of “internships.” One of the candidates was helping in a jail ministry, and he shared his experiences with me quite often. His impressions of the needs of the incarcerated and their gratitude for helpful intervention aroused in me a latent sense of guilt because I have never, in all my ministerial history, directly served the incarcerated, even though I have had some sense of their neediness.

That latent sense of guilt was actively seeking my attention when I chanced on an announcement that the Archdiocese of Santa Fe had received a grant to establish its *Threshold Program*. The program was designed to help parolees from youth detention to make the transition from detention to normal life by avoiding a return to the things that had led them into criminal activity. (I learned later from a staff person that the rate of recidivism at his detention program was 85% and that most of these young people would probably spend a large part of the rest of their lives in some kind of prison.) A *Threshold* orientation meeting encouraged me to volunteer. I was attracted by the desire to do *something*, and this particular “something” did not require

familiarity with the inner culture of a penal institution. After some training sessions, I was assigned to a parolee who had already been released.

After about a month, it was apparent that he was not really interested in the relationship. We were supposed to meet weekly, but he frequently failed to show. The *Threshold* director decided that we terminate the attempt, and assigned me to a different boy who was about to be paroled. That is, he expected to be paroled. When his hearing took place, he was denied parole and was committed to an additional two years of detention in a maximum security facility. Apparently, he had not yet responded successfully to the treatment program. In retrospect, I can understand why. At our second meeting, he had handed me a written biography. He was sixteen years old, and in those sixteen years he had experienced every negative influence imaginable: dysfunctional family, sexually abused, drugs, gang membership. In spite of that history, he has a desire and a will to establish a personal covenant with God, and to change himself and become a productive member of society.

I had been meeting with him weekly at his treatment location for about three months in anticipation of his exiting the “threshold.” When it became apparent that he was not going to exit any time soon, he ceased to be an appropriate candidate for the *Threshold Program*. By that time, we had established a friendship that I was not willing to abandon and that he wanted also to continue. With the approval of the director, we resigned from the *Threshold Program*.

I kept visiting him regularly at the maximum security facility. As its name implies, visiting was a cumbersome process. At the suggestion of the deacon who supervises the religious support program at the facility, and with his help, I obtained formal recognition as a

Volunteer Chaplain. That status allowed me ready access at times other than the specified visiting day. Our friendship deepened. I like to think that it helped him, too. Recently, he was moved from maximum security to medium security. There seems also to be the possibility that he will be paroled before the end of the two years.

I said that our friendship deepened. So did my understanding of the penal institution and its culture. And so did my involvement in that culture. The deacon asked me to expand my visits to include some kind of catechetical instruction for other inmates who have had no experience of that kind of instruction. It has not been a smooth experience. The young men participate well. The staff are as helpful as they can be, but in the maximum security facility, discipline, procedure and schedule take precedence over all other claims on the time of the inmates. I started with six names, but in two months, I have never had more than four participants and often had only two. Two of the six (including my friend) have been moved to another facility. I am now meeting twice a week in two different places. I also preside at Eucharist every other week, if it is not cancelled.

I am becoming acclimated. I feel more and more like a member of an important enterprise. My friend seems to be doing well. When he is paroled, we will probably rejoin the *Threshold Program*. But I suspect that when that happens, I will continue to be a volunteer chaplain at the youth detention center, as long as my pacemaker and my knees hold out. And as long as the Prior does not exercise his veto power.



At age 84, Fr. Vincent is a “retired” member of the community who continues to be active as a spiritual director, environmentalist, cantor, and now prison chaplain. He is an inspiration to all of us.

Justice and Peace at the Parish Level by Fr. Eugene Gries, O.Praem.



At Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish, the Justice and Peace Committee is about four years old. Membership fluctuates—our mailing extends to fourteen people. Our fundamental call is to educate and raise the awareness level of people in the Parish about the social teachings of the Church and their application to current issues in our society and world today.

Some of our efforts are in cooperation with the Pastoral Outreach Office of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

Our actions to accomplish our task over the past four years have included raising awareness levels about responsible citizenship as Catholics during the electoral process on the local, state and national level; calling for reflection on capital punishment and holding a prayer vigil on the evening that a prisoner was executed in New Mexico; after training, becoming part of a team that mentors inmates as they leave prison; raising awareness levels about the problem of domestic violence; setting up a literature stand in the gathering space of the church that includes literature on matters of Justice and Peace, domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse; offering support to the Albuquerque Mental Health Office enabling them to establish a home for

homeless mothers with little children and other marginal persons; preaching from the pulpit on matters of justice and peace; including a monthly calendar in the parish bulletin that highlights significant events or acknowledges special days that have a justice and peace flavor to be placed on the refrigerator in the family kitchen; placing significant justice and peace statements on the Sunday morning breakfast tables in the parish hall for the people to see; dedicating some time to prayer and reflection as a committee.

