

# Charismatic Circularity: Lay Faculty, Practices of Transmission, and Possibilities for Renewal

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## Abstract

This essay explores the principle of charismatic circularity and argues that this theological principle offers a warrant for lay faculty to adopt and renew the charisms of religious congregations in and through the practices of teaching. The essay first develops the principle of charismatic circularity by tracing its origin, as well as explicating the Biblical origin of charism and its theological development at the Second Vatican Council, particularly in relation to charism renewal among religious communities. The essay then discusses charism transmission within the context of 21st century Catholic higher education through a concrete example of a faculty-led, charism-driven pedagogy development program.

That things repeat, that time seems to cycle back on itself, is a culturally familiar notion. *All things old become new again. History repeats itself.* These compact philosophies tell us events occur with an inevitable, looping circularity. The Christian vision of reality, a vision defined by resurrection and redemption, is different. It is teleological. It has a clear beginning, “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1), and hopeful expectation about the end, “We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come” (Nicene Creed) — both events defined in relation to Christ. Within this arc of history, Christians make room for cycles — daily rituals and annual liturgical events that repeat — yet the Christian vision resists *rote* practice and *pure* cycles. Each recurrence of a prayer practice is incarnated anew by the one who performs it. Every repetition of the liturgical cycle draws people of faith along the arc of history toward Christ.

This essay explores a theological cycle, not a liturgical cycle one — that of *charismatic circularity* — as a way of envisioning renewal at

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Catholic colleges and universities, particularly those founded and sponsored by religious congregations (henceforth, sponsored schools). Charismatic circularity is a concept from the Magisterium, laid out in a document issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education, a Vatican-created body that dates back to 1588.<sup>1</sup> The concept provides a rich resource for sponsored schools that are concerned about the future life of their heritage and mission: their charism.

The principle of charismatic circularity, as argued here, offers a warrant for lay faculty to adopt and renew the congregation's charism in the new and shifting landscape of Catholic higher education. This principle is theologically developed here and then articulated in relation to the concrete circumstances of twenty-first century Catholic higher education. Specifically, I am interested in exploring how charism manifests in and through the quotidian, common work that is the very heart of an educational community — the work of teaching — and in making a case with a doctrinal foundation for lay faculty as rightful stewards of charism.

This project is governed by two assumptions. First, that charismatic circularity is by no means inevitable. Lay faculty don't just happen to adopt and renew the charism of their sponsoring communities as a natural course of events. The charism will not just repeat itself, for the Spirit needs a place — or rather, people on whom — to land. This is a biblically grounded conviction illustrated by the Pentecost experience: “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place... Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them” (Acts 1:1–3). The Spirit arrived when the disciples were gathered in one place. The upshot for my purposes is that lay faculty at sponsored schools need intentional and carefully designed opportunities to engage the charism in relation to their teaching. They must gather in one place. Second, because charism is incarnational, the assumption is that, as the charism iterates anew, it may not look like previous iterations. This means that the “new version” may generate discomfort and dissonance, including the cognitive dissonance that results from bequeathing charism to non-religious teaching faculty. This is a shift that is, at least in principle, allowed for — even encouraged — by the principle of charismatic circularity.

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<sup>1</sup>“Charismatic circularity,” which will be discussed at length in this essay, appears in the following document: Congregation for Catholic Education, “Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools,” [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_20021028\\_consecrated-persons\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20021028_consecrated-persons_en.html).

## Norbertine Pedagogy and the Principle of Charismatic Circularity

Several years ago, I began thinking seriously about whether the charism of my institution's sponsoring order influenced my teaching in any concrete or specific way. I was a tenure-track professor at a school founded and steeped in Norbertine culture and though I'm not a Norbertine priest or woman religious, I felt the impact of charism at St. Norbert College.<sup>2</sup> As a professor I felt invested in nurturing a charism I worried was endangered but realized I had never explored.

I therefore initiated a conversation with a colleague and friend, Fr. Andrew Ciferni, O.Praem., about his formation and life as a Norbertine.<sup>3</sup> I wanted to have a deeper sense of what being a Norbertine really meant. Fr. Andrew generously shared his personal journey as a Norbertine, as well as his rich knowledge of St. Norbert of Xanten and the history of the order.

I learned that when Fr. Andrew first came to the college as a novice in the mid-1950s, all his teachers were white-robed Premonstratensians. Yet by the time I joined the St. Norbert faculty in 2011, only a handful of Norbertines were regularly present and active on campus, with only one teaching full time. The contrast between Fr. Andrew's arrival on campus and my own was striking: Fr. Andrew went from being entirely surrounded by members of his order to being one of its only representatives on campus, a story by no means unremarkable at sponsored schools across North America.

Behind our dialogue I found a philosophical riddle: Can a Norbertine school be authentically Norbertine if no Norbertines remain around to run it? My answer to this riddle is "Yes." This essay offers a theological rationale for *why* I say "yes," and does so by exploring one avenue — built on the example of an effort I undertook — for *how* it is possible to authentically maintain an institution's charism in the age of severely declining religious life.<sup>4</sup> The essay also offers a challenge (in the spirit

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<sup>2</sup>"Norbertines" is another name for members of the Order of the Premonstratensians, designated by the abbreviation O. Praem.

<sup>3</sup>Fr. Andrew Ciferni, O. Praem., is a canon of the Daylesford Abbey and served as the director of the Center for Norbertine Studies at St. Norbert College. I am grateful to him for his open spirit to me, and tireless enthusiasm for this project.

<sup>4</sup>Recent reports by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) on the population trends among Religions Institutes of Men and Religious Institutes of Women paint a picture of decline for both men's and women's institutes. While the full narrative

of humility!) to my teaching colleagues and administrators at other religiously-sponsored institutions: If schools, and the Church, want the mission and heritage of sponsoring communities to be more than just relics of the past, if the mission and heritage are to live and breathe now and in the future, then educational communities must think seriously about the process of “charism transmission.”

