

# Norbertines Come To Save Belgians and Stay 100 Years



*They Start a College, Schools, Missions, and Area Broadcasting*

In 1893 two Norbertine priests and a lay brother journeyed from the home abbey in Holland to Door and Kewaunee counties, where Belgian immigrants had begun to drift from Catholic orthodoxy.

Although Norbertine missions had existed in southwestern Wisconsin between 1845 and 1890, this was the order's first U.S. mission to continue to the present day. It has not only survived to this centennial year; it has expanded dramatically.

Known as The Canons Regular of the Order of Praemontre of De Pere, Wisconsin, the Norbertine "White Fathers" have established abbeys and priories in a half-dozen locations in the United States. They have ministered to parishioners from Canada to Chicago and Montana to Michigan. They have established missions for the poor in Mississippi, New Mexico, Peru, and the West Indies. They

**By Betsy Foley**

brought radio and television to northeastern Wisconsin. "But the greatest development was to take place in the realm of higher education."<sup>1</sup> At De Pere in 1898, the Norbertines founded St. Norbert College. But the Norbertine impact extends beyond the realm of higher education to the secondary level: It has opened high schools in De Pere, Green Bay, Philadelphia, Chicago, Claymont (Delaware), and Essexville (Michigan).

It all began when the Rt. Rev. Sebastian G. Messmer, then bishop of Green Bay, appealed for help in ministering to the spiritual needs of the French- and Dutch-speaking immigrants in Door and Kewaunee counties. No priests who spoke those languages were available within the diocese. Furthermore,

since 1885, Joseph Rene Vilatte, a French-speaking priest of the Old Catholic Church, had been proselytizing the people, preaching a doctrine Messmer and the official church judged to be unacceptable. The preacher's popularity spread rapidly, and Bishop Messmer feared he would lose the Belgian immigrants.

One of the bishop's priests, the Rev. Alphonse Broens, had a brother among the Norbertines of Berne Abbey, Holland. He suggested the bishop might enlist help from that source. Messmer appealed to the Dutch abbot, who promised to send the two priests and the lay brother. Father Bernard A. Pennings, O. Praem., the designated superior, departed Rotterdam

November 1, 1893, with the Rev. Lambert R. Broens and Brother Servatius Heesackers. They landed on the East Coast November 13 and arrived in Wisconsin ten days later.

When Pennings reached his new parish in Delwiche, he discovered that there was no house in which to live. So he and his assistant, Brother Heesackers, moved into the church sacristy. But the sacristy had no room for beds. The two Norbertines had to trudge through the snow at night by lantern to sleep at a nearby farmhouse. Pennings and Heesacker soon added a ceiling to the sacristy, making an upstairs room "to which they climbed every evening like chickens going to roost."<sup>2</sup>

From the parish at Delwiche, Pennings and his associate, along with Broens stationed in Sturgeon Bay, served mission churches in Brussels, Gardner, Little Sturgeon, and Marchant. Within a year, the Norbertines were ministering to Catholics throughout the Door Peninsula. Two more Norbertines arrived in 1894 and a sixth two years later. Within five years, the Dutch missionaries had accomplished the bishop's objective. They had "completely undermined Vilatte's base in the Belgian settlements."<sup>3</sup>

At that time (1898), Pennings returned to his abbey in Holland and persuaded five others from the home community to join the missionary effort in Wisconsin. This was the beginning of missionary outreach that eventually would include Chicago, Madison, Michigan, Canada, Montana, Mississippi, New Mexico, and South America.



Photograph courtesy St. Norbert Abbey Archives  
 Rev. Bernard Pennings, O. Praem., posed with fellow Norbertines at their first mission at Delwiche, Wisconsin, in 1898. They came from Holland to keep Door County immigrants from going astray.

## Missions

By 1898, Vilatte had departed Door County. With the faith restored among the Catholic immigrants there, Pennings moved his base of operation to De Pere where he negotiated with the bishop for title to St. Joseph parish in West De Pere, a French-speaking community "so badly in debt its very existence was threatened."<sup>4</sup> With the parish came a mission congregation in Oneida.

Immediately, Pennings had hired a buggy and jolted through the dust to address, through an interpreter, the Oneida Indians.

