



# Norbertine Community News

NORBERTINE COMMUNITY OF NEW MEXICO



One of the meaningful traditions of our way of religious life is to have a cemetery on the grounds

of the Abbey in which we live. We are not yet an Abbey, but all the moves we make are intended to guide us in that direction.

Over the last few years we have been preparing to have a cemetery on our Priory grounds. As part of the Phase II of our development, it was blessed and dedicated on Memorial Day this year.

We gathered in the Church of Santa Maria de la Vid with about one hundred of our friends whom we serve in local parishes. We prayed together, and then processed to our new cemetery. It was there that I blessed the ground and the gravestones which serve as reminders of the service of our brothers in New Mexico.

Three of our men who died in New Mexico (Fr. Ed Sdano, Fr. Robert Brooks, and Fr. Norbert Manders) were moved from Mount Calvary Cemetery back to the Priory in late May. Two other men (Fr. Stan Joppe and Fr. Richard Mulroy) who died at St. Norbert Abbey in Wisconsin and are buried there, have gravestones here in remembrance of their ministry in New Mexico.



Blessing of Priory Cemetery, Memorial Day 2002

The cemetery lies to the east of Augustine Commons which is our gathering place for eating, recreation, and community activities. Since the cemetery is on a mesa overlooking the city and the Sandia Mountains, it is becoming a place of meditation for us. The walkways

are lit very subtly at night by solar lamps. They and the benches invite quiet moments of reflection and meditation, particularly in the evening when the view of the city and the mountains is quite engaging.



John Edwards, First Norbertine Oblate in America

The beautiful redwood and stainless steel cross which is framed against the mountains and the city arrived late in the summer. It is a Cross of Joy, a Cross of Resurrection, a Tree of Eternal Life. It speaks of the *dying*, but particularly of the great mystery of the *rising*. We blessed the cross on our community day in September.

Our sacred art project is coming to a fitting climax with the blessing and dedication of our sacred images for the church. At Vespers on September 8th, the Nativity of Mary, we blessed and dedicated the **Risen Christ, Our Lady of the Vine** (*Santa Maria de la Vid*), the **Madonna and Child**, and **Mary Magdalene**, and ten days later on September 18th, **John the Baptizer**.

Our patronal statue, Our Lady of the Vine (*Santa Maria de la Vid*), to whom our priory and church are dedicated, was blessed in *Honor of the Friends of the New Mexico Norbertines*. You are among them and for that we are deeply grateful.

Fr. Joel

# Profile: Fr. Francis Dorff, O.Praem



If I ever were to write an autobiography its title would be, “Living with a Restless Heart.” That’s what I see I have been doing for the past sixty-eight years and will be called to do for as long as God gives me life. At the heart of my life’s story I hear a very personalized version of St. Augustine’s classic prayer: “You have made *me* for yourself, O Lord, and *my* heart is restless until it rests in you.”

This restless heart of mine has been at one and the same time a blessing and a cross for me. On the one hand, it has graced me with a life-long love of learning and a heartfelt longing for God. On the other hand, it has made me feel like a lost pilgrim no matter where I have been and has obliged me to live with unanswered questions that even my best friends wish I wouldn’t bother asking. It has made me live with both a deep sense of God’s mysterious presence and an acute awareness of God’s painful absence in my life.

This restless heart of mine lets me see my life from the inside out. It lets me see that what is really important to me is not all the things I have said and done in my very rich life as a priest and teacher. What is really important to me is how faithful I have been to following my restless heart’s holy longing wherever it leads me. For me, this fidelity has been the deep source of my ongoing conversion and of whatever happiness I have known in my life as a priest. It has also prepared me, in a most surprising way, to be able to minister to others when their restless hearts lead them to question radically the meaning of their work, their church, their faith, and their life at times of transition.

I was born in Philadelphia in 1934 as the twelfth of thirteen children to faith-filled parents whose special love for me is one thing I have never questioned. In the Norbertines who taught me at Southeast Catholic High School in Philadelphia I met a community of dedicated teachers and men of God who clearly enjoyed each other’s company. My brother Joe was one of them. At fourteen years old I decided I would be one of them too if they would have me. I kept it a secret for four years, however, so that it wouldn’t cramp my social life.

I wish I could say that I became a Norbertine and lived happily ever after. But that is not what we Norbertines are all about as a community. We are all about living and praying through the suffering and joy of the Paschal Mystery together on our journey into God so that we may actually share the heart and mind of Christ along the way.