Efforts at effecting transmission must be more than an onboarding brief at a new faculty orientation event. Doing the work of charism transmission includes: asking whether transmission is possible, figuring out the means by which it can occur, and being sensitive to the implications of transmission, both practical and theological.<sup>5</sup> The Norbertine Pedagogy Project (NPP) represents a practically focused effort to keep the Norbertine mission and heritage “off the shelf” and truly alive — to actualize, in some small way, charism transmission through the practice of teaching. The NPP was an experimental project that I initiated and facilitated.<sup>6</sup> I present features of it — and use “charismatic circularity”

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is more complex than simple decline (CARA, “Population Trends Among Religious Institutes of Men,” Washington, DC [2015], 8) and reading the data requires nuance (CARA, “Population Trends Among Religious Institutes of Women,” Washington, DC [2014], 7), the studies reveal significant decreases in vocations and membership since the mid-twentieth century. While the number of diocesan priests in the United States dropped by 30 percent between 1970 and 2015 (itself a significant decline), membership among religious institutes of men in the United States dropped at nearly twice that rate, 58 percent (CARA, “Men,” 1). Likewise, the population of women religious in the United States fell by 72.5% between 1965 and 2014 (CARA, “Women,” 2). CARA does not track what such dramatic patterns of decline mean for college and university life *per se*. However, the report notes some effects on men’s and women’s ministries broadly speaking. For example, CARA remarks that “the diminished numbers [of two of the largest religious institutes of men, the Jesuits and the Brothers of the Christian Schools] resulted in their withdrawal from many sponsored ministries such as parishes and schools” (CARA, “Men,” 7). The bird’s-eye view offered by CARA data provides a wider context for Fr. Andrew’s experience of being among the last of the Norbertines at St. Norbert College.

<sup>5</sup> John Lydon, “Transmission of Charism: A Major Challenge for Catholic Education,” *International Studies in Catholic Education* 1, no. 1 (2009): 51. See also, Gerald Grace, *Catholic Schools: Mission, Markets, and Morality* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2002) and Gerald Grace, “Renewing Spiritual Capital: An Urgent Priority for the Future of Catholic Education Internationally,” *International Studies in Catholic Education* 2 (2010): 117–128.

<sup>6</sup> The NPP was an effort of my own making: I started it *without* a long-term vision, clear ideas for programming, or an assessment plan. I also did it without remuneration, a budget, dedicated space, or any other formal structure of support beyond the general encouragement of key administrators, Norbertines, and interested colleagues. I note this to highlight the project’s genuinely exploratory, *ad hoc*, and open-ended nature.

as the interpretative key to explore its theological implications — to stimulate conversations on charism transmission and to prompt faculty at other institutions to try something similar.<sup>7</sup>

The principle of charismatic circularity, identified by the Congregation for Catholic Education in “Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools,” is derived from observing how religious communities develop in history.<sup>8</sup> The principle aims to help us recognize various manifestations of the Spirit’s gifts, providing assurance that the charism of a community will return “in a sort of way to where it was born, but without simply repeating itself.”<sup>9</sup> The principle explains how religious communities are renewed — how they are uncannily defined by their heritage — and also how they are responsive to and therefore shaped by the exigencies of the present. Thus, the principle of charismatic circularity reveals a cycle that also moves forward in time: It is recursive, but also teleological.

The principle allows us to draw lines of continuity between past and future, and explains how religious communities are renewed “in the listening and interpretation of the signs of the times and in the creative and active fidelity of its origins.”<sup>10</sup> At sponsored schools in the twenty-first century, one of the strongest signs of the times is a marked absence of the sponsoring congregation. This situation demands a new

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Because I took a new job at a different university shortly after the NPP Workshop, I didn’t have the opportunity to hold subsequent sessions of the NPP or to integrate the project into other faculty development efforts. Furthermore, due to significant administrative changes at the college, the NPP never took flight. Still, the self-reported assessment data I gathered from faculty participants (to be discussed at the end of this essay) suggest positive effects on my colleagues’ teaching, as well as growing appreciation for the Norbertine charism. The NPP also pushed my research agenda in a new direction and in which I currently have a grant-funded project in development using the NPP as a model to be replicated at other sponsored schools.

<sup>7</sup> I was unaware of the principle of charismatic circularity during the project and apply it retrospectively.

<sup>8</sup> The principle of charismatic circularity is “confirmed by history” (Congregation for Catholic Education, “Consecrated Persons,” sec. 14). To understand the notion of a theological principle, it may be helpful to draw a parallel with physical laws. Physical laws, like the law of gravity, tell us how objects behave in the world. Scientists “discover” physical laws through observation and then use those laws, in turn, to make predictions about how objects will act in the future. Bear in mind that physical laws — and by extension theological “laws” — are primarily explanatory. Where the law of gravity assures us that if we drop an apple from a tree it will fall to the ground, the principle of charismatic circularity dictates that the charism will loop back, in some new way, to its origin.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

moment for charism, wherein charisms are transmitted beyond the immediate community to lay faculty, but where charisms also return, renewed, to the place where they were born.

### Vatican II's Theology of Charism

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers a starting point definition for charism: “Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world.”<sup>11</sup> To fully appreciate this elemental, though authoritative, definition, the idea needs to be understood in the context of the theology of the Second Vatican Council (henceforth Vatican II), and especially *Lumen gentium*.

The understanding of “charism” offered in *Lumen gentium* relies heavily on the Apostle Paul,<sup>12</sup> who is responsible for “creating” the category of charism.<sup>13</sup> Paul uses the language of charism to make interpretative sense of what is happening in the early Church and helps him to develop the first hints of an ecclesiology. Thus, appreciating the meaning of charism requires appreciating Paul’s development of it.

