



From Abbey to Xanten
A Glossary of Catholic and Norbertine Terms



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As part of our mission at St. Norbert College, we value the importance of *communio*, a centuries-old charism of the Order of Premonstratensians (more commonly known as the Norbertines).

Communio is characterized by mutual esteem, trust, sincerity, faith and responsibility, and is lived through open dialogue, communication, consultation and collaboration.

In order for everyone to effectively engage in this ongoing dialogue, it is important that we share some of the same vocabulary and understand the concepts that shape our values as an institution. Because the college community is composed of people from diverse faith traditions and spiritual perspectives, this glossary explains a number of terms and concepts from the Catholic and Norbertine traditions with which some may not be familiar. We offer it as a guide to help people avoid those awkward moments one can experience when entering a new community – a place where people can sometimes appear to be speaking in code.

While the terms in this modest pamphlet are important, the definitions are limited and are best considered general indications of the meaning of the terms rather than a complete scholarly treatment.

We hope you find this useful. If there are other terms or concepts you would like to learn more about that are not covered in this guide, please feel free to contact the associate vice president for mission & student affairs at 920-403-3014 or msa-division@snc.edu.

In the spirit of *communio*,
The Staff of Mission & Student Affairs



When a word in a definition appears in bold type, it indicates that the word is defined elsewhere in the glossary.

Abbey – A building that houses a religious community that is overseen by an **abbot** or **abbess**.

Abbot/Abbess – The male/female superior of a religious community. An abbot general – or the superior general – is the superior of a group of religious communities. The abbot general of the Norbertines lives in Rome.

Abbot Pennings – Abbot Bernard Henry Pennings, O.Praem., was founder and first president (1898–1955) of St. Norbert College. Born in Holland, Abbot Pennings joined the Norbertine order at Berne Abbey. Originally sent to the United States to minister to Dutch-speaking immigrants, Father Pennings taught Frank Van Dyke his first Latin lesson on Oct. 10, 1898, which is now considered the college’s **Founder’s Day**.

Advent – The liturgical season leading up to Christmas, in which the church recalls the birth of Christ and spiritually prepares for Christ’s second coming. The season is marked by the four Sundays leading up to Christmas.

Archbishop – A **bishop** of highest rank who heads an **archdiocese** or province.

Archdiocese – The **diocese** overseen by an **archbishop**. A jurisdiction or area composed of a number of regional dioceses under the direction of an archbishop is known as an **ecclesiastical** province.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) – One of the most important Christian thinkers in Western culture. He was a rhetorician whose conversion is recounted in his “Confessions,” a work of deep psychological and spiritual self-reflection. The rule he gave to his monasteries was taken by St. Norbert as a foundational ideal for his community at **Prémontré**.

Benedictine – A member of the religious community founded by St. Benedict.

Bishop – A member of the hierarchy responsible for the pastoral and administrative oversight of a **diocese**. He may be assisted by one or more auxiliary bishops.

Blessed Sacrament – The consecrated **host** (Body of Christ) reserved in the tabernacle (an ornamental receptacle for the reserved **Eucharist**) or displayed in a monstrance (a container in which the consecrated host is exposed for adoration).



Blesseds – Women and men who have been beatified (declared to be among the blessed and, thus, entitled to specific religious honor) by the Catholic church, or proclaimed worthy of public veneration. **Norbertines** among those who have been beatified are Hugh, Hroznata, Henry, Herman, Gerard, Gertrude, Bronislava, James Kern, Johann Loelius, Macarius, Milo, Peter, Pontia, Radobo, Rivera, Peter Toulorge, Waltmann and Wilhelm.

Brother – A vowed member of a religious community of men within the church. A brother takes vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. He shares in the life and mission of his community. He may serve in a variety of ministries but, unlike a priest, he may not preside over **sacraments**.

Canons Regular – Adherents to a model of religious life followed by a number of religious congregations, including the **Norbertines**. As canons regular, the **Norbertines** attempt to balance a life of prayer and community with a life of service.

Cardinal – The title for the highest Catholic ecclesiastical honor other than pope. Cardinals are named by the pope. Upon the death of a pope, they elect his successor in a locked-door gathering called the conclave.

