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Stories in Stained Glass:
An Analysis of the Stained-Glass Windows
at Saint Norbert Abbey in De Pere, Wisconsin

by

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A paper submitted to the faculty of
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Liturgical Studies.

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY·SEMINARY
Saint John's University
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This paper was written under the direction of

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Monsignor Timothy Verdon
Director
Stories in Stained Glass:  
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Description:
This paper examines the relationship between the Rule of Saint Augustine, the Constitutions of the Order of Premontre, and the stained glass windows of Saint Norbert Abbey. Further, it discusses how the windows signify and reflect the Norbertine Canons’ mission to preach the Gospel in their apostolic ministry. After tracing a brief history of Saint Norbert of Xanten and the early history of the American mission, this paper continues with a discussion on Abbot Killeen’s (the second abbot of St. Norbert Abbey) vision to build a new abbey in the context of papal conservatism and modern art. The main body of the paper introduces the reader to selected windows from the chapter room and the abbey church, in order to depict the relationship to the texts mentioned above and the life of the Canon Regular of Premontré. Each window is filled with symbols designed by Francis Deck of Emil Frei in Saint Louis, Missouri. Finally, the paper briefly looks at the role of a Canon Regular in the Church today.

This paper may be duplicated.

Timothy A. Johnston
May 2, 2008
St. Augustine begins his rule with these words: "Let us love God above all things, dearest brothers, then our neighbor, for these are the chief commandments given to us." ¹ Living in a world cluttered with sounds, empty images and excessive activity, these words seem antiquated. In this technological age, it seems that people are more concerned with sending and answering e-mails, taking pictures and recording movies with a cell phone, or purchasing the newest, most fashionable gadget. This preoccupation with "things" has shifted our attention from the mystery and beauty beyond ourselves to an individual obsessive quest for perfection and efficiency. The space for quiet simplicity is congested with noise that does not allow time for one's mind to relax and enjoy the beauty or mystery of the created world that surrounds us. In our post-modern society, we are saturated with images that are shallow, abstract, or void of emotions. They speak to the idea of efficiency that dominates our society and, therefore, do not have the ability to challenge us or call us beyond ourselves. These images do not speak to the inner truth or beauty of the soul. Without art speaking to this inner reality, we begin to lose sight of deeper truth, not only in ourselves, but also in our neighbors, creation, and the transcendent. We no longer take time to appreciate or contemplate beauty. Art should speak to the creative energy, the transcendent, that resides within each of us. Through its symbolic and colored stories, we are connected to a past, present, and future, a lived experience.

For many centuries, the Christian world has told its stories through images of various forms: paintings, buildings, or stained glass among them. The mysteries of the Christian faith have been communicated through this fashion because art speaks to the soul and allows a person to let go of the busy world around him or her and embrace the beautiful mystery of God. Art evokes the presence of the transcendent that resides in us and can draw us into that deeper

mystery. According to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Art is meant to bring the
divine to the human world.” Churches and religious houses are great repositories of Christian art
from the past and the present. In general, they are places where these treasures are retained and
meditated on, giving us space and silence to contemplate the beauty of our world through art.
Art gives us the avenue to focus on God, ponder the meaning of God’s presence in our lives, and
escape the clutter that trespasses our solitude.

Returning to the quote from Augustine, we see that God is at the center of our very
existence. God is the being who moves, shapes, and directs our daily activity. In this brief
phrase, Augustine unfolds a complex theology of love, a relationship focused on God that allows
a person to love his or her neighbor and all of creation. It makes sense then, that religious houses,
such as the Norbertine house in De Pere, Wisconsin, would commission and surround
themselves with outstanding art that challenges them to delve deeper into the mystery of God’s
love and be inspired to carry the mission set forth by Christ and St. Norbert. The Norbertines,
founded by Norbert of Xanten in 1121, have a mission to contemplate the word of God and, with
zeal, preach it to all peoples. This paper will examine how the stories and images depicted in the
stained glass windows from the chapter room and the church of St. Norbert Abbey signify and
reflect the Norbertine’s mission to preach the Gospel in their apostolic ministry.

Saint Norbert: A Man of Vision

Augustine’s theme of love resonated with St. Norbert of Xanten as he journeyed to
discover how God was calling him to serve the Church and revitalize the Christian interest and
zeal for communion with Christ in the celebration of the sacraments, the Divine Office, and the
priesthood. Like many religious founders, Norbert understood that simplicity of heart and mind

2 National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Built of Living Stones (Washington DC: United States Catholic
led to a fuller union with God, opening one’s heart to preach the truth of the Gospel just as the apostles did after the resurrection.

Norbert came from a noble family and was ordained sub-deacon and assigned to be a canon in Xanten. Norbert served at the courts of the archbishop of Cologne and Henry V.\(^3\) In these positions Norbert was exposed to worldly ideas and was “carried away by its pleasures and allurements.”\(^4\) Upon his conversion, which was similar to that of St. Paul, he realized there was more to life than all the pleasures of the court. There was a new mission at hand and it became clear that he was to preach the Gospel as a penitent and reform the clergy. He settled in the valley of Prémontré, France where he had a vision of white robed canons chanting praises to God. The youthful community that was “burning with zeal for the salvation of souls”\(^5\) made their solemn profession on Christmas Eve of 1121.\(^6\)

Norbert was a man of great passion who devoted his time to prayer and celebration of the sacraments, which nourished him to be an outstanding preacher: “He wished his disciples, like himself, to go out preaching . . . explain[ing] to the ignorant the articles of faith and preach[ing] penance, refut[ing] heretics, and fulfill[ing] pastoral duties. . . .”\(^7\) In summary, the new community was to gather daily for prayer, the sacrament of Eucharist, and work, which nourished them to be faithful preachers and witnesses of God’s word. Norbert and his companions desired salvation for all and hoped that people would come to know Christ by witnessing the truth the confreres lived.