Paul does not apply charism univocally.<sup>14</sup> At points, Paul uses the term to designate the “permanently acknowledged function” of those who lead, serve, and bear responsibilities for communities.<sup>15</sup> The usage in these cases “denotes differentiated functions that entail subordination.”<sup>16</sup> This, in turn, gives rise to the concept of ecclesiastical office.<sup>17</sup> This use of charism can be (and has been) used to justify a strongly institutional

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<sup>11</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 799. Some scholars, including Peter Phillips, see the Catechism’s definition as an atrophied account of charism, insofar as the Catechism implies that charisms are relatively rare and extraordinary in nature (Peter Phillips, “The Universal Call to Holiness: Engaging with the Secular,” *New Blackfriars* 95 [2014]: 590). That charisms are primarily extraordinary runs counter to the understanding of charisms that I propose in this essay.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Pfiel, “Charism and Catholic Social Teaching,” *Horizons* 34 (2007): 224.

<sup>13</sup> Carolyn Osiek, “Relation of Charism to the Rights and Duties in the New Testament Church,” *Jurist* 41 (1981): 297.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>16</sup> Enrique Nardoni, “The Concept of Charism in Paul,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55 (1993): 74.

<sup>17</sup> Osiek, “Relation of Charism,” 302.

and hierarchical view of the Christian community, wherein those who hold office are set apart from the community by virtue of their charism.<sup>18</sup>

Paul's dominant usage of charism, however, is more generic and indicates concrete manifestations of God's grace.<sup>19</sup> Charism is not tied to a particular position of leadership, but instead is inclusive.<sup>20</sup> This broad usage reveals that, for Paul, charism is not reserved for just a few members of the community, nor operative only in the extraordinary circumstances of ministry. Instead, charisms are ordinary and corporate: gifts for the daily upbuilding of the body of Christ, revealed in the common activity of the community.<sup>21</sup> Thus, charism also can be (and has been) used to justify a view of the Christian community that disregards structure and opposes institution, wherein charism is freely given to all members for the purpose of building the community.

Paul's diverse use of charism, applied to office as well as to common members, makes the concept available for ambiguous use.<sup>22</sup> Vatican II takes an integrative view of Paul, however, leading *Lumen gentium* to affirm that the gifts are allotted not only to the lay, not only to the ordained, but to "the faithful of every rank."<sup>23</sup> This is significant for the principle

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<sup>18</sup> John B. Ledwidge, "Looking to the Future: Charisms in the Church," *Doctrine and Life* 35 (1985): 69.

<sup>19</sup> Nardoni, "The Concept of Charism," 74. For example, see 1 Cor 12:9–10, 28–31, Rom 12:6–8, Eph 4:11, 1 Pet 4:10–11, 1 Tim 4:14, 2 Tim 1:6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 73–74.

<sup>21</sup> Osiek, "Relation of Charism," 300; John M. Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders, and Their Religious Families*, trans. Joseph Daries (Chicago, IL: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1983), 31; William Koupal, "Charism: A Relational Concept," *Worship* 42 (1968): 545.

<sup>22</sup> For example, in 1 Corinthians, Paul talks about charism as the gifts given to *each* member of the Body of Christ whereas in the epistles to Timothy, charisms are identified with particular leadership roles. The tension at play in Paul — between the common and the hierarchical — is also at play in *Lumen gentium* (Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, "Theologians and the Magisterium: A Proposal for Complementarity through Dialogue," *Horizons* 36 [2009]: 9–10). Rather than view "charism of office" as opposed to "charism of common members," it is possible to see them as working together, in a complementary relationship, as *Lumen gentium* strikes out to do (Anthony Ekpo, "Personal Charisms and the Charism of Office: A Possible Convergence," *Australian Catholic Record* 94 [2017]:181–82).

<sup>23</sup> Pope Paul VI, "Lumen gentium: The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church," [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), sec. 12.

of charismatic circularity because it opens lay people to the opportunity to be stewards of charism, just as consecrated men and women are.<sup>24</sup>

Paul indicates that charisms materialize among the faithful in the following ways: in wisdom, speaking in tongues, healing, working wonders, prophecy, teaching, apostleship, administering and governing, and having the kind of faith that builds community (1 Corinthians 12:4–11). All gifts are directed outward and all “are gifts of service.”<sup>25</sup> While diverse in function, their source is always one.<sup>26</sup> The Holy Spirit distributes and unifies the gifts.<sup>27</sup> Paul’s lists of charism are important for the principle of charismatic circularity because they highlight that ordinary acts — like fostering community, expressing wisdom, and teaching (1 Corinthians 12: 7–8) (notice that all these activities are at the heart of collegiate communities) — are animated by and revelatory of the Spirit, just as are extraordinary acts, such as performing miracles and speaking prophecy (1 Corinthians 12: 9–10).

### Charism and Religious Life

Vatican II’s doctrine of religious life holds charism at its center.<sup>28</sup> Though Vatican II’s theology of charism is rooted in Paul, Paul’s ecclesiology does not include a theory of religious life. The very notion of communal charism is foreign to the New Testament, for Paul discusses charism

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<sup>24</sup> This parallels the statement in *Dei verbum* regarding the development of tradition through time. Note how, in *Dei verbum*’s account, ordinary believers help move the Church toward the fullness of truth: “This tradition which comes from the Apostles develop in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (see Luke, 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth....” (Pope Paul VI, “*Dei verbum*: The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html), sec. 8).

<sup>25</sup> Koupal, “Charism,” 543.

<sup>26</sup> Osiek, “Relation to Charism,” 299.

