



Norbertine Community News

From the Prior's Desk Norbertines of India



India is a country of great beauty and overwhelming poverty. I spent much of November in India as a visitor to a young Norbertine community along with our Abbot General Thomas Handgrattinger, a German Norbertine who lives in Rome. A visitation is an event that happens every six years when two Norbertines from outside a given Abbey or priory pay a visit to affirm the community's life and ministries as well as make suggestions for further development. Our eleven page report was discussed with the community at the end of our visit.

We interviewed over 50 Indian Norbertines as well as five groups of seminarians. The community of Mananthavady, founded out of a German abbey, is only twenty five years old. It has forty five young priests, the oldest of whom is 43, and forty seminarians. It is one of the two fastest growing Norbertine communities in the world.

India is a land with a population of over one billion people, one-sixth of the world population. Christians account for only 2.4% of the population, of which 1.6% are Catholic. The Hindus are about 75% of the population and the Muslims 14%.

The Norbertines of Mananthavady have their central house in Kerala, a state in the South of India, that has long been a Catholic stronghold. While the government is communist, the Catholics number about 34% of the population. The Christian tradition there is thought to go back to St. Thomas the Apostle, who preached the Gospel of Christ in this area about the year 52AD.

There are many religious communities in this part of India and vocations to both the priesthood and sisterhood are in great abundance. The climate is tropical, and farming is the primary source of income. Coffee and tea, rubber trees, coconuts and spices of all kinds are the principal crops. The Catholic families are generally large and there is a sense that one boy and one girl from each family should serve the church. From this kind of religious culture, vocations emerge.

Young Norbertine priests have moved to neighboring states to serve Catholics who them-

selves have relocated in order to obtain employment. In effect, they have become missionaries in their own country, where 70% of the people live in hand to mouth poverty. The middle class numbers about 25% of the population and the rich are 5%. Norbertines have started schools and social centers, and have worked with homeless youth.

The traffic in large cities like Bangalore, where the Norbertine House of Studies is located, is horrendous. Motorized rickshaws, cars, ox drawn carts, and cows, (which the Hindus hold to be sacred) are found on most streets. There are many motor scooters and it is frightening to see a family of several children and parents riding on one motor scooter with shopping items in their laps.

It took about nine hours to travel about 180 miles to a central mission station where the Norbertines minister. The roads are bad in the rural areas particularly in the mountains where the monsoons cause havoc each year.

Traveling through the mountains it is a common sight to see monkeys along side the road. At one point, we saw a herd of about twelve wild elephants.

One of the highlights was to participate in the ordination of a young Norbertine to the priesthood in his rural village church where the people turn out in the hundreds and sit on the floor of the church as well as outside during the three hour ceremony of ordination and a first Mass. The faith of the people is deep and highly devotional.

At the beginning of December, I flew from Bombay to Albuquerque on a 21 hour airplane trip. I arrived at the time when the commercialism through which we prepare for Christmas was at its height. It stood in stark contrast to the many scenes of poverty and real squalor that I had seen during my stay in India. I became keenly aware, as I celebrated Christmas this past year, how much we take for granted, and how much the deep mystery of that season can be eroded in a culture that has far greater material abundance than the ancient land I had just left. I celebrated my 2004 Christmas grateful, yet deeply challenged by the experience of my visit to India.

Fr. Joel Garner, O.Praem.

Jews and Catholics in Dialogue



By Vincent DeLeers, O.Praem.

Archaeologists tell us that even the most primitive human cultures invariably included a strong

belief in some kind of divine and personal superpower who is the very center of the culture. Is there evidence that this common cultural element has been a context for amicable relationship and cooperation? Indeed, the opposite is true. Witness the vicious anti-Semitism of Medieval Christian Europe that evolved into the Crusades and, eventually, the Holocaust.

But even in the midst of the Holocaust, there were Christians of every denomination who risked their lives to save their Jewish neighbors. That kind of benevolent sacrifice was motivated by the conviction that Jesus meant what he said when he commanded, "Love one another as I have loved you."

In recent years, there have been efforts by Jews and Christians to promote understanding and appreciation by conversing together and exploring what they share rather than what divides them. In 1984, one such effort was initiated by Rev. Ernest Falardeau, SSS., who was then the Director of the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. Through talks he was invited to give on the Vatican II teachings on interreligious relationships, he met Rabbi Paul Citrin and Rabbi Isaac Celnik. Their informal contacts evolved into a group sponsored by the Archdiocese that met regularly and engaged in education efforts. In 1989, the group was formally named, "The Jewish-Catholic Dialogue of New Mexico," and, in a kind of discernment retreat, defined itself and its mission. Based on that mission statement, in 1994 it offered its first "Colloquium," a full day session on some topic related to

Jewish-Catholic relationships. The Colloquium has been offered in March of every year since 1994. (The 12th Colloquium will be offered on March 1 at B'nai Israel Synagogue in Albuquerque.)