\(^4\) Ibid., 7.
\(^5\) Ibid., 40.
\(^6\) Ibid., 104-5.
\(^7\) Ibid., 82, 105.
An American Mission

In 1893, Bernard Pennings, O. Praem, along with two other Norbertines from Berne Abbey in Holland, came to the United States at the request of the bishop of Green Bay. They were to be missionaries to stamp out the heresy of a bishop in the peninsula of Wisconsin. They arrived in Namur and were assigned to care for all the parishes in the region. This new missionary foundation found energy in their apostolic work, just as Norbert and his companions had in the early years. No matter how rough and primitive the conditions were, the canons persevered because this was a new opportunity to teach, sharing the good news and ministering as Norbert had wished. The community moved to De Pere, Wisconsin, in 1898 and began St. Norbert College, which accomplished the task of preaching and teaching the message of Christ. The community grew, as did the apostolate. Along with the college, the community had three high schools and many parishes under their care. It is clear the community was fulfilling Norbert’s dream of educating and caring for people’s souls. Over time, the community outgrew the original abbey. Under the direction of the new abbot, a new abbey was to be built to better illustrate the canonical life in the diocese of Green Bay. This new church would be a great abbey that would function as a house of prayer and service where the canonical life would thrive.8

Abbot Sylvester Killeen and His Abbey

Abbot Sylvester Killeen, the new abbot, was a formal and dignified man. He wanted to establish a formal daily cursus for the canons in his care. In order to achieve this task, he aspired to build an abbey that would last a thousand years and be distinguished in its celebration of the Divine Mysteries, which would nourish the body and soul and prepare the canon for apostolic life. This abbey would be a model for other Norbertine houses and provide an authentic example

8 This information was presented to the author during his novitiate at St. Norbert Abbey in 2002 and 2003. See www.norbertines.org or www.premontre.org for further history.
of the canonical lifestyle. The abbey would be a gem of the spiritual life in the midst of the farmlands of Wisconsin, a safe haven for those who sought spiritual refuge. With great pomp and circumstance, St. Norbert Abbey was dedicated on June 18, 1959. Abbot Killeen’s vision finally came to fruition.

There is not much documentation on the origin of the design of the abbey building itself. One community tradition holds that the building is modeled after Jasov Abbey in Slovakia. This Norbertine Abbey was founded in 1170. In 1947, Fathers Dennis Burke, O. Praem, and Julian Resch, O. Praem, attended the general chapter in Rome and, while there, they were invited to visit European abbeys to gather creative and architectural ideas and bring them to the abbot.\(^9\) The design chosen for the abbey church is a basilica model. It is long and rectangular with a well-defined clerestory where the eighteen windows provide the only dominant pieces of art in the space, along with the main window depicting the sacraments.

St. Norbert Abbey was built in the midst of the liturgical movement. In 1947, Pius XII published the encyclical *Mediator Dei*, which “affirmed the liturgical movement for Catholics,”\(^10\) and became the document that directed both Abbot Killeen and the artist of the windows, Francis Deck. The liturgical activity of the

\(^{9}\) Andrew Ciferni, O. Praem, telephone interview by author, October 2006.
\(^{10}\) Edward Foley, *From Age to Age* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991), 142.
community is central in the design of this building. The space highlights the canonical obligation to celebrate the Eucharist and the Divine Office publicly in choir. This is essential to the Norbertine way of life: “The divine office is at the center of the Norbertine vocation. The mass is the summit of the celebration of the office and the praise to God.”11 Because of this, “the Church is built to house the liturgical cult”12 that worships there so we must keep in mind that this building is meant to function for a Chapter of Canons who celebrate the Premonstratensian liturgy in a pre-Vatican II church.13 “We can say people’s life-style conditions the architecture”14

The abbey is built to house the liturgical rites of the community. The interior is spacious, allowing room for many types of processions and services, which are part of the daily liturgical life of a canon. The altar freely stands in the center of the space dividing the canons from the laity. Directly behind the altar is the elevated abbot’s throne. This signifies the connection between the sacred mysteries upon the altar and the abbot’s role of spiritual leader or an alter christus. The pater abbas is surrounded by the choir whom he shepherds. It is in this space that a canon most fulfills his vocation to the vita apostlica. Within this space, the canon will meditate upon the Word of God in song and be nourished by Jesus’ body and blood in order to have the courage and strength to “be for the world signs of Christ living in his Church.”15 Within such a majestic space, surrounded by images and symbols of the Divine Office and the Mass, one is inspired to live out his canonical vocation and yearns to take the knowledge gained from contemplation to the people of God as an apostle of Norbert and a disciple of Jesus.

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15 Ardura, 582.
Design: Papal Conservatism vs. Abstract Symbolism

To understand these windows, without considering the theological discussion at the time about sacred art would be impossible. Francis Deck, designed the stained glass in the abbey church. He worked for Emil Frei Art Glass Company in St. Louis, Missouri, which specialized in mouth-blown Munich antique glass. It was one of the largest stained glass firms in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century. After World War II, there was a shift from a classical form of art in stained glass to a more abstract and modern form. In this period the company took a more abstract approach in the windows it produced because they believed that the "abstract [can] articulate the faith" in ways the more classical forms cannot. The classical style, designed to be seen by illiterate people, communicates stories that are clear and attainable. The abstract images challenge a person constantly to ask questions and delve deeper into the mysteries of the faith. This abstract form was chosen because it would not exhaust the transcendent theme and would allow every generation to find relevance in its symbols. In the case of St. Norbert Abbey, the canons would have an endless supply of imagery that could nourish their own contemplation.