A year later, several of the Norbertines left De Pere for mis-

*The author of this article also wrote the most recent comprehensive history of Green Bay, Green Bay: Gateway to the Great Waterway (1983). She is a former Voyageur associate editor.*

sions in Manitoba, Canada, an endeavor that continued until the late 1920s. Father Broens, then pastor of St. Joseph parish, De Pere, moved to Chicago to become pastor of the first Dutch congregation there (1900).

In 1903, the diocese of Grand Rapids, Michigan, called for a priest who could speak Dutch and French, to serve a parish in Essexville. Later, the Norbertines formed a second mission parish at Munger, Michigan, and another in Manistique in 1908. Six years later (1914), the mission field extended to Montana when the bishop there wrote Pennings asking for priests to care for Belgian Catholics in the diocese of Helena.

By 1927, the Norbertines had been called to Vancouver, British Columbia, and were ministering to Italian Catholics there. A year later, the order was asked to right a troubled Italian parish in Madison, Wisconsin.

Following the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s, the Norbertine missions took on an international dimension. Responding to Pope John XXIII's plea for American personnel to rebuild the Church in Latin America, the De Pere Norbertines established a school, parish, and dispensary in Lima, Peru. The Rev. Julian Resch pioneered the order's new mission in May 1963. In the thirty years since, Norbertine missionaries have served in Peru in health services, parish ministry, and education.

Early on, the Rev. Conan Mulrooney organized a mission effort from De Pere to the Peru missions, collecting medicines and raising money for the missions in Lima. Since then, preaching and fundraising on behalf of the Norbertine missions has been a frequent summer activity for many members of the De Pere Community.

In 1978, the Norbertines extended their Peruvian ministry to San Juan de Lurigancho, one of the slum districts surrounding Lima. They built a chapel and a day-care center, expanded their ministry to two other sections of the same area, and set up a feeding program for the unemployed. In 1972, they asked for and received help from the Missionaries of Mother Theresa. Service at the slum-district mission is sometimes dangerous:

Missionary work in a country like Peru offers many challenges...With one of the worst economies on the hemisphere, Peru has been threatened with violence that to this time has created an atmosphere of insecurity and fear as groups like Sender Luminoso (Shining Path) attempt to destroy the democratic government by vicious crimes that have killed over 25,000 people since 1986. Norbertines felt the violence rather dramatically on December 20, 1990, when the house in Villa Flores (Lurigancho) was attacked late at night by three gunmen holding up the residence, robbing the house and shooting Father Bill Fischer in the process. Fortunately, he recovered...but the sad experience still lingers.<sup>5</sup>

The Norbertines have since taken their ministry to the jungles where the Rev. Jack MacCarthy, a Norbertine M.D., and the Rev. Maurice Schroeder, O.M.I., "offer a generous and very necessary service to the people in an area where jungle diseases are rampant"<sup>6</sup> and hospitals are nonexistent.

After ninety years among the Belgians in Door and Kewaunee county parishes and nearly seventy years in Montana, the Norbertines returned these missions to their respective dioceses in the mid-1980s. When the Norbertines withdrew from the last of the peninsula parishes in 1986, "it was the end of an era...There was nothing much said about it at all. It just sort of slipped from one (the Norbertine order) to the other (Green Bay diocese) and that was it...I think the Norbertines had more of a feeling for our church than the diocesan priests did...They (Norbertines) had more of a sense of belonging...I think there was a bond...They treated the parish here like it was their own. They took care of the buildings...they cut the lawn, it was as though it was their own home...And I think that made you feel more secure. It made you feel a sense of belonging, a sense of home and warmth...They (parishioners) felt sort of let down...when the Norbertines left us."<sup>7</sup>

According to the current St. Norbert Abbey archivist, "Even when parishes were at their peak in terms of members, pastoral ministry was a second career for most Norbertines; their first career was in the schools as administrators or teachers. When the pastor retired or wanted to go into other ministries, there was no one to take his place."<sup>8</sup>

While the Norbertines were withdrawing from the parishes, the diocese receiving the parishes was experiencing similar limitations in available personnel. Some of the Door and Kewaunee parishes have since closed, are closing, have merged, or are merging with others.