<sup>27</sup> Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 27. Vatican II enjoined religious communities to rediscover the charisms of their communities, attention to which had been blotted out by the strong centralizing tendency of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Church (Mary Milligan, “Charism and Constitutions,” *The Way* 36 [1979]: 52).



only in relation to persons, not groups. The Church's doctrine of religious life therefore goes beyond the New Testament, but, as one historian of religious communities points out, going beyond the New Testament is not (necessarily) to go against it. And so the account of religious life that emerged from Vatican II builds on and extrapolates from Pauline charism.<sup>29</sup>

Religious life is framed as follows: Religious men and women respond to a call — “and therefore a gift” — from God to adhere to a particular pattern of life.<sup>30</sup> Their chosen pattern of life originates with the founders of religious congregations, who themselves are called by God.<sup>31</sup> The founders of religious communities, whether intentionally or not, drew others to them as they lived out their particular visions of faith in response to a perceived need of the world.<sup>32</sup> Both founders and followers *respond* to a call of God while *responding* to the needs of the world, because — in the theological rendering of Vatican II — the world's needs are *the call of God*. Thus charism is an originating and sustaining force that enables responsiveness.

“Charism transmission” is natural to the life of religious communities. Charism transmission explains how the gift of the founder is passed to his or her immediate followers, and then to later generations who identify with their founder's gift.<sup>33</sup> Lozano describes the process as such, “The gift received by father or mother, and directly from God by their followers, is collectively cultivated, proposed in spiritual doctrine to new generations, deepened, and actualized.”<sup>34</sup> Religious men and women are inspired (by the Spirit) to live according to their community's spiritual doctrine and, in doing so, are animated (by the Spirit) to help unfold the gift's potential for a new time and place.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 75.

<sup>30</sup> Enid Williamson, “The Notion of Charism in the Religious Life,” *Studia Canonica* 19 (1985): 99–100.

<sup>31</sup> Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Milligan, “Charism and Constitutions,” 48–49. NB: I use the word *founder* to refer to both male and female founders, rather than *founders* and *foundresses*, as is sometimes customary.

<sup>33</sup> Again, *Dei verbum*'s account of the development of tradition is relevant by analogy: “Holding fast to this deposit the entire holy people united with their shepherds remain always steadfast in the teaching of the Apostles, in the common life, in the breaking of the bread and in prayers (see Acts 2, 42, Greek text), so that holding to, practicing and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the bishops and faithful a single common effort” (Pope Paul VI, “*Dei verbum*,” sec. 10).

<sup>34</sup> Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 76.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

And yet the members of a religious community are not the founders. In their lives and the manifold communities that spring up over time, the circular resemblances to the founder and the founder's practice gain life anew. Reading a dog-eared copy of, say, the *Rule of St. Benedict*, doesn't transmute a person into a carbon copy of St. Benedict, but it does allow her to live a life in accordance with Benedict. Thus it is the case that no "single expression" of a community's charism will be "universally normative," as Trappist Michael Casey observes in his brief account of Benedictine history. Benedictinism survives, Casey posits, because the charism "contains within itself a predisposition to adapt and so to avoid extinction."<sup>36</sup> Charism endures through the principle of charismatic circularity.

Sharing in a community's charism involves the work of continual interpretation wherein the founder's life and work provide a point of departure, but not the conclusion of the story.<sup>37</sup> Because charism is deeply incarnational and dynamic in nature, it will be incarnated differently not only from person to person but also according to context.<sup>38</sup> Striving to understand the charism — to see its working in the life of the founder, to name its subtle movements — is integral to a religious community's work and life.

*Ecclesiae sanctae*, an apostolic letter on the renewal of religious life, is sensitive to the importance of identifying charisms — naming the special gifts that characterize the community — for the future life of the congregation.<sup>39</sup> The letter instructs congregations to rediscover their original spirit so as to better understand and live out their communal call: "...institutes should strive for a genuine knowledge of their original spirit, so that faithfully preserving this spirit in determining adaptations, their religious life may thus be purified of alien elements and freed from those which are obsolete."<sup>40</sup> If religious orders transmit and renew

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Casey, "The Dynamic Unfolding of the Benedictine Charism," *American Benedictine Review* 51 (2000): 149, 167.

<sup>37</sup> Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 87.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>39</sup> Williamson, "The Notion of Charism," 101.

<sup>40</sup> Pope Paul IV, "Ecclesiae sanctae," [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_motu-proprio\\_19660806\\_ecclesiae-sanctae.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19660806_ecclesiae-sanctae.html), pt. III, sec.16. This point, about purifying religious life, raises significant questions (which unfortunately cannot be addressed in this essay, given its limited scope) for charism transmission: How do we know when a particular life in a community is not a true flowering of the charism? What resources does the community have to help it discern what elements are alien and obsolete?

charism in these ways and if, at the same time, the principle of charismatic circularity is to be obeyed, then lay faculty at sponsored schools, I argue, should have the possibility of likewise engaging in the transmission and renewal process, a process enlarged by the people who are involved in it.<sup>41</sup>

### Charism Transmission at Sponsored Colleges and Universities

In the context of education, the charism of the sponsoring congregation can help schools “sharpen their focus and clarify their distinctive educational vision and qualities.”<sup>42</sup> Charism, as an emblem of Catholic identity and a resource for educational focus, became a matter of special concern since *Ex corde Ecclesia* (1990) bade Catholic institutions to “increase the presence and integration of the Catholic mission and religious charism.”<sup>43</sup> As a first response, institutional leaders encouraged faculty to seriously engage with questions around Catholic identity. Though undertaking this effort in academic affairs, institutional leaders gave little attention to *Ex corde*’s significance for student affairs staff.<sup>44</sup> Today, nearly thirty years after *Ex corde*, the situation has reversed: Staff, rather than faculty, do the lion’s share of work on Catholic identity. For example, campus ministry offices, John Piderit and Melanie Morey’s study reveals, are frequently expected to be the “sole purveyors” of Catholic identity.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Susan Sanders, RSM, surveys efforts at sponsored schools to preserve and sustain charism. Early efforts focused on institutional governance, manifested in constitutional articles and bylaws requiring members of the congregation to retain an active presence and serve in administrative positions. For example, schools mandated that members of the congregation populate a majority of the board of trustees, serve as senior administrators, or occupy a certain number of faculty seats. A second strategy involved a two-tiered, canon-civil governance structure, wherein members of the congregation comprise one tier of trustees (canon) and non-members comprise the second tier (civil). Structural interventions, while significant, necessitate the service of religious men and women. Because the trend of decline of religious is unlikely to reverse, this is not a long-term insurance policy (Susan M. Sanders, “Charisms, Congregational Sponsors, and Education,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 29 [2010]: 9–10).