As mentioned earlier, Mediator Dei was an influential document for this project. It is the only document mentioned by Deck in a booklet he composed to explain the windows. The encyclical lays out some strong positions on appropriate celebration of the sacred mysteries and the role of clergy and laity within the church. It seems that while supporting the liturgical movement, it also tries to preserve or secure certain formalities and traditional roles. Pope Pius XII addresses the role of art and artist near the end of the document after discussing the character

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16 Emil Frei, St. Louis, to Abbot Sylvester Killeen, De Pere, 6 August 1958, Emil Frei Collections, Missouri Historical Society research Library, St. Louis.  
17 Steve Frei, son of Emil Frei, phone interview by author, 9 November 2006.  
18 Ibid.  
19 Ibid.
and rhythm of worship in the Church. Deck selected paragraph 138 for inspiration and as
explanation for the art and themes that would adorn the abbey church:

The ideal of Christian life is that each one be united to God in the closest and most intimate manner. For this reason, the worship that the Church renders to God, and which is based especially on the eucharistic sacrifice and the use if the sacraments, is directed and arranged in such a way that it embraces by means of the divine office, the hours of the day, the weeks and the whole cycle of the year, and reaches all aspects and phases of human life.20

In paragraph 188, Pius XII acknowledges the role art has in “serv[ing] and foster[ing] dignity and reverence within the liturgical celebrations,”21 but he goes on to emphasize that art should retain a respectful, reverent, and balanced style that is conscious of the needs of the worshiping community. The pope wanted to safeguard against art looking or becoming too secular; there should “neither . . . [be] extreme realism nor . . . excessive ‘symbolism.’” Art should express the sacred mysteries and not just the “Particular taste’ of the artist”.22 The ideas of balance, reverence, and dignity were criteria Abbot Killeen used in assessing what would be appropriate in this monumental structure.

Other Roman documents of the time shaped and influenced art and architecture during the 1950s and 1960s. Frei and Deck would have been aware of these documents, but there is no indication of how the work they did at St. Norbert was influenced them. As we will see, they produced art full of abstract symbolism in the midst of Rome’s publication of more conservative statements about the design and production of religious objects for churches. Rome was conscious of the rapid shifts in the culture and was cautious of making radical changes in church art. Could God be contemplated in abstract symbols, or in objects that reflected secular trends?

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
On April 8, 1952, Pius XII addressed a group of artists that had gathered in Rome and encouraged them to create works of art with “greater clarity” that “mirror[ed] the infinite [and] the divine” while training to become “great masters of Christian art.”

The master of Christian art would be one who could bring scripture and tradition alive with images revealed in prayer and deep adoration for the faith of the church. In this way, the artist becomes an interpreter of the sacred.

On June 30th of the same year, the Holy Office published an instruction on sacred art further clarifying the role of art in worship:

> The function and purpose of sacred art, as its very nature implies, is to enhance the beauty of the house of God and to foster the faith and piety of those who gather in the church.

The instruction goes on to condemn art that tries to adapt to modern circumstances and maintains that the local ordinary has the authority to approve what is “appropriate and not unusual.”

There was a shift in the attitude toward the character of art prior to the Second Vatican Council. John XXIII emphasized that there was a sacramental nature in religious images. He identified the role art could have in drawing viewers into God’s life. Viewing art could be a graced moment, a sacramental encounter with the sacred.

Kilian McDonnell, OSB, also emphasized this sacramental nature by looking at the Incarnation: “From the beginning, from the moment of creation, all things were sacred” because “they come from the hand of God.”

This view declares that the artist is sacred and therefore the work he or she produces is sacred because of the Divine hand that created them.

About a year after the windows in the abbey had all been finished and installed, Paul VI,

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22 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 175-177.
25 Ibid., 457.
26 Ibid.
in his Allocution to Artists, invited artists to produce works of art for the church again. The previous statements of a more conservative nature did not inspire artists of the period to rush and help the Church in her building. He wanted them to use their talents to express the sacred mysteries of the Church’s faith. He gave an apology for the instances in which the Church micromanaged and outlined what was sacred art instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to work in and through the artist who is created in the image and likeness of God. ²⁹

**Themes**

Many topics for the windows in both the chapter room and the church of the abbey were discussed between the artist and the community. Baptism, Norbertine saints, and the Rule of St. Augustine were proposed as themes for the chapter room. The theme that finally satisfied both the community and Emil Frei was Salvation History, which was suggested by the members of the novitiate. ³⁰ The themes for the windows in the church seemed much easier to choose with *Mediator Dei* in the background. As mentioned above, that document made clear that “the most pressing duty of [a] Christian is to live the liturgical life,” which is accomplished through the sanctification of time in the celebration of the Office and Mass. Being surrounded by images of the Divine Office and the Mass would certainly help the canon focus on the mission of the order and his own life. The canon, through his “liturgical life,” was to be transformed into another Christ who worked in the world bringing others to Christ, helping them transform their lives.

In a transcription dated July 9, 1957, Frei comments on a meeting at which he, the abbot, and the architect were present. Frei points out that Abbot Killeen was very excited to have the Divine Office, the Mass, and the Sacraments as the themes within this space. He also notes

²⁹ Seasoltz, 510-15.
³⁰ Emil Frei, St. Louis, to Abbot Sylvester Killeen, De Pere, 21 June 1963, Emil Frei Collections, Missouri Historical Society Research Library, St. Louis.
³¹ *Mediator Dei*, #197.
briefly the “interesting” arrangement of the church. He mentions the freestanding altar in the middle of the church between the choir stalls and the seating for the laity, which before the early 1960s, was an unusual placement. Frei makes further reference to the color scheme, using “blues, yellows and whites” because they would work well in that space.32 Deck also wanted to incorporate earth tones to draw out the beauty of nature. In 1958, after seeing a few sketches of the windows, Vincent De Leers, O. Praem, sent a rather intriguing letter to Emil Frei about the use of the Roman Rite for the Eucharist windows. He wrote, “The Roman Rite is undergoing a quiet revolution, slowly now, but, it seems probably, with increased tempo in the years ahead.”33 De Leers was very conscious that the windows could be outdated soon after their installation and cautions the company and the abbot to think in broader terms:

Rites vary, with time. . . [and] I would not want to undertake the defense of the thesis that the Roman Rite of today is the best vehicle the Church ever had for the Mass Mystery and Action, or even the best that She has now.34

He goes onto to propose some very broad ideas concerning the “priesthood of the people, thanksgiving, and the eschaton,” which were rejected as major themes, but were incorporated in some of the windows on a smaller scale. De Leers appears to have had some insight about the coming reforms that neither Frei nor Killeen seemed to acknowledge. The project moved forward with a commitment from the community on the themes of Salvation History, the Mass, the Divine Office, and the Sacraments, which reflect their canonical vocation to pray and meditate on God’s Word.