Like the rest of the Catholic Church in the 1980s, the Norbertines were experiencing a diminished, aging membership, the result of a decline in vocations to the priesthood, necessitating a con-

solidation of men and ministries. "The thrust was to reach out in new ways to minister, particularly to the poor and minority groups, even to the point of initiating new foundations, continuing the ancient tradition of the order of meeting the needs of the times."<sup>9</sup>

In 1984, Abbot Benjamin T. Mackin, who succeeded the Rt. Rev. Jerome Tremel in June 1982, called a special community gathering to address these circumstances and to redefine the order's mission. During the session, the order developed a new mission statement with a special commitment to the poor and disadvantaged, especially to Hispanics and African-Americans. The city of Albuquerque in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico, was targeted as a new community through which to work among the Hispanic poor. Service to the diocese was offered and accepted in 1985.

A new Norbertine house, Santa Maria de la Vid Priory, was established and the Rev. Joel Garner

appointed prior. The new parish is in a blue-collar neighborhood; ninety percent of the parishioners are Hispanic. Long term, the group hopes to attract vocations from within the Hispanic population, increase its membership, and eventually establish its independence from the De Pere abbey. "Historically, what we are doing in Albuquerque is not new. It is very much in line with the Order's tradition....The foundation in Albuquerque is a Southwestern version of what Pennings did in De Pere."<sup>10</sup>

In 1985, in St. Lucia, West Indies, Rev. Milton Strebel took charge of a parish that had been without a priest for six years, reconstructing the church and school, and building a residence for abandoned elderly.

In 1990, the Norbertines established St. Moses the Black Priory in Jackson, Mississippi, working in a neighborhood in transition from White to African-American. The Rev. Xavier Colavechio, a former

St. Norbert College humanities professor, was appointed parish pastor and administrator of the new priory.

Colavechio has said Mississippi "is the poorest state in the nation, ranking 49th or 50th in per capita income, education, health care and environmental concerns. Though there has been progress in racial relations, there is still a long way to go."<sup>11</sup>

## Education

Five years after coming to America, Pennings had achieved what he and Bishop Messmer had set out to achieve in Door County. In 1898, another challenge gave Pennings the occasion to fulfill another dream - the establishment of a Norbertine house in America with native-born priests to carry on. On September 24, 1898, the diocese turned over title to St. Joseph Church, West De Pere, also designated the seat of the American Archconfraternity of St.



Photograph courtesy St. Norbert Abbey Archives  
Some children gather around Rev. Julian Resch, O. Praem., in the first years of the Norbertine mission in Lima, Peru.

Joseph (a national shrine) and the publication headquarters of "The Annals of St. Joseph." At the same time, the order formally established the Praemonstratensium Priory in De Pere, with Pennings as prior.

Pennings lost no time in announcing that the order would accept and train young men for the priesthood. Frank Van Dyke, a De Pere native, was the first to study Latin in the priory kitchen on October 10, 1898. History would mark the event as the beginning of St. Norbert College.

Within days, Anthony Vissers followed Van Dyke into the priory classroom. Soon after, a third student, Charles Savageau, was seen at the window and begged so hard to be let in "that we both reached down and grabbed him by the hands - that was the solemn entry of the third student...Along about the early part of November, Billy Marchant arrived. That completed the registration for the first year at St. Norbert's."<sup>12</sup> When the four original students were ordained to the priesthood ten to twelve years later, Pennings realized his dream for Norbertine continuity in the New World.

By the end of their first year in De Pere, the Norbertines were operating a parish, a national shrine and its monthly journal, a mission at Oneida, and a seminary for training young men for the priesthood.

St. Norbert's second year opened on September 11, 1899, with a 200 percent increase in enrollment and a new twenty-six-room convent to house the Norbertines and the student body. One room of the priory was set aside for the school. Within three years, however, "the need for a separate college building was becoming acute."<sup>13</sup>

On May 9, 1901, Bishop Messmer and a representation of priests from the diocese met with the

Norbertines to build the new structure on a beautiful knoll on the banks of the Fox. The building was to be of brick, three stories high, with a basement."<sup>14</sup> Along with seminary training, the curriculum would offer a commercial course for young men not called to the priesthood.