<sup>42</sup> Timothy Cook and Thomas Simonds, “The Charism of 21st Century Catholic Schools: Building a Culture of Relationships,” *Catholic Education* 14 (2011): 320.

<sup>43</sup> Michael J. James and Sandra M. Estanek, “Building the Capacity for Mission through Use of the Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities,” *Catholic Education* 15 (2011): 141.

<sup>44</sup> James and Estanek, “Building the Capacity,” 141.

<sup>45</sup> Melanie Morey and John J. Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 197.

While the relative disengagement of faculty is lamentable (and worrying), this shouldn't overshadow the clear goods that have come from the shift to staff. Specifically, mission offices have become leaders in lighting the beacon that is charism: They host heritage events (such as Founder's Day celebrations), organize liturgies that express the sponsoring community's spirituality, and design artwork and literature to convey the community's values. Mission officers' work reveals the power of "culture-creating forces" that awaken and sustain an institution's culture. Susan Sanders, RSM, adopts language from organizational theory to explain these activities as the "secondary articulation and reinforcement mechanisms" of institutional culture, in this case, the culture generated by charism.<sup>46</sup>

Of course, faculty engagement with mission and identity is a matter of concern for institutional leaders. Robert Murray, OSA, who studies mission effectiveness and education, notes that there is considerable ambiguity among (non-religious) faculty on the extent to which they can convey the sponsoring community's heritage and cultural values.<sup>47</sup> With shared conviction, Sanders recommends in frank terms that religious congregations "pay careful attention to the people they recruit to lead and teach at their colleges and universities" and urges congregations to help those who are *not* members of the community to "assume increasing responsibility" for the charism.<sup>48</sup> In cases where religious congregations do not prompt faculty to take responsibility for charism, or do so only in abstract terms, it follows from (my interpretation of) the principle of charismatic circularity that lay faculty have license — possibly even the obligation — to take responsibility for it, as a creative act of fidelity to the congregation's origins, and as a response to today's "signs of the times."

In this spirit, my question is: What "secondary articulation and reinforcement mechanisms" exist *for the work of teaching*, in particular? Paul's theology of charism reminds us of the immediate and direct connection between teaching and charism (1 Corinthians 12: 8). My sense is that, even when faculty have a robust sense of Catholic identity and charism, efforts to help them make incremental changes to their teaching to align with the charism are few and far between.<sup>49</sup> My experience

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<sup>46</sup> Sanders, "Charisms, Congregational Sponsors," 12.

<sup>47</sup> Robert J. Murray, "Effecting a University's Mission: The Praxis of Charism," *Catholic Education* 6 (2002): 50.

<sup>48</sup> Sanders, "Charisms, Congregational Sponsors," 13, 9.

<sup>49</sup> Though my observation is certainly impressionistic, it is supported by a lacuna in the literature on pedagogy and charism.

at St. Norbert was such that, though I was afforded many rich opportunities to engage the Norbertine heritage and mission, I was rarely positioned to think about how to structure learning designs, create assignments, orient teaching strategies, and develop curricula to connect to the Norbertine charism. The NPP represents my attempt to bring faculty (my colleagues and myself) into deeper contact with the Norbertine charism and to shift and strengthen our teaching practices in relation to it. More broadly, it serves as a call to the Norbertine community, as well as other sponsoring communities, to recognize that charism needs to be cultivated *outside* the immediate congregation and to offer support in that transmission.

As a first step, I wanted to name a Norbertine pedagogy, that is, to identify it and define its contours. I thought by doing so, faculty would be able to better understand our institutional and curricular goals, be more equipped to mobilize the mission in our classrooms, and be inspired to refine teaching habits in accordance with the charism. I undertook this work as a lay person and faculty member, not as a member of the religious community nor as an institutional leader or administrator. I make this point not to celebrate *my* initiative, but rather because (thinking with the theology of charism and the principle of charismatic circularity) the *commonness* of the NPP's starting point is significant: Recall that for Paul, the gifts of the Spirit are revealed in the daily, common work of the community.

The NPP began with dialogue. Dialogue, perhaps not incidentally, is central to the Norbertine way of life. Fr. Andrew told me about his vocational path, his studies at St. Norbert, Notre Dame, and later in Rome, and his work as theologian. I read about Norbert of Xanten and studied how the many hagiographies of him have shaped our contemporary perspectives on this figure. I learned about Hugh of Fosse, Norbert's devoted disciple who put structures into place that allowed the order to flourish. I read diaries of the Norbertines who travelled from Berne Abbey to the remote woods of Wisconsin to found an abbey and a school for the study of Latin on the banks of the Fox River.

Neither a historian nor a canonist by training, I was drawn in new directions to flesh out the picture beginning to take shape in my mind. I researched the ecclesiastical practices that pre-dated Norbert and the medieval reforms that swept Europe, of which Norbert was a part. I studied ecclesiological history of religious institutes as well as canon law. I read the *Rule of St. Augustine*, which orders the life of Premonstratensians, and researched how it functions in other congregations. This broad study gave me a more dimensional picture of the Norbertine

heritage into which I could situate Fr. Andrew's personal account. By the same token, Fr. Andrew's story breathed life into my understanding of the Norbertine vocation and life, which I used to write a synthetic foundational document for the NPP.