*“I wish I could say that I became a Norbertine and lived happily ever after.”*

Not just one, but four Norbertine communities have spiritually shaped my life and priestly ministry as a Norbertine:

- The community of St. Norbert Abbey in De Pere, Wisconsin first fostered my love of learning by encouraging me to do a triple major in college and missioning me to eight years of doctoral studies in Rome and Paris. I returned from studies to teach theology and philosophy at the college for many years during a most creative time in the community’s life when it was welcoming many seminarians and internalizing and disseminating the renewal of the Second Vatican Council.
- The international Norbertine community in Rome welcomed me for four years. It allowed me to study theology full-time and to experience the spiritual richness, history, and diversity of our Norbertine way of life and of the Catholic Church in a way no classroom could convey.

- The community of Daylesford Abbey near Philadelphia embraced me as a brother for over thirty-five years. After entrusting me with a great variety of pastoral and administrative ministries, it missioned me to live as a semi-solitary for seven years in the Jemez Mountains while ministering to troubled priests and brothers.

- Finally, the Norbertine community in Albuquerque welcomed me to help in its work of founding a permanent community. Once again my ministries both within and outside the community were very diversified. They centered on planning, formation, construction, spiritual teaching, retreat work, and spiritual direction.

Fifteen years ago I experienced a turning point in my life as a Norbertine when I realized that I was being called to a more contemplative way of life than I or any of these communities could currently envision. So I spent a year living with the Camaldolese hermits in Big Sur, California, in order to discern whether or not I should join their community. During that year I discovered that I was not being called to live as a Camaldolese hermit but as a contemplative Norbertine. I was assured that the form that would take would be given to me eventually if I remained faithful to my journey. This experience gave me the courage to return to the community and to continue to follow my restless heart’s stirrings on a very demanding journey toward a more contemplative, solitary way of living communally.

As I celebrate fifty years as a member of the Norbertine community, I am entering a whole new phase of my life. The community here has allowed me to retire from my many communal and ministerial responsibilities and to live in retreat on the Priory grounds. For me this is a dream come true. It promises to allow me to deepen the love of learning and the longing for God which have always been the foundation of my life and ministry as a Norbertine and to continue a modest spiritual outreach to other pilgrims with restless hearts.

*Note: Fr. Fran is presently living in retirement at the Norbertine Hermitage Retreat and conducting retreats and workshops on Meditative Writing.*



# A Morning in the Life of a Hospital Chaplain by Christian O'Brien, O.Praem.

Minister at Albuquerque Regional Medical Center (formerly St. Joseph's Medical Center) with a special presence to our Rehab Center—a 55-bed treatment hospital for brain injuries, stroke victims, and folks dealing with amputation, hip replacements, knee injuries, or those recovering from back surgery.

A usual day begins with the celebration of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick for four or five patients. Occasionally I am called to our emergency unit for crisis management in collaboration with other staff. Today, I sat with Pat, one of our chaplains, who seemed overburdened with extra responsibilities due to the illness of our intensive care chaplain.


Our Baptist Chaplain had picked out some music for our 11:20 AM Eucha-

rist. Knowing this was all taken care of, I headed over to Rehab – the brisk morning air was refreshing. After updating our Communion list of wonderful volunteers, I reflected on a homily help for this Sunday's liturgy before heading to the floor for visitation.

Karen, a patient, saw me in the hall and asked for a blessing on her blood report. If it was good, she could go home. She is overweight and seems a little developmentally challenged, yet has evidenced a child-like faith that deeply touched me. A Baptist patient had asked for a visit – her husband called her a hardcore Baptist – so I shared my mother's Methodist roots, and she said would never bite me. Her roommate was a Church of Christ and marveled at her recovery from back surgery. She had a litany of praise for

our innovative staff that got her moving so quickly after surgery.

A 93-year old lady was sitting in the hallway and so wanted to get back into bed. I listened to her story. On the brain unit a woman was quietly weeping. She was open to prayer and an anointing. Another woman was leaving for a nursing home for continued care. She was a charismatic and witnessed a great faith in the Lord's healing presence.

In the final moments, before running off for a rushed lunch, a nurse gave me a mini-hug in the hallway that seemed to make her day... and so it goes. 

## Ministry to Immigrants

In the early 1990's, two members of the pastoral team at the Norbertine Parish of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary had a dream. Fr. Dominic Rossi and Deacon Juan Barajas dreamed of welcoming newcomers to our country and to New Mexico. In order to welcome them into our parish, they began by inviting immigrants from around Albuquerque to celebrate the Eucharist at Holy Rosary.


On the first Sunday forty immigrants responded to the invitation. That Eucharist has grown to between 500-700 participants each Sunday through the year. An increasing number of families seeking involvement at Holy Rosary is a significant manifestation that the dream is being realized.