Main Hall construction began almost immediately; Bishop Messmer laid the cornerstone on March 19, 1902. The following November, the all-male student body moved in before the building - containing classrooms, dormitories, dining room, kitchen, library, and auditorium - was complete. Dedicated in April 1903, Main Hall was named to the *National Register of Historic Places* in 1989, shortly before it underwent renovation.

St. Norbert College and St. Norbert High School coexisted until the college's need for space necessitated relocation of the high school from its rooms in Boyle Hall. With Bishop Stanislaus Bona as honorary chair of a fund drive, money was raised to buy the former Nicolet (West De Pere) High School on the northeast corner of Third and Reid streets, where Abbot Pennings High School opened in 1959. World War II nearly depleted the college's all-male enrollment during the early 1940s, almost forcing the school to close its doors. From the enrollment of 340, more than 90 percent were serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. A combination of factors came together to prevent the college's untimely demise.

About two years into the war, the U.S. government chose St. Norbert as a site for the Army Specialist Training Program (ASTP), which brought several hundred soldiers to the college campus. The Rev. Dennis Burke, then vice-president of the college, had campaigned successfully for the con-

struction of a dormitory building. But, when enrollment drastically declined, the new Berne Hall became known as "Burke's Folly." Burke had the last laugh, however, because it was that facility that gave the St. Norbert campus the capacity to house several hundred soldiers for training. "During the ensuing semesters only the white habits of the faculty members reminded the casual visitor that St. Norbert was not a military reservation."<sup>15</sup>

After the war, in 1946, the enrollment rose to 700 men, mostly veterans.

Archmere Academy in Claymont, Delaware, opened September 17, 1932, on the former estate of John J. Roskob, chairman of the board of General Motors and former chairman of the Democratic National Committee. The high school and a newly established priory were located on thirty acres along the Delaware River between Wilmington, and Philadelphia. In 1936, the Norbertines opened South Philadelphia Catholic High School, formerly a public school for boys. Nearly 600 boys enrolled the first year.

In 1941, Central Catholic High School for boys opened in the Columbus Club in downtown Green Bay. The Rev. Sylvester Killeen, who later succeeded Pennings as abbot in 1955, was installed as principal. Enrollment was 265 boys. In September 1955, the school moved to a new building, Our Lady of Premontre High School for boys, built on a twenty-two acre plot on West Mason Street "on the western edge of Green Bay."<sup>16</sup>

The Rev. Richard Mulroy was Premontre's first principal. He was later appointed secretary of Catholic Secondary Education in Washington, D.C. With the Rt. Rev. Jerome Tremel, a St. Norbert mathematics professor who suc-

ceeded Killeen as abbot on January 6, 1970, a lay faculty union, recognized as a collective bargaining unit, was put in place at Premontre, "perhaps one of the first such units among the state's private schools."<sup>17</sup> Tremel also established a lay board of advisors for Premontre and Abbot Pennings high schools, which led to a predominantly lay Board of Education to oversee the two schools.

The two Norbertine high schools for boys, along with St. Joseph Academy, an all-girls school run by the Sisters of St. Joseph Carondelet, closed their doors at the end of the 1990 school year. The three schools were consolidated and re-opened in the fall as Notre Dame de La Baie Academy at the former Premontre site. The controversial announcement in November 1989 cited fiscal considerations resulting from declining operations and escalating operational costs as the reasons underlying the decision. Premontre was chosen for the site because it had an enrollment capacity for about 800 students with additional space and land for expansion.

## Broadcasting

Because Cletus Collom, a St. Norbert student from Upper Michigan, and young Father Van Dyke shared an interest in electricity, the Norbertines introduced radio and television to Northeast Wisconsin and dominated the local industry for nearly fifty years.

Collom and Van Dyke obtained an operation license and built the first radio station in the area in 1925, setting up a transmitter on the fourth floor of Boyle Hall, and operating with the call letters WHBY. In November 1928, the station increased power to 100 watts and opened studios in Green Bay, Appleton, and Oshkosh.