*Perfectae Caritatis*, Vatican II's Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (1965), required religious communities to return to the founder,<sup>50</sup> prescribing to religious community the practice that characterized the work of Vatican II: *ressourcement* — “return to the sources.” *Perfectae Caritatis* states: “Let their founders' spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions...be faithfully held in honor.”<sup>51</sup> Careful study of the past — like the study I undertook in conversation first with Fr. Andrew and later with my colleagues — is essential to discerning the founder's charism, and to understanding what responsibilities the community has to that tradition.<sup>52</sup> My study of Norbert, the Norbertines, and St. Norbert College was driven by curiosity and a desire to snap a panoramic picture for others to look at. In another sense, it may be possible to read my activity theologically, such that I was animated — pushed forward and encouraged — by the Spirit. My work was a function of the principle of charismatic circularity. Possibly, the Spirit had descended.

I recount the process of my learning not for the sake of personal reflection, but rather to illuminate the serious and wide-ranging demands — *the discipline* — required of instilling charism in a community member. Indeed, many institutions make good faith efforts to introduce lay faculty (and staff) to the heritage and mission of the sponsoring order. But how much space is made available in the lives of faculty for this work? How recurrent and “scaffolded” are these opportunities? How integrated is learning about charism into the daily practices of the faculty? These are questions, I propose, that must be asked if teaching is to become an authentic site for charism transmission and expression.

Alongside my study of Norbert and the Norbertines, I also sought to deepen my knowledge of mission-based pedagogy by examining the

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<sup>50</sup> Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 59–60. Notably, *Perfectae Caritatis* also enjoins religious communities to return to the Gospel. Precisely how a teaching faculty-focused charismatic pedagogy project can build a return to the Gospel into its program is not something that I take up directly in the iteration of the NPP described here.

<sup>51</sup> Pope Paul VI, “*Perfectae Caritatis*: Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life,” [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_perfectae-caritatis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html), sec. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Milligan, “Charism and Constitution,” 56.

charisms of other religious communities, including Augustinian, Lasallian (Christian Brothers), Benedictine, and Jesuit communities and their schools. I learned about the history of these orders and their founders, researched faculty formation programs in the schools, and conversed with practitioners of the charismatic pedagogies. As noted earlier, charism “encompasses a type of spirituality” and a “special tradition.”<sup>53</sup> It involves a specific lifestyle, a certain way of being in community and a certain manner of doing work.<sup>54</sup> Charism generates a “family flavor” of ministry and accounts for the community’s “defining dynamism.”<sup>55</sup>

This brief review reveals the coincidence of the words *specific*, *certain*, *particular*, and *special* with the word *charism*. Indeed, the Magisterial tradition affirms that each religious community has “its own way,” that is, its own approach to communal life, its own style of manifesting Christ, its own way of observing the “evangelical counsels” (chastity, poverty, and obedience).<sup>56</sup> The theology of charism reminds us that the special traditions of different religious communities are not in competition with one another. The gifts of the Spirit — incarnated differently in different contexts and carried forward differently by different traditions — are always unified by the Spirit. Charisms are thus *distinctive rather than unique*.

Practitioners of one charismatic pedagogy stand to benefit by engaging deeply with practitioners of another. Paul’s theology of charism emphasizes the relational nature of the Spirit’s gifts.<sup>57</sup> The Spirit gives gifts first and always for the building of community.<sup>58</sup> In the fractured world of Catholic higher education, connecting *across* sponsored schools can become a way of deepening the experience of charism, precisely by uplifting the Spirit’s unifying activity in those many places, and a way of building a wider communion.

My background study on the charism of the Norbertines and other communities resulted in two foundational “byproducts.” First, I articulated a handful of Norbertine pedagogical precepts, intended as starting

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<sup>53</sup> Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 30.

<sup>54</sup> Mary Ann Donovan, “The Vocation of Theologians,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 3.

<sup>55</sup> Sanders, “Charisms, Congregational Sponsors,” 7; Murray, “Effecting a University’s Mission,” 51.

<sup>56</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsclife\\_doc\\_02021990\\_directives-on-formation\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_02021990_directives-on-formation_en.html), sec 16.

<sup>57</sup> Nardoni, “The Concept of Charism,” 75.

<sup>58</sup> Koupal, “Charism,” 541.

points that could be experimented with and configured, developed and deconstructed. Second, I made a plan with a group of interested colleagues.<sup>59</sup> We formed a working group that, along with a few Norbertines and mission staff, gathered together to engage in a teaching workshop. Again, my aim in describing these byproducts is to provide a blueprint for faculty at other sponsored schools to follow.

The questions that governed the NPP workshop were: How do we connect the vision of Norbert of Xanten to our educational practices and self-understanding as instructors? What resources can we excavate from the Norbertine way of life — past and present — to support our teaching? I acted as the primary facilitator, but it was genuinely a collaborative effort. As facilitator, my aim was to draw the group's focus to teaching at the granular level.

The workshop was organized around a sequence of mini-sessions, each led by a pair of faculty. We began with a creative self-reflection exercise and plenary discussion on these broad questions: What is pedagogy? What is the role of a mission-informed pedagogy at the college? The leader asked participants to identify a metaphor or image to describe their role as an instructor (for example, a chef, a tour guide, a detective) and share it with group. Then, we considered the values embedded in our teaching metaphors and asked — critically and constructively — if those values were consistent with the values of the Norbertine mission, insofar as we understood it.