Catechism – A text created for the formation of members of the universal Roman Catholic Church, which is promulgated by the **Vatican** and serves as a guide to the religious **doctrine** of the church.

Catholic – Often used as a shorthand reference to the Roman Catholic Church or its members, the word “catholic” is a Greek term that literally means “universal.” It was first used in reference to the community of faith in a letter from St. Ignatius of Antioch in the year 107 CE.

Catholic Intellectual Tradition – A commonly held set of principles that describe a Catholic approach to intellectual life. These include:

- Upholding the value of both faith and reason, and calling us to an active dialogue between these sources of knowledge.
- Seeing God as actively involved in the world, and affirming both the dignity of the human person and the goodness to be found in creation and culture.
- Viewing the human enterprises of learning and working as contributing to the creation of a Gospel vision of justice.



Catholic Social Teaching – Encompasses aspects of Catholic doctrine relating to matters dealing with the collective welfare of humanity. The seven basic principles of Catholic social teaching are:

- Life and dignity of the human person
- Call to family, community and participation
- Rights and responsibilities
- Option for the poor and vulnerable
- Dignity of work and rights of workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God’s creation

Charism – A distinct spirit that animates a religious order and gives it a particular character. The charisms of the religious community founded by **Norbert of Xanten** – the **Norbertines** – include **communio**, *actio* (action), *contemplatio* (contemplation) and **localitas**.

Common Good – This principle, central to Catholic social teaching, promotes the idea that social systems should be organized in ways that support human dignity and the ability of individuals to grow in community. In this view, the flourishing of the individual and the good of the community are intertwined.

Communio – A Norbertine **charism** that flows from the theological understanding that the **Trinitarian** God is a relational reality. Relationship is at the heart of the nature of God and we are called to live in ways that reflect the image in which we were created. Thus, our relationships strive for high standards including mutual esteem, trust, sincerity, faith, responsibility, open dialogue, communication, consultation and collaboration.

Communion – A common term that refers to the receiving of the **Eucharist** at **Mass**.

Consecration – The act through which the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.

Deacon – Within the Roman Catholic tradition, an **ordained** male called to a ministry of service. Deacons are most often involved in assisting with liturgical responsibilities and in outreach efforts.

Diocese – A church region under the pastoral guidance and governance of a **bishop**. There are five dioceses in Wisconsin: Green Bay, Madison, La Crosse, Superior and the **Archdiocese** of Milwaukee.



Divine Office – Also known as the **Liturgy of the Hours**, it is the public prayer of the church that incorporates prayer, song, psalms and the reading of Scripture in order to praise God and sanctify the day. Praying the Divine Office is a requirement for those in holy orders, as well as for men and women in professed religious life. While morning and evening prayer are given prominence, there are seven times for prayer throughout the day.

Docere verbo et exemplo – The Latin phrase meaning “to teach by word and example,” which has long been used by the **Norbertines**. It was officially adopted as the motto of St. Norbert College in 2007.

Doctrine – A belief or principle, or the whole body of such beliefs, authoritatively taught and passed on by the Catholic church.

Dogma – The official teaching of the Catholic church that is considered to be essential to the faith.

Dominican – A member of the religious community founded by St. Dominic.

Ecclesiastical – Relating or pertaining to the church.

Ecumenical Church Councils – Gatherings of **bishops** from the worldwide church that attend to matters of **doctrine** or discipline. To date, there have been 21 such councils, the most recent of which was **Vatican II**. While all councils discuss matters of import, among the more famous are the Councils at Nicaea (325 CE) and Trent (1545-63 CE).

Ecumenism – The process of working toward unity among all Christian religions.

Encyclical – A letter written by the pope addressing a particular religious or moral topic. The letter is circulated throughout the universal church and may address institutions and people outside the community of the Roman Catholic Church.

Eucharist – Derived from a Greek word meaning “thanksgiving,” this term is used to refer to the celebration of the **Mass** as a whole or to the **consecrated** bread and wine.

Ex Corde Ecclesiae – Meaning “from the heart of the church,” this is a public decree written by Pope John Paul II that identifies the important characteristics of Catholic colleges and universities.