The Norbertines bought WTAZ, a 1,000-watt station in Appleton, in 1935. It is likely St. Norbert College thus became the only college in the country with two full-time radio stations under its control. Four years later, the FCC gave permission for WHBY to move to Appleton to become a Mutual Broadcasting System affiliate with a 5,000-watt transmitter. Together, WHBY and WTAQ were known as "The Voices of the Fox River Valley."

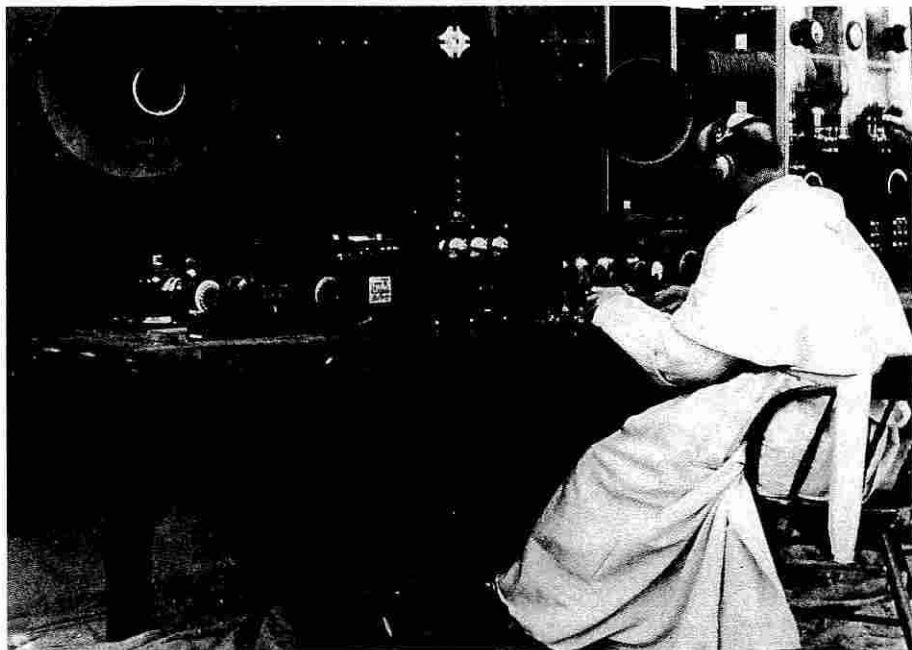
WTAQ, a CBS affiliate, later moved to Green Bay-De Pere, and became WBAY, and today operates as WIXX-WGEE.

All these set the stage for securing a permit in 1952 to build WBAY-TV, the first television station in the area. Altogether, according to Abbot Tremel, "The sixties and early seventies were glory years for these broadcast properties. The income derived from their successful operation was a major factor in the support of the life and work of the members of St. Norbert Abbey and make possible the con-

struction of Premontre High School in 1955 and the new St. Norbert Abbey in 1959."<sup>18</sup>

On December 13, 1976, Abbot Tremel convened a meeting of the Norbertine membership to consider selling the radio and television enterprises. "As the leader of a religious community of men that numbered some one-hundred seventy-five members, I also found myself 'Chairman of the Board' of the extensive technical and financial being that those broadcast properties had become."<sup>19</sup> The Green Bay operation alone employed 125 persons.

As successful as the operations were, the stations faced major challenges in the early 1970s. Industry competition was "heating up" and multiple-station ownership became the norm. That made technology and program acquisition more favorable for owners of a group of stations than for single-station owners. At the same time, Cable TV, pay TV, and home video loomed on the horizon, threatening to cut into the broadcast market



Photograph courtesy St. Norbert Abbey Archives  
Rev. James Wagner, O. Praem., managed WHBY from 1927, two years after it was started as the first area radio station, until 1947.

and affect net income. FCC rules prohibited WBAY from getting into those markets.