32 Emil Frei, St. Louis, transcription of a meeting, 9 July 1957, Emil Frei Collections, Missouri Historical Society Research Library, St. Louis.
33 Vincent De Leers, O. Praem., West De Pere, to Emil Frei, St. Louis, 2 May 1958, Emil Frei Collections, Missouri Historical Society Research Library, St. Louis.
34 Ibid.
Stories in Stained Glass

Augustine writes in his rule that “the first purpose for which you have come together is to live in unity in the house and to be of one mind and one heart on the way to God.” This implies that the person who enters the community must be willing to put all selfish desires aside to be fully incorporated into this Body of Christ. By taking vows with the community, the canon forms a bond with the confreres of the house. Each member of the canonry vows to give himself to the church or community he will reside in, “promise[s] a conversion of [his] ways and [to] life in community.” The commitment to the community in the early years took place in the chapter room. The young novice took simple vows in this space and the junior, the first part of his solemn vows. In the chapter room, the canons were surrounded by the history of the faith, reflected in the art of the windows, ideas that have shaped and enriched the Christian tradition. The Norbertines processed to the chapter room after Prime singing a psalm; they would listen to a reading from the Rule of St. Augustine and then have the Chapter of Faults, which consisted of reading the Martyrology, receiving daily assignments, and concluding with a Salve Regina. The young and the old could see in art how their vocation was participating in a long tradition and with the Paschal Mystery.

Twelve windows in the chapter room depict major covenant and prophetic stories from the Hebrew Scriptures and twelve windows depict the fulfillment of the covenant in the life of Jesus. The windows in the chapter room range from Creation to Abraham to Moses to the Exile. We will look at a few to point out some characteristics of the order.

The second window in the series is the Fall and the Promise. This window reminds the canon that he is not perfect and must spend time daily in prayer fulfilling his promise to live a

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35 The Day of Pentecost, xiii.
36 Ibid., 10.
37 Ted Antry, O. Praem., phone interview by author, 5 November 2006.
life of conversion. It also allows the canon to examine his conscience and recall the things that tempt him and call him away from the loving presence of God in his life. This window recalls the time when there was communal confession of sins in the chapter room.\textsuperscript{38} The hope is that the canon’s meditation on God’s word, leads him to a change of heart and mind to recognize the hope and grace that is offered in Christ Jesus. At the bottom of the window, this hope is depicted by the lily, which symbolizes Mary and is piercing the head of the serpent. One charism in the Norbertine’s vows is a conversion of life:

\begin{center}
\textbf{Figure 3 The Fall and the Promise}
\end{center}

The Spirit of Christ urges us, that denying and transcending ourselves we may break out of our self-centeredness and live for God and the brethren.\textsuperscript{39}

It is through the power of Christ that all people escape the darkness of sin and focus their energy on Christ. It is the canon’s responsibility to be aware of Christ’s presence in his life so he can truly help others on their journey to God.\textsuperscript{40}

Another hallmark of the order is preaching God’s word. The eleventh window depicts the Major Prophets: Isaiah is shown as a “six-winged . . . Seraph” which he saw in a vision; Jeremiah is symbolized by the chains; Ezekiel is shown by the wheel; and Daniel is depicted by the lion. A prophet is someone who calls people back to right relationship with God and, many

\begin{center}
\textbf{Figure 4 Major Prophets}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{38} Roger Stalley, \textit{Early Medieval Architecture} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 188.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Day of Pentecost}, 3.

\textsuperscript{40} Francis Deck, Windows booklet, (De Pere: St. Norbert Abbey Press, printed for the dedication).
times, they are persecuted for challenging people to change their ways. Norbert insisted that his priests and brothers be authentic people of the Gospel who challenged others to grow in faith and continually call them to faith-filled lives that focus on the Paschal Mystery. Here we see a few prophets who were imprisoned for their preaching. In Norbert’s time, and in our own day, good preachers, people with a challenging voice, are often imprisoned in some capacity. It is hard to be a prophet in our world, but the Norbertines hold that they are to be “prepared for every good work . . . to share the joy of unity and love found in [Christ].” Norbert, too, was persecuted because people did not understand his mission as a penitent and he was brought before the Council of Fritzlar where his name was cleared. This window reminds the canon to stand strong and defend the faith in the eyes of false and weak teaching.

Preaching is the ability to challenge, inspire, and teach people about truth, which is the role of prophet and priest. The last window I will discuss in this series, inspired by the Hebrew Scriptures is The Exile. Freedom is the focus of this window. In the upper left hand corner, we see dry bones as depicted in the prophet Ezekiel. The broken chain depicts the numerous times the Hebrews were set free from captivity, and the sunburst symbolizes their freedom. As a man of reconciliation, Norbert went out to preach healing and peace, in order that people could be set free from their burdens. Meditating on this window brings to mind the beautiful image of the dry bones coming to life by Ezekiel’s prophecy. The Norbertine canons have a

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41 Day of Pentecost, 2.
42 Kirkfleet, 31.
43 Francis Deck, booklet.
zeal for the salvation of souls. It is through God’s word that people will be brought back to life, a life in the Spirit. It is in the canon’s daily living and preaching that he might be able to communicate or witness the life giving words of God and journey with them as they unite themselves to God in love.44

At the root of the canon’s vocation to preach and minister to God’s people is his life in Christ. It is through the grace of baptism that we are incorporated into Christ’s life, death, and resurrection and are redeemed. Through the waters of life and death, each member of the Church is enrolled in the communion of saints, the Body of Christ. As in baptism, when the junior makes profession, he answers a call that is deep within him to serve, fully realizing his responsibility to the Body of Christ. The canons answer, “We freely associate ourselves with a particular community of Norbertines”45 in response to the call of the Holy Spirit to be on a journey to grow closer to God in a disciplined life. Baptism is the beginning step that prepares the religious to respond to God’s call in faith and love by vowing a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience. This common life helps free the heart and mind so that the canon may freely contemplate Christ.46 The canon willingly offers himself to Christ through his life in the community. In this window, we see The Baptism of Jesus. He is the model that we are to imitate. First, we see John, the announcer of the Good News, as the flame, below the word ecce. John preached repentance so people would be available and ready to receive the Lamb of God. The theme of announcing Christ through preaching is the prevalent mission Norbert gave to his

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44 Deck, booklet
45 Day of Pentecost, 11.
46 Ibid.
disciples. Second, we see Jesus (Chi-Rho) being baptized with the water flowing out of the shell. Christ responds to the Father’s will and accepts his mission of being the loving presence of God in the world.\textsuperscript{47} The canon living out his vows will be a loving presence of Christ in and out of the community. He will be transformed, setting aside his selfish desires; he will love as Christ loved. Through the grace of baptism, we have the courage and strength to live out our vocations and become witnesses of Christ’s love.