Fr. Andrew led the second mini-session, titled “Who was Norbert and what does his story mean for us?” by first offering a synopsis of Norbert's life. Fr. Andrew highlighted critical moments and created room for participants to clarify the significance of those moments. For example, Norbert famously received two holy orders on one day. Together, the group made sense of this, both historically (i.e., Was this a common practice? What enabled Norbert to achieve this?) and theologically (i.e., What does it mean to receive holy orders? To what extent does receiving two on one day present a challenge to the integrity of the orders?) in an effort to move from *knowledge about* Norbert's life to a deeper *understanding of* it. Fr. Andrew helped us raise questions about

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<sup>59</sup> Murray advises sponsored schools to focus more on “forging a committed culture” and less on the declining numbers of their sponsoring communities (Murray, “Effecting a University's Mission,” 50). Indeed, charism is a living reality that “must continually confront the questions of growth or decline, of development or disintegration” (ibid., 52). Holding this in view, it is possible, as Murray recognizes, for a small group of committed people to give life to charism. Numbers alone do not determine the strength of charism.



Norbert's story and identify tensions and even problems that the story raises for contemporary followers of his "way." Faculty built on what they already knew from mission-based orientations and trainings at the college, and worked specifically to extract values and principles from Norbert's story that could be connected directly to pedagogy.

Our third mini-session took us to the way of life adopted by Norbert's followers. We met in small groups to read and discuss different parts of the *Rule of St. Augustine*, specifically the sections on humility, fraternal correction, care of the sick, and seeking pardon and forgiving offense. Participants were directed to think about how *one insight* from their part of *the Rule* might be applicable to *one aspect* of a course, for example, the syllabus, an assignment, how one runs the first day of class, or a policy. Participants then discussed what it would take to make that specific change, and imagine how this small shift might affect the learning community they establish in their course. This concluded the first part of the workshop. Each of these sessions — whose focal points were the philosophy of mission-based pedagogy, the life of the founder (or inspiring figure), and the rule of the community — could be easily replicated at any sponsored school.

The second part of the workshop was practically oriented. We engaged in an activity to help us draw comparisons between a mission-informed pedagogy and other advocacy-based or strategic pedagogies in use at the college, for example, academic-service learning and contemplative pedagogy. The final session explored specific practices and the concrete circumstances of our teaching. We shared examples in which we believed our work (through a specific strategy or activity) genuinely reflected the values of Norbertine Pedagogy and moments when we departed from these central values, or "regretful traps" we inadvertently set for ourselves. We asked, "What factors contributed to make the Norbertine Pedagogical Practice a success? What factors contributed to creating a trap? How did the Norbertine value function in the activity — explicitly or implicitly?" We thought creatively across our disciplinary areas of scholarship about the "translatability" of our practices. For example, to what extent could my colleague in physics implement a Norbertine Pedagogical Practice that I developed in the context of a theology class, and vice versa? We concluded with a writing exercise, imagining ways to bring the work to other faculty members.

As facilitator, I relied on a couple key convictions. First, I entered into the project with the conviction that a distinctive pedagogical form was *already genuinely operative* at the college. This isn't to say that the workshop simply affirmed current practices of faculty, but instead that

I began with a sense of trust — both in the work of the Spirit and in my colleagues — that charism was already being enacted, though in inchoate or incomplete form.<sup>60</sup> My hunch was that my colleagues genuinely, authentically, and intuitively shaped their pedagogies to the charism, but I also felt that the practices of a Norbertine Pedagogy could be significantly refined.<sup>61</sup> Our efforts to give Norbertine Pedagogy concrete expression were less codification than they were ethnographic documentation used as a starting point for the work of reflecting more carefully on how we embody charism through teaching and of calibrating our practices more effectively to the Norbertine charism.<sup>62</sup> Through the very process of naming charism, charism's relational nature was revealed: We used our gifts to build up and strengthen the common work that joins us.

In follow-up assessment reports, one NPP participant said that the workshop gave him a “better sense of how to frame mission to my students,” as well as confidence knowing he had access to a “shared pedagogical language across disciplines and departments.” This faculty member noted that the workshop grew his appreciation for the importance of teaching through a “common grammar” — a grammar by which faculty communicate the central values of the institution in the minutiae of day-to-day learning. As an example of communicating values at the granular level, another NPP participant indicated that he now incorporates the *Rule of St. Augustine* into his syllabus, so as to connect his course policies and procedures to the norms of Norbertine common life. Though a simple strategy, this tactic helps students understand how expectations for classroom climate and a culture of participation

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<sup>60</sup> In a set of essays published for the 100th anniversary of Norbertines in De Pere (1988), a longstanding lay faculty member insists that “we need to recognize our institutional character in order to preserve it” (Thomas W. Phelan, “Teaching at St. Norbert College,” *The Communicator* 6, no. 1 [1988]: 29). He identifies a “movement of self toward others” as the basis of Norbertine common life, and by extension, the animating spirit of collegiality at the College (ibid., 29). I view this as a clear example of how St. Norbert faculty have long given witness to charism in their daily life on campus. The question for my purposes is how to invite present and future generations of faculty into the “hallmark” ways of being of the sponsoring order *particularly in the practice of teaching*.

<sup>61</sup> In Thomas Aquinas's treatise on grace, he takes up the matter of the need for the “further help of grace” after grace has been bestowed through baptism (*Summa Theologica* [ST] II.I.109.9). Affirming Augustine's insight that even a healthy eye needs light to see, Thomas maintains that ongoing grace is necessary for people to live and act rightly, and to persevere in the effort to live and act rightly ST II.I.109.9–10. A parallel exists here: Faculty may already be teaching in a way that's inspired by the charism of their institution, while also being (perpetually) in need of further direction and formation.

<sup>62</sup> An appendix to this essay documents the Norbertine Pedagogical Precepts that grew out of the NPP.

are deeply rooted in the spiritual discipline and practical life of the sponsoring community.