"It became increasingly obvious that we were 'over our heads' in trying to continue to operate this increasingly competitive, volatile

and rapidly-developing technological enterprise," Abbot Tremel has written.<sup>20</sup>

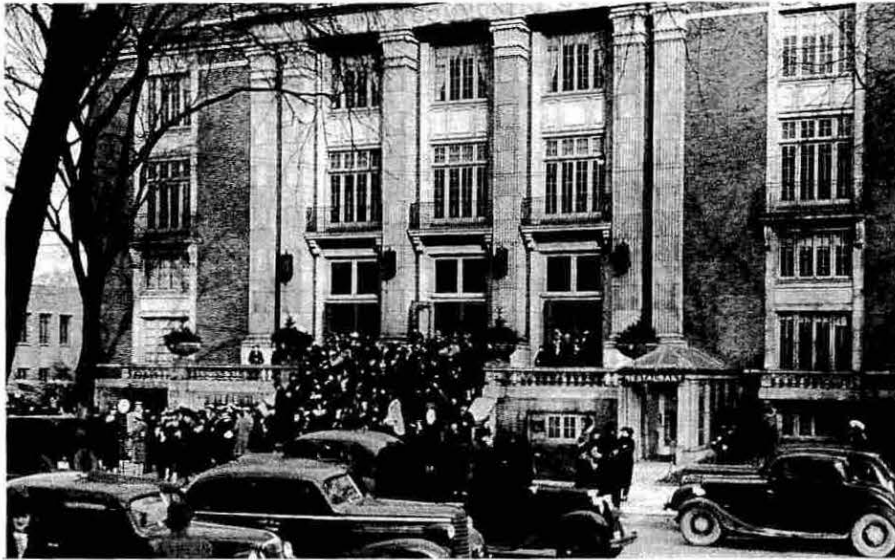
Programming was another factor. What was available was becoming increasingly "permissive." Some of the more question-

able material was censored. "Our call as religious has always been to live and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and we were often being seen in the public eye, and by critics in the local print media, as ambiguous, middle-of-the-road, permissive, compromising, least-common-denominator Christians."<sup>21</sup> When the question came to a community vote, the members almost unanimously favored selling the broadcast facilities and using the monies to establish endowments for St. Norbert College and the high schools and for the retirement needs of community members, and to create a dowry for Daylesford Abbey (a new abbey founded in Pennsylvania). Three separate buyers were found for WBAY-TV, WBAY-AM and FM, and WHBY-AM.

"Some said that 'We killed the goose that laid the golden egg,'" Abbot Tremel said. "No one can be sure that we made the right decision...but the decision was made in the best collegial manner that we could manage at the time. So far as I know, no one now is second-guessing the decision."<sup>22</sup>

## Other Enterprises

In 1925, the Norbertines bought 150 acres of land on Shawano Lake and built Camp Tivoli, the first summer camp for Catholic boys in Wisconsin. Its purpose was "to provide a safe place to which parents of the larger cities might send their sons for the long summer vacations."<sup>23</sup> James J. Crowley, who had achieved national fame during the preceding football season as one of the "Four Horsemen" of Notre Dame University, was hired as athletic director. The camp flourished and boys from throughout Wisconsin and the Midwest came to Tivoli until the camp closed in 1980.



Photograph courtesy St. Norbert Abbey Archives

*The Columbus Community Club, a recreational facility for Roman Catholics, was built by the diocese on South Jefferson Street, Green Bay, and deeded to the Norbertines in 1932.*



Photograph courtesy St. Norbert Abbey Archives

*The Norbertines founded WBAY-TV in 1952 and continued to operate it until 1976, when "it became increasingly obvious that we were over our heads." This is one of the cerebral palsy telethons produced by WBAY before the Norbertines sold the station.*

For many Green Bay natives, two downtown institutions - St. Willebrord's parish and the Columbus Club - are synonymous with "Norbertine." Initially owned by the diocese, the Columbus Community Club, located in the 100 block of South Jefferson Street, was the Catholic alternative to the YMCA. Able to accommodate large gatherings, the building served as an important social and business center for the city. Built by the diocese in 1923 and dedicated to the veterans of World War I, the club's purpose was "to provide for its members and for the community additional facilities and opportunities for spiritual, intellectual and physical education, to assist in the charitable work of the community; and to carry on benevolent work in the community in every reasonable manner."<sup>24</sup>

When the building faced financial failure in 1932, Bishop Paul Rhode deeded the Columbus Club to the Norbertines, along with St. Willebrord's parish, with a view to its ultimately becoming a central

Catholic high school. Rev. Frances Exler, also appointed pastor of St. Willebrord, was made director of the Columbus Club; Father Sylvester M. Kisseen, who succeeded Pennings as abbot when he died in 1955, was the building manager. Catholic Central High School opened there in 1941. Today, the building is called the WBAY Building, housing WBAY television and WIXX-WGEE Radio, formerly WBAY Radio.