One of the pillars of the Norbertine Community is habitual penance. Norbert was strict with the early community about fasting and types of mortification to keep the body and the mind purified and focused on Jesus. Penance also serves as a type of self-offering for the sins of the world. Through prayer and daily acts of penance, the canon united himself to the suffering and death of Christ. Number 26 of the constitutions comments on \textit{Vita A}\textsuperscript{48} chapter 12 saying:

\begin{quote}
"To carry daily the cross of Christ" in a spirit of penance \[is\] to supply whatever is lacking to the passion of Christ in the flesh for the sake of His Body which is the Church, in order that we may live with the resurrected Christ.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

This window depicts an image of \textit{The Death of Christ} and allows the canon to remember that part of daily life is dying to the things that keep us from Christ. It is a reminder to keep in mind all people who suffer. Through suffering, the world will grow closer to the Risen Savior and share in the fullness of the resurrection.\textsuperscript{50}

The last window from the chapter room we will discuss is \textit{Pentecost}. On that day, the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[47] Deck, booklet
\item[48] \textit{Vita A} is a biography of the Life of St. Norbert.
\item[49] \textit{Day of Pentecost}, 7.
\item[50] Deck, booklet.
\end{footnotes}
Holy Spirit rested upon the apostles in the upper room and gave them the courage to take up the cross of Christ and be living examples of Christ for the people of all the earth. The Holy Spirit showers down gifts that empower, enliven, and challenge us to be faithful to the promises made in the waters of baptism. The apostles’ faith was strengthened so they could go “to the ends of the earth”

51 teaching the Gospel of Christ. Pentecost is the model for much of Norbertine living:

The apostolic way of life, under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ, is to have one heart and one mind, to have all things in common; to persevere in the teaching [of] the apostles; to persevere together in prayer with Mary . . . to break bread with joy . . . to give witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . . by preaching, by good example and by every form of the apostolate. 52

It is clear the Holy Spirit sustains this life in common and stirs up passion for the mission. Here we see a Dove (Holy Spirit) breathing on the branches (the faithful), which are supported by the vine (Christ). The breath of the Spirit sanctifies the Church and calls her to action. The canon’s response is to have an open mind and heart to sense where the Holy Spirit is calling him to serve. Awareness of the Spirit in one’s life allows the person to minister boldly with a listening and respectful heart. The Spirit empowers us to be faithful ministers and witnesses of the Gospel. Meditating on this window allows the canon to become aware of how the Holy Spirit is working in his life and giving him the faculty to be an educator of the faith. The Holy Spirit stirs up passion in the hearts of all the faithful and guides them in a virtuous life using the gifts that are bestowed upon us. Uniting his ministry to

51 Acts 1:8.
52 Day of Pentecost, 7.
the Spirit allows the canon’s daily labor to sanctify time, revealing the presence of Christ in the world.

We now move from the chapter room into the heart of the abbey, the church. The abbey church, along with the refectory, is the lifeblood of the community’s life together. Within this space, men take solemn vows, celebrate jubilees, bury brothers, and pray in one heart and mind. The liturgy is at the very core, a distinguishing attribute, of canonical life. With great faith, a canon regular vows to celebrate the liturgy with respect and dignity. St. Augustine says, “Be zealous in prayer at the hours and times appointed.” It is through this prayer that the canon unites himself to Christ and gives praise, thanks, and adoration for all the great gifts bestowed on him and the community. The choir is situated amid images of the mass and office, the work they carry out. These images mirror to the men the very lifestyle they have professed to live. Their voices unite with the nonverbal expressions of the windows and create an environment that opens itself to the real presence of God.

The second window in the south clerestory is The Liturgy of the Word. Connecting to the prophet’s window in the chapter room, this window reminds us of the Norbertines’ vocation to be teachers sharing God’s word. Caroline Bynum affirms this saying:

orders of canons . . . [were] established especially for this . . . that is, . . . to instruct according to the laws and morals of the Fathers, to correct comfort and rebuke

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53 Ibid., 15.
54 Ibid., xiv.
disciples by the words of holy doctrine.\textsuperscript{55}

The canons are required to take the word they hear and connect it to the ministry, in which they are engaged.\textsuperscript{56} Within the window, we see the Holy Spirit inspiring the four authors of the Gospels. In the liturgy, we must allow the Spirit to inspire us and call us to action. The canon should be open to the words taking root in his heart so they may have life in his actions. The lamp of wisdom symbolizes the knowledge about God’s presence we gain by reflecting on the sacred text. The canon takes this wisdom and shares it in his preaching.

Another pillar for the order is devotion to the Eucharist. Norbert had great reverence for the Blessed Sacrament and refuted some heresies that arose against the Eucharist. For Norbert, the celebration of the mass is at the root of communal life.\textsuperscript{57} The Eucharist helps the canon to live his promise of a life of conversion. It strengthens the canon, through grace, to be a person of reconciliation so he is fully united with Christ and his community. The brothers must be of one heart and mind to approach the table, receive the body and blood of Christ, and fully realize the potential to be transformed into people of love: “[B]y celebrating the mysteries of the Lord’s death and resurrection, we die more to sin and live more for God and the brethren.”\textsuperscript{58} The story in figure 10 begins at the top of the window with Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus and the Seraphim, which calls to mind the hallowed acts that are taking place.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure10.jpg}
\caption{Liturgy of the Eucharist}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Day of Pentecost}, 14-15.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 17.
\end{flushright}
place upon the altar and in the hearts of the faithful. The canon is called to give reverent praise
and adoration to God like the Seraphim. This prepares him to have reverence for all creation as
he works in the apostolate. The other three sections of the window tell stories of the Church, the
living, and the saints. 59

The Church, represented by a boat, refers to the Bark of Peter, a phrase that points to the
unity of all the faithful under Christ the head through the Roman Pontiff. Inside the boat, we see
the papal tiara and keys illustrating the pope as Vicar of Christ, the bishop’s miter and crosier for
his role as shepherd, and the shell with baptismal water for all the laity, who are united to the

Church by their profession of faith. The third section depicts a sword
symbolizing the “Church Militant” and to the right of the sword a
diptych. Early in the Church’s history, the diptych was used to inscribe
names of the living faithful that were to be prayed for and would be read
during the prayers as this part in the mass. 60 Each of these symbols
illustrates the order’s faithfulness to the global Church and her teaching.