I was invited to join the Dialogue in 1989, during the discernment retreat mentioned above. I accepted happily and eagerly. My interest in interreligious relationships had been generated and enhanced by the refreshing insights of the Second Vatican Council. My membership in the Dialogue involved monthly meetings that were conversations on shared readings, and the various activities related to the annual Colloquium. I was appointed Treasurer of the latter. Last year, Father Joel Garner, Prior of our community, encouraged me to reduce my activities and "really to retire." As part of that retirement strategy, I resigned the monthly meetings, but remained on the Planning Committee for the Colloquium. I miss the meetings. I am going to discuss with the Prior a return to the meetings.

So much for history. How do I see the Dialogue now in retrospect? I consider it one of the most important experiences in my life. I met and worked with wonderful people whom I would never have met outside of the Dialogue, and some of whom have become close friends. I have a whole new perspective on the Jewish faith and its relationship to Christian faith. Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity arose out of the same roots and at the same time after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. They both claim their origins from the Hebrew Scriptures that we call the "Old Testament." The first Christians were all Jews. The handful of Jewish leaders who, for selfish reasons, engineered Jesus' trial and death, were not representative of the whole Jewish people. In some cities of the Roman Empire, the relationship between Christians and Jews was friendly and cooperative.

What are the roots of the anti-Semitism that characterized the Medieval Christian attitudes (and some contemporary fundamentalism)? I confess that I do not understand them, but I see no reason to perpetuate them in the contemporary Church. We should recognize and enjoy what we share, and mutually respect our differences. I found the Dialogue a perfect place to do just that. I am grateful that the Spirit led me into it and instructs me there. I am grateful for the friendships that have emerged from it. I hope they and the Dialogue will endure to the end of my journey and beyond.

Fr. Vincent DeLeers, O.Praem., at 86 years old is the senior Norbertine at the priory. He remains active in retirement.



Norbertine Parish Focus for Study



In recent years several liturgical documents issued from Rome have mandated changes

within the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The publication of these documents coincided with Dolly Sokol's pondering a proper dissertation topic to complete her Doctor of Philosophy degree in the department of Organizational Development at the University of New Mexico. Dolly is a member of the Norbertine Parish of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary in Albuquerque as well as the director of the Archdiocesan Office of Worship and Christian Initiation.

Organizational Development is the study of the improvement of organizations through systems design, (communication, formation and training, measurement and accountability, recognition and reward,

quality, etc.), leadership development, collaboration, and evaluation.

Holy Rosary has a full blown liturgical life with many parishioners involved in a wide range of liturgical ministries. The changes mandated particularly by the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (GIRM) needed to be discussed thoroughly if they were to be implemented successfully. Dolly Sokol's study was a vehicle for much discussion prior to the implementation of the changes recommended by the Roman document.

Her dissertation, entitled *Organizational and Cultural Change in the Liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church: An Action Research Study of a Vatican II Parish*, involved leading our parish through the changes required by the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*.

In her dissertation, Dr. Sokol states, "Key findings suggested that mandated changes were received and appropriated at a high level when those directly involved in implementing the organizational change had a voice in the change process. Because parish leaders took the time to reflect, discuss, strategize and implement, leaders and parishioners felt respected and educated in the process."

Dr. Dolly Sokol is married to Deacon Joe Herrera, one of the first native American Deacons ordained in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. Deacon Joe is a member of the Pastoral Team at Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish.

Spring Retreats by Fr. Fran Dorff, O. Praem.

April 9— *Going with the Flow of Life: Toward Living Gracefully*

April 23 — *Taking Your Soul to Work*

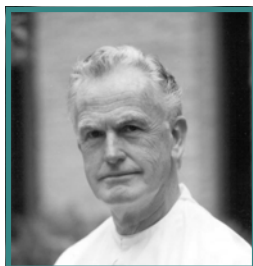
May 13-15 — *Living Creatively in a Broken World: Toward a Contemporary Spirituality*

May 27-29 — *Exploring your Soul's Dwelling Place*

For more information call
(505) 873-4399.

Celebrating Art as Spiritual Experience

By Francis Dorff, O.Praem.