### ***New Abbey, New Direction***

For nearly sixty years, the Norbertine headquarters and principal residence was St. Joseph Priory, located on Grant Street adjacent to the church on the St. Norbert College campus. By the 1950s, the building was outgrown, and inadequate in every respect. Lacking sufficient space for new candidates, the order was using college housing for the newest members and had established a novitiate

house in Madison, Wisconsin. In 1956, Victor McCormick donated eighty-seven acres on North Broadway on the east side of the river for a new abbey. The De Pere City Council annexed the site, previously a part of Allouez, to the City of De Pere. Ground was broken June 9, 1956.

In July 1958, more than three tons of bells arrived from Holland, were consecrated by Bishop Stanislaus V. Bona, and installed in the abbey church. The bells, crafted according to the six chords of the musical scale, weigh a total of 6,670 pounds. Each bell is individually named and contains an inscription and the crest of the person it memorializes along with the Abbey shield.

The Norbertines moved into their new quarters February 1, 1959. The former abbey on the campus continues to function as a priory for Norbertines presently and previously affiliated with the college.

The move to the new abbey stirred visions of monastic life lived according to the European model, with members living, working and praying in community - all together in one place. The ministries of European monasteries "were walls - schools, farms, or cottage industries - by which the order supported itself. [But] the Norbertines here, at a very early stage, involved themselves in a lot of ministries outside the Abbey."<sup>25</sup>

From the time the De Pere community attained abbey status in 1925, it had been impossible to live according to the order's ideal of abbey life. Shaped by parish and school ministries, the De Pere experience simply did not fit the European model. By the time the abbey was built, the order had established two schools in De Pere and one in Green Bay. The order's missionary and educational endeavors demanded "full time service and dedication in these aposto-



*Photograph courtesy St. Norbert Abbey Archives*

*The Norbertines moved across the Fox River to their quarters at the new abbey in early 1959. Here Rev. John Neitzel, Rev. Neal McLaughlin, and Abbot Sylvester Killeen (all O. Praem.) pack up for the move. The bareheaded man on the left has not been identified.*

lates (which) left little time for the refinements of Norbertine monastic life....The monastic elements of traditional Norbertine life were not to fit with the American experience."<sup>26</sup>

## ***Vatican II***

The move to the new abbey coincided with Pope John's announcement for the second Vatican Council. The Vatican II pronouncements prompted the renovation of Old St. Joseph Church, the establishment of a campus parish, and the move to English liturgies. The National Shrine to St. Joseph was moved from Old St. Joseph Church to the new abbey. In 1992, the shrine was renovated to mark its one-hundredth anniversary. It was rededicated March 19, 1992, the feast of St. Joseph.

Following Vatican II, St. Norbert Abbey became a resource of continuing education for clergy. A theology seminar, said to be one of the first such programs in the nation, provided updates and interpretations of Vatican II output. In 1971, the abbey hosted another program, "Remaking the Ministry," in which scholars, sociologists, educators, theologians, historians, philosophers, gathered at St. Norbert College during the summer to share with priests, religious, and lay persons insights for refocusing church ministry after Vatican II.

Norbertines were also impacting liturgical and theological movements in the Green Bay Diocese and elsewhere by serving on diocesan and national commissions: the Diocesan Liturgical Commission, the Diocesan Board of Education, Ecumenical Commission, Bishop's Board of Consultors, Diocesan Pastoral Council, Diocesan Marriage Tribunal, and Diocesan Planning Commission.

The Rev. Roman Vanasse was appointed by the Holy See in Rome as spiritual director of Aid to the Church in Need, located in Germany, a program started in World War II to assist war victims and later expanded to include aid to the Church world-wide. Rev. Alfred McBride became spiritual director for the program in the United States.

## ***Reaching Out***

During the 1980s, issues of social justice became increasingly important. In 1983, the order established a stewardship trust fund to perpetuate the work of the abbey and its missions locally and internationally. Twice yearly, an advisory board reviews requests for aid in the U.S. and around the world, especially in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and South America. Funds have been allocated for seminary training, education, and a small escrow account to help Wisconsin communities of women religious.