The sixth window, The Consecration, is thematically connected to
the previous window. This window is dominated by a triumphant figure
of Christ outlined by the figure of a fish. Christ is crowned, showing he
has conquered sin and death. The sacrificial character of Jesus’ death is
the major scheme communicated and we see this in the lamb at the
bottom of the window. In the consecration, through the power of the Holy
Spirit and the faithful prayer of the people we memorialize the sacrificial
love of Christ. Inside the fish, we see eleven circles that represent the

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59 Deck, booklet.
60 Ibid.
faithful apostles. The canon is challenged to reflect on how faithful he is living the message of the Scriptures. We also see one circle outside the figure that represents Judas and those who turn away from the love of Christ. In order to receive the Eucharist, one must be reconciled or part of the community. This theme is connected to windows we have previously discussed. Norbert was a man of peace and reconciliation trying to heal the wounds and brokenness of the world he encountered. Through his preaching, the Holy Spirit was able to take root in the hearts of many, calling them to repent and drawing them closer to Christ. Part of the Christian life is to love the world as Christ loved it; he best demonstrates this agapé love by offering himself for the sins of all people. The sacrifice on Calvary was the ultimate offering to restore wholeness to all creation. The canon must be nourished by the Eucharist and himself become Eucharist for the world. Jesus’ great act of love calls the canon to give of himself to help sanctify and “consecrate the whole world itself to God.”61 By being faithful to the teachings of Christ, we become like Christ and will have the strength and courage to lay our lives down to heal the wounds of our broken world.

As the mass concludes, the presider instructs those gathered to “carry the fruits of the Sacrifice . . . into [their] daily lives.”62 The last window in the mass series is Thanksgiving. After reflecting on God’s word and being nourished by his body and blood we are sent forth to spread the love of Christ in our ministry. At the top of the window is the hand of God symbolizing the blessing the priest imparts on the

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61 Day of Pentecost, 17.
62 Deck, booklet.
assembly who are sent with a “burning zeal” from the altars of Word and Sacrifice to evangelize. Here, the people are symbolized by the dove at the base of the flame because we have been passionately infused with the Holy Spirit to go to the ends of the earth proclaiming the Good News. The liturgical celebration is a joy-filled time to give thanks and praise to God for all the wonderful gifts that God shares with the Church. The canon is able to say with great confidence Deo Gratias for all that has been bestowed on him and is privileged to use those gifts to celebrate Christ’s presence in creation. At the base of the window are three canons holding a thistle for poverty, the lily for chastity, and the sunflower for obedience. These are representative of the three vows the canon takes showing his dedication to love the world as Christ loved the world. Behind the canons is a single flame recalling the light of Christ that was enkindled in the canon’s heart during the celebration of the liturgy. It also brings to mind the life of the Spirit that was awakened in the canon’s heart at baptism. This is the light that the canon is to bear as he feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, visits the imprisoned, and teaches the ignorant, etc., so darkness is conquered by the radiance of Christ’s mercy. By carrying the message of the liturgy forth and ministering, we show our thanks and love to God.

The nine windows in the north clerestory represent images from the Divine Office. The celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours is an essential element to the canonical life. Along with the celebration of the Eucharist, it sets a rhythm allowing the canon to enter into contemplation. Through this contemplation of God’s word, the canon sanctifies time. It is not that the canon’s prayer makes time and space holy, but through meditation, he becomes aware of the sacredness around him. In the Rule, St. Augustine calls the community to “[b]e zealous in prayer at the hours appointed.” He calls the community to come before God with a burning in their hearts to

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63 Ibid.
64 Day of Pentecost, xiv.
receive the Word of God. Augustine calls them to come with joy and enthusiasm so they might actively participate in the dialogue and be set on fire by the stories and prayers of our ancestors. Prayer is not a passive activity, but one that should engage the heart and mind stimulating the person to share the wisdom they gain in the prayer. The Divine Office is a way for “the Church [to] respond to the word of God speaking to us.” Our prayer is a way to offer ourselves to God and continually deepen our relationship with God.  

Lauds is the second window in this series and is a prayer focused on praise to God. A theme Deck focused on is resurrection, connecting the rising of the sun with the rising of Christ. Just as the sun conquers the darkness of the night, Christ, in his death and resurrection, conquers the darkness of sin. Looking closer at the window, there is a sense of movement from the bottom near the word Benedictus rising to the top of the window and stopping at the Chi-Rho. In the Benedictus, the canticle at Lauds, Christ is referred to as the “light from on high,” which is symbolized by the brightly colored sunburst at the base of the Chi-Rho. In the lower-right corner is another Chi-Rho that is rising from a dark triangular shape representing Christ’s resurrection. Above the Chi-Rho is a path of branches that leads to the Chi-Rho at the top of the window. These branches call to mind Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. It was there that he was put to death for the salvation of the world. Christ has conquered sin and reigns victoriously over all creation. Above the text is a simple horn and blue waves bringing us back to John the Baptist. With these images, the canon is reminded, again, of his calling to announce or proclaim the

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65 Day of Pentecost, 16.
66 Deck, booklet.
resurrection and bring people into the community through the waters of baptism, which symbolize death and resurrection. This window is extremely important in keeping our hearts and minds focused on the positive message of the Gospel. There is a sense of hope that comes with meditating on the resurrection. The canon ponders that his sinfulness will be transformed in the risen Christ. Praying with a hopeful heart, the canon can enter his work giving praise to God for the beauty that surrounds him and, in turn, show our broken world that it can be renewed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