Father – Term commonly used in reference to an ordained Roman Catholic priest.

Founder’s Day – The college considers Oct. 10 the anniversary of its founding. On this day, **Abbot Pennings** taught his first student, Frank Van Dyke, a Latin lesson.

Franciscan – A member of the religious community founded by St. Francis.

Grotto – A cave-like, natural or artificial structure often associated with religious sites visited, generally for private devotion or prayer.

Holy Days of Obligation – Specific dates on which Roman Catholics are expected to participate in **Mass**.

Holy Week – The last week of **Lent**, immediately preceding Easter, in which Christians remember, particularly, Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection.

Homily – A sermon.

Host – The bread that is used in the Christian ritual of the **Eucharist**.

Immaculate Conception – The belief that Mary was conceived and born in a state of grace, without original sin.

Infallibility – The teaching that holds that, under certain circumstances, the pope, and sometimes the whole body of **bishops** in union with the pope, is enabled by the presence of the Holy Spirit to teach without error in matters related to faith and morals. Not everything the pope says is free from error; he must explicitly define the teaching as infallible. In addition, it must relate to a matter of either faith or morals.

Interfaith – Dialogue or activity to promote understanding across world religions – Christianity, Islam, Judaism and more.

Jesuit – A member of the religious community founded by St. Ignatius.

Laity – Non-ordained members of the church. Also known as the congregation, or parishioners, of a church.

Lent – The 40 days of fasting, prayer and almsgiving (charitable acts) before Easter. Lent starts on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Thursday.



Liturgical (Church) Year – The cycle of liturgical seasons in Christian churches that determine when feast days are to be observed and which portions of Scripture are to be read. The liturgical seasons in Christianity are:

- **Advent:** the four weeks leading up to Christmas.
- **Christmas:** the season that begins at Christmas and ends with the feast of the baptism of our Lord.
- **Ordinary time:** the period after the baptism of our Lord until the beginning of Lent.
- **Lent:** the 40 days of preparation for Easter.
- **Triduum:** the liturgy that marks Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday.
- **Easter:** this season begins with Easter Sunday and ends with the feast of Pentecost.
- **Ordinary time:** the period after Pentecost until the beginning of Advent.

Liturgy – The act of Christian worship.

Liturgy of the Hours – See **Divine Office**.

Localitas – On the day of profession, **Norbertines** give themselves to a specific church and are immediately incorporated into a certain Norbertine community. This term also refers to the commitment a Norbertine community has over many generations to serve the particular spiritual needs of the local community.

Mandatum – An acknowledgement, by church authority, that a professor of theological or related disciplines has agreed to accurately and faithfully present official Catholic teaching. The matter of seeking or receiving a mandatum is considered a private matter between the local **bishop** and the faculty member.

Mass – Refers to the **Eucharistic** celebration made up of the **Liturgy** of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Morning Prayer – The college community honors the Norbertine call to praying in common by gathering for ecumenical Christian prayer each Monday, Wednesday and Friday during the academic semester.

Norbert of Xanten – Founder of the **Order of Premonstratensians**, a religious community of **canons regular**, more commonly known as **Norbertines**.

Norbertine – A member of the Catholic religious order of **canons regular** founded at **Prémontré**, France, in 1120 by **Norbert of Xanten**.



Norbertine Associate – A member of a group of lay people, joined together by a common desire to commit themselves to Christ through the life and work of the **Norbertine** community; in so doing, they hope to increase their service to God and their sisters and brothers, and find mutual support in each other.

Nun – A participant in a particular form of religious life for women. While nuns may commonly be called “**Sister**,” their particular form of religious life is marked by contemplation, and is most often cloistered life in a monastery.

O.Praem. – The suffix designation for **Norbertines**. O.Praem. is an abbreviation for *ordinis Praemonstratensis* (referring to the Order of **Premonstratensians**).

Ordained – To become officially authorized by a church or religious organization to provide leadership to the community. In the Catholic church, men are ordained as **deacons**, **priests** and **bishops**.

Parish – A church community most often led by a **priest** who serves as pastor.

Pope – The bishop of Rome. As the successor of St. Peter, prince of the apostles, he is considered the “first among equals” of all the bishops of the world. He is called to be a principal instrument of unity by presiding over the church in love. He is also the head of the Vatican city/state.