Each Thursday evening, a *noche hispana* is held in the Family Center at Holy Rosary. A hundred adults gather for prayer and learning. Seventy teenagers participate in the youth group and two hundred children take religious education classes.

In addition, fifteen adult participants in the R.C.I.A. (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) process and twenty children in the R.C.I.C. (Rite of Christian Initiation of Children) process were


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## The Hermitage Retreat

In the spring of this year we set about renovating our retreat facility at the priory. It had been many years since anything was done in the way of updating and refurbishing. Bethany Guest House can now accommodate larger groups of 20+ people for day conferences and six bedrooms are available for overnight guests and retreatants. Our four hermitages received new names this year (Bethlehem, Tabor, Gethsemani, Emmaus) and were renewed with a fresh coat of paint, a new roof, and new furniture. In addition the desert landscape has been enhanced and outdoor lighting and walkways have been installed. All of these improvements were done with a view toward providing a better environment for those who join us to make a retreat. If you are interested in making a retreat here at the priory, please contact the Norbertine Hermitage Retreat at 505-873-4399, ext 224 for more information. 

## Jaime Avila vested as Novice



On August 27th Jaime Avila became our newest Novice. He was vested with the Norbertine habit at First Vespers of Feast of St. Augustine. Jaime graduated in June from the University of New Mexico with a degree in Psychology and Spanish. Throughout his association with the priory, Jaime has ministered to immigrants in three Albuquerque parishes and has been a great gift to us. He will make his novitiate at St. Norbert Abbey. 

NORBERTINE COMMUNITY OF  
NEW MEXICO

Santa Maria de la Vid Priory  
5825 Coors Road, SW  
Albuquerque, NM 87121-6700

Phone: 505-873-4399

Fax: 505-873-4667

Email: [norbertines@norbertinecommunity.org](mailto:norbertines@norbertinecommunity.org)  
[www.norbertinecommunity.org](http://www.norbertinecommunity.org)

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

## Comings and Goings....

**Fr. Nick Nirschl**, former college mathematics professor and missionary to Peru, retired as pastor of the Native American Parish of St. Augustine of Isleta Pueblo at the end of June... **Father Christian O'Brien** attended the 45th reunion of his class at Notre Dame University this summer and reconnected with friends not seen in many years... **Father Joel Garner** attended a by-invitation-only Leadership Conference with twenty other pastors from around the country at a conference center in Minneapolis at which they shared broadly what was happening in their parishes and the Church... **Father Vincent DeLeers** had surgery for a pacemaker this summer. He continues to serve on the Board of Trustees at St. Norbert College and offers spiritual direction to many at the Priory... **Father Francis Dorff**, our contemplative and permanent retreatant in residence, continues to conduct retreats and days of reflection often focused on meditative writing, here at the priory as well as for other groups. Father Fran also pro-

vided key leadership for our Phase II development which is now nearing completion... **Father Roberto Fenzl**, a mission for thirty-four years in Peru, is working with immigrants in Albuquerque as well as ministering to prisoners. He also preached for our mission in Peru over the summer in both California and Missouri... **Father Jim Huth** returned to Toronto to write his doctoral dissertation after spending the summer at the Priory where is assisted in both parish and hospital ministry and various projects within the community... Seminarian **Michael Doyle** spent much of the summer at the Priory often sharing his gift of music through the cello at various liturgies... Seminarian **Robert Campbell** studied Spanish at the Mexican-American Cultural Center in San Antonio and is now spending the first term touring and studying in the biblical lands of the mid-east... Our Oblate, **John Edwards**, continues to face daily health challenges, but keeps busy with a number of projects both personally and for the Priory... **Fr. Gene Gries** is co-chair of the renovation committee at

Holy Rosary Parish. Both the Family Center (a former school) and the Parish Office have infrastructures that are badly in need of replacement... **Brother Dennis Butler** continues to work with our new group of six Lay Associates. Dennis continues to be a key figure in the RCIA Program at Holy Rosary as well as cooking wonderful meals for us on the week-ends... The New Mexico Campus of **The Masters in Theological Studies** program of St. Norbert College graduated its first three graduates in early August. 

### Immigrant Ministry

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initiated into the Catholic Community at Easter.

The pastoral team has been working hard on many levels to build bridges between the newcomers and the seasoned members of Holy Rosary Parish. Two members of the immigrant community now serve on the Parish Pastoral Council. Father Rod "Roberto" Fenzl, a Norbertine who served in the Lima, Peru, mission for 34 years, serves the immigrants at Holy Rosary as well as in other communities in Albuquerque. 