During the past year and a half I have been having a delightful experience. I have had the joy of seeing a very gifted artist paint a story that came to me over thirty years ago. It is parable of a deeply troubled community that begins to come alive again when it takes a Rabbi's teaching to heart. Painting by painting, I have watched this parable come alive again in a most touchingly beautiful way. It came alive, not in words, but in an enchanting array of colors and meditative forms in twenty four original paintings. For me, this is a spiritual experience that is hard to forget. It is also extremely hard to describe.

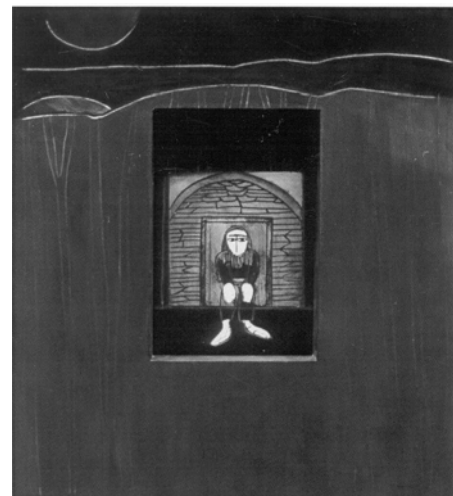
From July 9th to the 17th, the Norbertine community invites you to have a similar experience in our new Priory Church. During those days we will host an exhibit of Sheila Mahoney Keefe's paintings entitled, *The Untold Story: A Painted Parable*. The exhibit will include both the twenty-four original paintings through which the parable unfolds and a small collection of additional paintings entitled, *The Cloister Walk*. These two collections are closely related in spirit since *The Cloister Walk* came to the artist while she was painting the parable. Our beautiful Priory church provides a most congenial space in which to approach these paintings as a spiritual experience.

Sheila Keefe is a celebrated painter from Santa Fe, New Mexico, whose work has been exhibited across the country. Over the years she has worked in wood and various media before dedicating herself to painting the "contemporary icons" that are the present focus of her art. An admirable

simplicity, a great attention to detail, and a deeply meditative spirit are characteristic of Sheila's work. Sheila has already published two beautiful books in which she brings spiritual stories to life in her paintings. Hopefully, this new collection of her paintings will one day take book form as well.

This exhibit of *The Untold Story: A Painted Parable* is the initial offering in the Norbertine community's *Bridge Initiative*. The *Bridge Initiative* is a vision we have of inviting others to join us from time to time to celebrate art as a spiritual experience. We envision this exhibit as the first of many such celebrations. It will give you a unique opportunity to experience the whole parable expressed in this collection of paintings, since, immediately after being exhibited at the Priory, these paintings will be put on exhibit and sold at the Hand Artes Gallery in Truchas, New Mexico. After that they will no longer be seen together.

During these deeply trouble times, it is our fondest hope that, in celebrating *The Untold Story* with us, our guests may join us in taking the Rabbi's teaching to heart and coming alive again and again in the most graceful and creative ways.



The Untold Story #3

**NORBERTINE COMMUNITY OF
NEW MEXICO**

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that our work may
continue...**

Comings and Goings....

Brother Robert Campbell finished his first semester as a teacher and head of the Theology Department at Pius X High School in Albuquerque....

Jaime Avila-Borunda has completed his philosophy and theological requirements at an undergraduate level in preparation for his study at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago next Fall.... Fr. Larry Mayer, our newest member, was the overseer of the re-shaping of our welcome garden outside the church. He has also assumed the role of Chair of our house Liturgy

Committee as well as Cantor in the community.... In dialogue with our architect Robert Habiger we are nearing a final design for our new, small library... On the feast of All Saints of the Norbertine Order in November, three new persons were initiated as Norbertine Associates while six veteran Associates renewed their commitments. In July, several of the Associates will participate in the international meeting of Norbertine Associates at the Norbertine Abbey of Mondaye in France... Eugene Hayes, O.Praem., Abbot of St. Michael's Abbey in Califor-

nia, and Fr. Cyril Caals, the Procurator General of the Order who lives in Rome, will be Visitors to our community in February... Fr. Fran Dorff continues to be the lead presenter in the 72 hour ecumenical *Called Back to the Well Retreats* held at our Center for Spiritual Life. These retreats are made possible by a grant from the Lilly Foundation to the Samaritan Counseling Center in partnership with our Community.



Celebrating Art as Spiritual Experience

The Untold Story: A Painted Parable

By Sheila Mahoney Keefe

On a story by Francis Dorff, O.Praem.

July, 2005 Exhibition

July 9 - 17

At the Norbertine Center for Spiritual Life, Albuquerque

July 24 - August 31

At Hand Artes Gallery, Truchas