Premonstratensian – See Norbertine.

Prémontré – The town in France where Norbert of Xanten founded his religious community.

Priest – An **ordained** member of the Roman Catholic clergy.

Prior/Prioress – The male/female superior of a **priory** or the primary assistant to the **abbot/abbess** in a religious community.

Priory – A house of religious men or women that is connected to an **abbey**. An abbey, often considered a mother house, oversees priories, often called dependent houses because they are dependent on the abbey for governance and financial support.

Religious – In its adjective form, this refers to belief in and worship of God. In its noun form, it refers to members of a religious order.

Reverend – A term of respect used as the formal title for members of the clergy.



Rome – The capital and center of the Roman Empire at the time of Christ.

As described in the acts of the apostles, the acceptance of the faith by the gentiles saw the move of “the center” of Christianity from Jerusalem to this city, which, founded on the faith of Peter, has ever since been the center of governance for the Roman Catholic Church.

Rosary – A Catholic devotion that consists of the recitation of 20 prayers. The prayers are divided into four groups of five, known as the joyful, luminous, sorrowful and glorious mysteries, which focus on the life, ministry, passion and glorification of Christ. As an aid to memory, the prayers are counted on a string of beads, which are commonly referred to as rosary beads.

Rule of Augustine – Written around the year 400 CE, this is one of the earliest guides for religious life. It is divided into eight chapters and covers such topics as common life, prayer, fraternal correction and forgiveness. It is this rule that **Norbert of Xanten** adopted when he founded his religious community.

Sacrament – Commonly refers to the seven prayer rituals that are based upon the ministry of Jesus: baptism, reconciliation (confession), Holy **Communion**, confirmation, marriage, holy orders (**ordination**) and anointing of the sick.

Sacramental Worldview – Recognizes God is present and active in the world today. This leads us to approach persons, creation and culture with optimism and reverence, believing they can reveal aspects of God’s goodness.

Saint – A person who is formally recognized (canonized) by the Catholic church as an exemplar of holiness in following Christ. **Norbertine** saints are Norbert, Godfrey, Frederic, Gerlac, Evermode, Ludolph, Hermann-Joseph, Isfrid, Adrian, James, Gilbert, Giselbert, Hedwig, Hildegund, Petronilla, Richard and Siard.

St. Augustine – see **Augustine of Hippo**.

St. Norbert – See **Norbert of Xanten**.

Sister – A woman in a religious order who takes solemn vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Stations of the Cross – A prayerful devotion through which an individual or group meditates on the story of Jesus’ journey to the Crucifixion. There is more than one form of the stations; some forms include the Resurrection as the final station.



Tradition – Along with Scripture, considered the means by which Christ’s revelation is passed down through the generations.

Transubstantiation – Teaching that, when **consecrated**, the bread and wine used for **Communion** become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This is also referred to as the real presence of Christ in the **Eucharist**.

Trinitarian – Believing or professing belief in the Christian Trinity or the Trinity, which asserts there is one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Vatican – The area of the city of Rome where tradition recounts that St. Peter was buried and over whose grave the Emperor Constantine erected a major basilica. Contrary to popular belief, the Vatican basilica is not the cathedral of the Diocese of Rome; St. John Lateran is. It was only in the late Middle Ages that the Vatican became the residence of the **pope** and the administrative center of the Roman Catholic Church.

Vatican II – An **ecumenical church council** convened from 1962 to 1965. The council sought to define the nature, scope and mission of the Catholic church in the modern world.

Vocation – The understanding of what one is called to be and do in the world. In traditional Catholic thought, this was used in reference to state of life, whether one was called to married or single life, or religious or ordained life. A fuller understanding includes the ways in which one is called to serve God and the human family by using one’s particular gifts and passions in service to the needs of the world.

Xanten – The town in Germany where Norbert was educated. St. Norbert is often referred to as Norbert of Xanten.



*St. Norbert College,
a Catholic liberal arts
college embracing the
Norbertine ideal of
communio, provides an
educational environment
that fosters intellectual,
spiritual and personal
development.*