In 1984, responding to the trend of lay association within religious life, the Norbertine Associates were formed with fourteen lay men and women. Exploration of the idea began when people who attended daily Eucharist at the abbey began discussing the possibility of becoming more involved in the life and worship of the Norbertine community. Meeting regularly for worship and discussion, members are also active in their parishes, in community service, and in the Norbertine missions at home and elsewhere.

As Norbertine vocations declined and membership dwindled, much of the abbey's space was left vacant and unused. For the past twenty years, the order has made these areas available to the community. The Green Bay Diocesan Marriage Tribunal used

abbey space from 1972-83. Auxiliary Bishop Robert Morneau maintained his residence and office there for several years. From the mid-1980s to 1992, the Diocesan Charismatic Movement had an office in the abbey. From 1972-83, one wing housed the Brown County Youth Home, a temporary residence for troubled teenagers. From 1975 until the early 1980s, the abbey served as a religious center for Vietnamese. Pastoral care to the deaf and hearing impaired began with the Sign of God Deaf Ministry in 1988. In recent years, a wing of the Abbey was converted to a nursing facility for older Norbertines who previously would have ended their days in nursing homes or hospitals, away from community.

In 1979, The Ministry and Life Center opened in the abbey's northwest wing with the Rev. Joel Garner as director and a lay person, Anne Egan, as co-director. The center fosters spiritual life and growth among people of all faiths. By serving as a focus for retreats, marriage encounter, ecumenical gatherings, days of reflection, short courses and conferences, and regular programs in spiritual development.

It is doubtful that even the visionary Bernard H. Pennings could have foreseen the new abbey, Vatican II, missions in Peru, New Mexico, and Mississippi, or the growth and changes of the college and schools he started. "Nonetheless, his spirit pervades even those who were not members of the order in the year of his death, 1955."<sup>27</sup>

## ***Abbey Houses National Shrine***

In 1888, Pope Leo XIII designated St. Joseph Church in De Pere as the seat of the Archconfraternity of St.

Joseph for the United States. Reportedly, it is the first shrine erected in America in honor of St. Joseph.

By special permission from the Vatican, the statue of St. Joseph was crowned in unique ceremonies on May 8, 1892. The new bishop of Green Bay, Bishop Sebastian G. Messmer, presided at the ceremony as the Vatican's official delegate. People from across the country donated jewels for the St. Joseph crown. Statue and crown, along with the designation "national shrine," were moved to the new St. Norbert Abbey when Old St. Joseph Church was renovated.

The Norbertines were given charge of St. Joseph Church and the shrine by the Green Bay Diocese in 1898 with the arrival of the Rev. Bernard H. Pennings, who founded the first permanent Norbertine establishment in the U.S. at the same time.

A perpetual novena in honor of St. Joseph, begun in 1888, continues to be celebrated at the St. Norbert Abbey shrine every Wednesday evening. The shrine is open to the public from 8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. daily for private prayer.

The one-hundred-year-old national shrine was rededicated on March 19, 1992, the feast of St. Joseph. St. Joseph, proclaimed patron of the Universal Church in 1870 by Pope Pius IX, has come to be known as the patron saint of workers and intercessor for the unemployed. (Annals of St. Joseph)

## NOTES

1. *Memorial presented by the Canons of St. Norbert Abbey*, 1936, p. 84.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
3. Frances Badtke. "Church of the Precious Blood Once Old Catholic Mission," *Door County Advocate*, November 7, 1968. Clipping, Brown County Library, page number not noted.
4. *Memorial presented by the Canons of St. Norbert Abbey*, p.66.
5. "Peru." Manuscript for the Norbertine centennial history in process; author not noted.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Personal interview by Brother Steven Herro, O. Praem., with Mrs. Christine Chaudor, Door County parish, April 24, 1993; transcript of tape recording.
8. Personal interview with Brother Steven Herro, O. Praem., St. Norbert Abbey archivist, July 27, 1993.
9. Benjamin T. Mackin. Untitled manuscript for Norbertine centennial history book in process, p. 23.
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