Another participant wrote that the workshop “increased the degree to which I think of mission as essential to what I do in the classroom, and vice versa.” The workshop allowed him to reevaluate his “classroom persona,” and to begin the work of reshaping how he presents himself to students. The workshop challenged him to more intentionally integrate Norbertine values into the *person* he is to his students and to consider how *he as a teacher* is vital to the Norbertine mission. Another participant described how, two years after the workshop, she has now woven a Norbertine theme into each of her regularly taught theology courses. In an academic service-learning course, this faculty member grounds “service learning” in the practice of *localitas* — the Norbertine commitment to serve the needs of the local community.<sup>63</sup> In her introductory theology course, this professor has long maintained Augustine’s *Confessions* as a core text. After participating in the NPP, she began encouraging students to connect Augustine’s narrative and theological discussion to the *Rule* he wrote, so that they can explore “the gifts and burdens of living in a community” and talk about communal life at St. Norbert College in a theological key. This faculty member wants her students to know that when they learn about Norbertine values and practices, they’re not just learning “more (as in ‘another topic’)” but instead are learning in a particular kind of way. These examples range from the “meta” to “micro” levels of teaching. While self-reported, this feedback indicates that faculty shaped course content, adjusted pedagogical modes, developed course policies, and acquired new language for reflecting on their work as a result of the NPP.

Lozano describes charism as “a reality to be transmitted and safeguarded but also a dynamic reality to be constantly deepened and developed.”<sup>64</sup> The Norbertine Pedagogy Project is one possible pathway for shepherding lay faculty into an authentic expression of charism and — by extension — to deepening and developing it. My argument is that this project (and others like it) can be explained by the principle of charismatic circularity and that, given this principle, lay faculty have a vital role to play in the transmission and renewal of charism.

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<sup>63</sup> Though Norbertines do not make a vow of stability (as with, for example, Benedictines), they make a lifetime commitment to a specific Norbertine community and church. This principle of Norbertine spirituality is known as *stabilitas loci*.

<sup>64</sup> Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 30.

Recall that the principle demands that charism always returns to the place it began. The “return” made in the Norbertine Pedagogy Project was not only to Norbert — and the charismatic particularities that defined him — but also to the place of origin for charism itself, the Apostle Paul. Paul reminds us that the true value of charism lies, not in “the limited sphere of the gifts themselves, but in *service*.”<sup>65</sup> Insofar as it serves the community and builds up the Church, the ordinary work of teaching is in fact an extraordinary gift of the Spirit. Recognizing teaching as authentically charismatic might create room and resources for instructors to intentionally cultivate their craft and do so in relation to the mission and heritage of their schools.

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<sup>65</sup> Koupal, “Charism,” 545.

## APPENDIX

### Norbertine Pedagogical Precepts

*Norbert underwent a powerful conversion. Like St. Paul, he saw a great light and was thrown from his horse. Norbert's experience compelled him to radically change his life. He gave up his wealth and status, and became a wandering preacher. A Norbertine Pedagogy...*

- \* ...encourages students to be always open to changes of heart and changes of mind, big and small;
- \* ...reassures students as they face unexpected changes, and encourages them to find new possibilities in the unforeseen.

*Before embarking on his mission, Norbert spent several years in a Benedictine monastery, contemplating his course of action. He sought the advice of the monastery's abbot, and listened carefully to the abbot's wisdom. A Norbertine Pedagogy...*

- \* ...recognizes the importance of "pausing," and prepares students for action by first carving out significant time for contemplation;
- \* ...encourages students to hear God's call through the voices of others.

*Norbert's mission was defined by his desire to be detached from material wealth and worldly values. Norbert wanted to adapt Christian asceticism to ordinary life, and monk-like renunciation to ordinary priesthood. A Norbertine Pedagogy...*

- \* ...asks students to consider the forms of "wealth" they cling to — be that material goods like expensive clothing, shoes, and devices, or the "wealth" of perfect grades and a full social calendar;
- \* ...helps students set aside those attachments in favor of building authentic community.

*As Norbert moved on the pilgrim's path, Norbert instituted the novel practices of teaching and preaching during the liturgy. He shared his message, but also gave his audience the opportunity to ask him questions. A Norbertine Pedagogy...*

- \* ...prioritizes dialogue as a primary mode of teaching and learning;
- \* ...honors the learners' questions.

*Norbert was also known for helping warring parties to reconcile. For this reason, he is known as an apostle of peace. A Norbertine Pedagogy...*

- \* ...recognizes deep dialogue as the ideal way of addressing conflicts;
- \* ...promotes reconciliation and peace.

*Norbert chose The Rule of St. Augustine to govern his communities. As canons in the Augustinian tradition, Norbertines seek unity of heart and mind, and appreciate affective experience. A Norbertine Pedagogy...*

- \* ...embraces the affective and emotional dimension of learning;
- \* ...seeks to help students align what they know with what they feel.

*Norbert was steadfast in his commitment to his message, but, as he set up communities of followers, he was also willing to adapt the rule to fit the context and situation. A Norbertine Pedagogy...*

- \* ...adapts to context and, most especially, the needs of the students being served;
- \* ...is always unfinished and open to adjustment and revision.

*Norbertines act as pastors, who go out into the world to serve the needs of the local community, whatever they may be. A Norbertine Pedagogy...*

- \* ...focuses on treating students with pastoral attention, by deeply caring for their well-being and for their development as full persons;
- \* ...models how to act pastorally toward the local community, by connecting student learning to the needs of the wider community.

*While being attentive to the outside world, Norbertines are deeply community-based and community-focused. They live according to a rule that helps to develop the spiritual life of every member of the community. A Norbertine Pedagogy...*

- \* ...creates space for students to think actively about how to build authentic relationships;
- \* ...helps students learn how to treat one another justly and how to settle differences and disagreements lovingly;
- \* ...emphasizes the importance of quiet reflection, meditation, and prayer.