Our Committee does not have a road map or blue print on how to proceed, but we are committed to the Catholic Church's belief that justice is at the heart of the gospel. We attempt to address current issues and try to honor the parish goal of enhancing the awareness and participation of the parish in matters of justice and peace.

Spring Retreats



Fr. Fran Dorff, O.Praem., will be offering a series of retreats at the Norbertine Hermitage Retreat this spring on meditative writing. These retreat experiences include a two-

hour meditation *Envisioning Peace in Violent Times* on February 21-22, two days of reflection on Saturday, March 1 and 29, and two weekend retreats on April 25-27 and May 16-18. If you are interested in participating in any of the retreats above or making a private retreat here at the priory, please contact the Norbertine Hermitage Retreat at 505-873-4399, ext 224 for reservations or more information.

St. Norbert and St. Augustine

Saints Augustine and Norbert are the spiritual fathers of the Norbertine Community. The statue of these two saints offers us the Word of God opened to the *Acts of the Apostles* and to the text where the early Christian community is described as being “of one mind and one heart.” These founders of the Norbertine way of life are portrayed here as embodying this text by being “soul friends,” and by inviting us to do the same. In doing so they exemplify the Augustinian rule of life that the Norbertines follow. The two men are simply dressed to reflect the monastic poverty in which both of them lived. This statue was created by Troy Williams of Jemez Springs, New Mexico and is dedicated to the memory of the members of St. Norbert Abbey in Wisconsin and Daylesford Abbey in Pennsylvania. Our current Abbot E. Thomas De Wane and our founding Abbot Benjamin Mackin represented St. Norbert Abbey at the blessing and dedication of the statue on November 13, the Feast of All Saints of the Norbertine Order. Fr. Dominic Rossi and Fr. Joe Serano represented Daylesford Abbey. Both of the latter had served on the Pastoral Team at the Norbertine Parish of Holy Rosary during the 1990’s.



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**Please remember us
in YOUR WILL -
that our work may
continue...**

Comings and Goings....

On November 13, the Feast of All Saints of the Norbertine Order, six lay associates participated in a Rite of Commitment at Vespers...**Fr. Achilles Van Hoof**, a Norbertine from Belgium who was involved for many years with the mission work of his abbey, came by Greyhound Bus from our abbey in Wisconsin to visit us for ten days...**Michael Doyle** and **Robert Campbell**, our seminarians attending Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, spent the Christmas holidays with us and will return during the Spring break from school to participate in a Vocation Discernment Weekend with young men exploring a call to religious life...**Fr. Stephen VandenBoogard**, a Norbertine chaplain in the Navy, spent Thanksgiving with us as he moved from his new assignment in California to a ship in Florida...**Fr. Gene Gries** recently presided at Mass for the family and friends of the incarcerated...**Fr. Joel Garner** visited **Fr. Jim Huth** who is writing his dissertation in the area of medical ethics in Toronto...**Fr. Nick**

Nirschl, recently retired as the pastor of St. Augustine in Isleta Pueblo, is helping regularly at various parishes in the Archdiocese and saying Mass during the week at the convent of the Canossian Sisters...**John Edwards**, our oblate and former executive assistant to the prior, continues to face difficult health issues each day, but he works through them with great faith, courage, and an extraordinary understanding of his own body as a former practicing nurse...**Br. Dennis Butler** continues to serve the community in a variety of ways, not the least of which is cooking the Saturday and Sunday evening meal...**Fr. Vincent De Leers**, our cantor, is initiating us in the new psalm tones for morning and evening prayer...**Fr. Christian O'Brien** spent one week at a retreat house in Tucson in a workshop training spiritual directors...**Jaime Avila-Borunda**, who is making his first year novitiate at St. Norbert Abbey, will return for a visit to the community during Holy Week...**Fr. Robert Fenzl** left at the end of January for a two and a half month stay in Peru where he had served for thirty four

years...**The week after Easter** a 1.7 million dollar renovation of the Family Center and Parish Offices will begin at the Norbertine parish of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary...**Fr. Joel Garner** is active in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe Vocation Committee which explores numerous ways to help others discern a call to priesthood and religious life...**Fr. Vincent De Leers** and **Fr. Gene Gries** recently attended a meeting of the Board of Trustees of St. Norbert College on which they serve.



From the Prior's Desk...*continued from page 1*

to the return to his people after a six-month stay in Wisconsin recovering from surgery. Two of his missionary colleagues for many years in Peru, Fr. Nick Nirschl and Fr. Roberto Fenzl, are presently ministering as members of Santa Maria de la Vid Priory.

Fr. Joel Garner
Prior