The third window, *Prime*, helps the canon realize the work he will do during the day to uncover the Paschal Mystery. The work each canon does revolves around the charism of St. Norbert. These values are summarized in the five pillars of the order, which this window depicts. The themes pour down from the hands at the top of the window. The first theme is the devotion to the Eucharist. Norbert had great respect and reverence for the Eucharistic species and the celebration of the Mass. The Eucharist is symbolized by the chalice, wheat, and grapes and the artist makes it clear they become the presence of Christ by superimposing the Chi-Rho on the chalice. Norbert fought heresies that denied the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and called his community to celebrate the liturgy with great care and to care for the sacred species in order that scandal among the faithful be avoided. For him, the Eucharist was the sustenance of all communal and Church activity. The second pillar of the order is a devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of the Immaculate Conception. This is depicted by the rosary wrapped around the lily. Mary
is the protector of the order, in fact, a legend from the fifteenth century says Mary gave Norbert the white habit the community wears, even though Norbert speaks about the color representing the Easter joy of resurrection.\textsuperscript{67} Just like the apostles in the upper room, the community invokes Mary in its daily prayer. The canons strive to witness the courage, love, and devotion she had for her son. The third pillar is the zeal for the salvation of souls, which is “indicated by the cross and flame and the Greek word \textit{Aògos} or ‘Word.’”\textsuperscript{68} Again, this touches on the prevalent theme of the canons’ mission to preach the Gospel because it is through God’s word that all people will be saved. It is the role of the canon to “teach the ignorant.”\textsuperscript{69} The fourth pillar is for the canons to have a spirit of habitual penance, which we have already discussed. This is shown by the scourge and crown of thorns. As mentioned in the chapter room, the canon unites his life to the passion of Christ for the sins of the world. The last pillar of the Norbertine Order is the singing of the Liturgy of the Hours. This is represented by the four white robed figures at the bottom of the window. The words \textit{Quicumque vult salvus esse}\textsuperscript{70} are woven throughout the window and come from the “Athanassian Creed,” which was “recited at Prime on Trinity Sunday.”\textsuperscript{71} The texted from the Creed that is placed in the window implies the Norbertine will live a holy life and be saved if he also immerses himself in the traits of the order. The author of the window is drawing a comparison between the Creed and the pillars of the order. With these five guideposts, the canon is nourished and directed in the Gospel discipline.

\textit{Terce} is the next hour of prayer. Done at nine in the morning, it recalls the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles at Pentecost. The canon needs to be filled with the zeal and gifts of the Spirit in order to carry out and bear fruit in his ministry. The two significant images are the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Ardura, 23.
  \item \textsuperscript{68} Deck, booklet.
  \item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{70} Whoever wishes to be saved
  \item \textsuperscript{71} Deck, booklet.
dove and the flames that arise from the dove. The flame represents the grace poured forth on Mary and the apostles in the upper room. Within the flame, there are smaller flames or swoops that symbolize Mary and the apostles. Once the apostles received the Holy Spirit, they had courage and wisdom to evangelize the world with Christ’s message of forgiveness and love. The Norbertine, who received the Spirit in baptism, strengthens those gifts in confirmation and in their commitment to the community. The canon, in his prayer, hones these gifts so he can go into the world with courage just like the apostles. This window allows the canon to reflect and recall the great gifts that God shares with him. It can be humbling to the canon as he reflects on the power of the Spirit. He becomes conscious that it is Christ who ministers through him by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is an awesome task to bear God’s light and no one can do it alone. The prayer that is spread out in the window is “Come, Holy Spirit.” The prayer requires an open heart and mind to receive the graces from God and hear God’s word. Coming from the dove’s breath is each of the seven gifts. The first is wisdom shown by the chains and the clear triangle. Wisdom is the gift that allows us to be “detached from the things of the world” and bear witness to the kingdom. Understanding is shown by the four Gospel writers.

Understanding gives one the ability to know truth and share it with those we teach. Thirdly, counsel is depicted by the scales, which show that one must discern what is appropriate in daily activity. The fourth gift is fortitude symbolized by the shields. Fortitude allows us to be strong and faithful to our promises. The shields show that one can resist

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72 Ibid.
temptation and strongly live the Christian vocation. The lamp with the flame depicts the fifth gift of knowledge. Through study and prayer, the canon becomes enlightened to God’s plan for him. This new knowledge allows him to respond more faithfully to God’s invitation. The sixth gift is piety, shown by the monstrance. “Piety awakens in us confidence and the will to honor God.”

The last gift is fear of the Lord. Lightening in the globe at the bottom of the window symbolizes our reverence for God and for justice in the world. It is important for each baptized person to reflect on how the gifts of the Spirit are present and active in his or her life so they might be used to bring people closer to Jesus. These are tools that need to be developed in prayer and reflection so they might be effectively used to reveal the real presence of Christ in creation.

The last window in this series we will discuss is Vespers. After a laborious day of preaching the Gospel, the canon returns to the abbey once again lifting his voice in song to give thanks to God the Creator. The Canticle of Mary, sung at Vespers, is the main subject for the images in this window. Mary teaches us to be humble and respond to God’s invitation with an open mind and heart and through this song of praise, Mary glorifies the Lord. As a model, Mary continually reminds the canon of his promise to Christ through the community to spread the Gospel and humbly serve the Lord. She is a model of self-offering, the life the canon is to live. At the center of the window is a large lily layered with many symbols, showing the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham. Coming out of the center of the lily is Christ (Chi-Rho) who is the final sacrifice to redeem the world. Next to the Chi-Rho is the Star of David symbolizing the

73 Ibid.
mercy that God has on the people of Israel. On the outer edge of the lily, we see a foot representing Mary crushing the serpent, which reflects the phrase “he has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.” Through the canon’s prophetic ministry, he too will crush false teachings. The wheat at the bottom right of the lily refers to God providing for the hungry and needy. Today, we are still nourished by Word and Sacrament. The canon’s role is to preach and celebrate the sacraments in order that the faithful are filled “with good things,” nourished to be strong in their daily labor. The last image in the lily is the lighting bolt representing God’s mighty arm scattering the proud of heart.

The other images in the window deal with the seven days of creation. Each crescent, above and below the lily, depicts items created on each day. Starting at the top are black and white forms recalling the separation of light from darkness. The second crescent, with the brown form and blue waves, shows the separation of the earth and water. Thirdly, plant life is created, followed by the creation of the sun and the moon. The fifth crescent depicts two abstract fish in water showing the creation of “the great sea monsters.” Near the bottom of the window are two beasts and finally the day of rest, which is symbolized by the Trinity: the flame, triangle, and Chi-Rho. Starting from the beginning with creation, through Abraham, to Mary’s fiat, we see how God’s promises are fulfilled in the sacrifice of Jesus and we give thanks to God for offering this gift of salvation. The canons gather in prayer to rejoice for their work and offer it to God so that it may become holy and prepare them for another day in the vineyard.

The Great West Window, The Sacraments, dominates the entire abbey church. It stretches the entire height of the building and is filled with vibrant blues and reds. Immediately, the canon sees two large figures reigning, Christ the King and St. Norbert, as Archbishop of

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74 Lk 1:52; NRSV.
75 Gen 1:21; NRSV.
Magdeburg. Rising from the bottom of the window is the Tree of Life rooted in the fountain of Living Water. Norbert understood that a person grows closer to Christ through the sacramental life and therefore, his order would promote and celebrate the sacramental life of the Church. The sacraments are doorways to encounter the sacred. This window shows our journey from baptism to eternal life with the risen Christ. Our journey is marked by the sacramental moments that bestow grace and strengthen us to live a life in and for Christ. Norbert is superimposed on Christ because he achieved sanctity by participating in the sacraments and, therefore, Christ’s life. The sacraments allowed him to reveal Christ’s presence through his preaching and his actions. This large image of Norbert challenges the community to remain faithful to his vision and be fervent in teaching, prayer, and celebration of the Divine Mysteries.

The ultimate goal for the canon who is faithful is to live a life so the world might become a holier place where people will be invited to a deeper relationship with God through Christ. Both
Norbert and Christ shepherd the community, which is symbolized by their crosiers, still calling their followers to be faithful and passionate witnesses of the Good News. The Holy Spirit, below Christ’s crosier, continues to breathe life in the community through the sacraments and calls them out of the cloister to share the burning for God’s love in their hearts to the ends of the earth. This window shows the fulfillment of the canon’s vow to conversion of life. It is through the sacramental life of the Church that his life is transformed. The old will perish and the new will rise. Within the Tree of Life are symbols representing each sacrament, which reflect the fruit they bear bringing abundant life to those who partake in them. According to St. Augustine, “The Sacraments are both signs and sources of unity of the Church.” Sacraments bring us together in one body and mark us as belonging to Christ. After praying the Liturgy of the Hours and celebrating the mass, the canon should be inspired, like Norbert and the apostles, to carry forth the wisdom he gains to all he encounters. Looking close at the heads of both figures, you will notice the square eyes. Deck specifically chose the square eyes to depict the abstract nature of both Jesus’ life and Norbert’s life. He wanted to suggest that there is more to learn about each person and that both Norbert’s and Jesus’ lives continue to flourish in our living. Abbot Killeen did not like the square shape and asked Deck to change them, but he stuck with his original ideas to communicate the abstract areas of our lives. The image can illustrate the not yet or unknown of our own lives and call us to be attentive to the power and movement of the Holy Spirit in our life.

**Conclusion**

The Canons Regular of Prémontré have a unique role in the Church, which emphasizes the

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76 *Day of Pentecost*, 15.
77 Emil Frei, St. Louis, to Abbot Sylvester Killeen, De Pere, 15 September 1959, Emil Frei Collections, Missouri Historical Society research Library, St. Louis.
78 Abbot Sylvester Killeen, De Pere, to Emil Frei, St. Louis, 10 September 1959, Emil Frei Collections, Missouri Historical Society research Library, St. Louis.
celebration of the liturgy so that people may cultivate a deep awareness of God’s presence in their lives. As we have discussed, the canon’s primary role is to celebrate the Divine Office and the Mass in order to be competent to preach the Word of God. The stained glass windows in the chapter room and Church at St. Norbert Abbey are collections of abstract symbols that challenge the heart and the mind of the canon to enter more fully into the sacred mysteries he has vowed to celebrate. It is here that the canon is inspired by the Divine logos. Surrounded by stories and symbols of the faith, the canon’s heart is set on fire for the mission of sharing the Gospel of Christ. Breaking out of the papal conservatism of the time, we see these abstract windows offering a visual text that speaks to the inner truth of the canon’s soul calling him to be on fire with the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{79} The art enhances the space the canon prays in and allows him space to ponder the meaning of his life in connection to the Divine Office and the Eucharist. His reflection should inspire him to be faithful in his ministry and renew his love for Christ and his Church:

\begin{quote}
The mission of our Order is not only to announce Christ and the grace He has brought to men, but also to imbue the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel and bring it to perfection . . . We ought to work at full strength with others in the building of a more humanely organized world.\textsuperscript{80}
\end{quote}

Norbert’s mission was to proclaim to good news of salvation. He wanted to bring people closer to Christ and accomplished that in the celebration of the sacraments and excellent preaching.

The challenge for the Norbertines today is to examine closely where the Spirit is leading them to carry forth Norbert’s mission. They must begin to let the stories of the faith and the symbols around them move them to a \textit{metanoia}. Symbols are divinely inspired and lead a person beyond reality, into the transcendent.\textsuperscript{81} Deck produced windows that reflect the life, mission, and

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Day of Pentecost}, 18.
\textsuperscript{81} Henry Chadwick, \textit{Studies on Ancient Christianity} (Burlington: Ashgate Variorum, 2006), 1.
spirit of Norbert and the Norbertines, but the images and the stories never grow old. They continue to challenge and call the contemporary canon, who meditates on them, to be a fervent, zealous, and inspired preacher. The canon must enter the world with the fire of St. Norbert and Christ. If this is at his core, this passion will transform him and all of creation.
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Note: The pictures included in this paper are not from the original booklet Francis Deck created. The Chapter Room windows were taken by Rt. Rev. Gary Neville, O. Praem, in 2006 and the windows in the church were taken by Ambrosius Studios in De Pere in 2006.