

STATUTES  
*of the*  
LAY ORDER OF PRÉMONTRÉ  
*at*  
ST. MICHAEL'S ABBEY



Revised October 2023

# Statutes of the Lay Order of Prémontré at St. Michael's Abbey

*My dearest brethren, first and above all things let us love God, and then our neighbor; these are the precepts principally imposed on us. —Rule of St. Augustine*

## Living Communio

1. Members of the Lay Order of Prémontré, clerics or lay persons, commit themselves to strive for Christian perfection, inspired by the canonical tradition, and their desire to share the evangelization of the world in union with the Order of Prémontré and under its direction (cf. Canon 303; S40).
2. Inspired by the teaching and example of Sts. Augustine and Norbert and striving for Christian perfection, members of the Lay Order of Prémontré profess a specific form of ecclesial *communio*, that is, communion with God and with each other in God (Constitutions 2).
3. Within the framework of their daily lives in the world, members endeavor to establish unity of mind and heart in God before all else and then communion with their neighbor, mindful of the first words of the Rule of St. Augustine, “Let us love God above all things, dearest brothers, then our neighbor, for these are the chief commandments given to us.”
4. Members of the Lay Order are a “spiritual arm” of the Norbertine Community reaching out into all areas of life, seeking to share with others what they themselves gain as sons and daughters of St. Norbert. Their affiliation with a community of canons regular is not, therefore, for their own personal benefit. By their Christian example and witness, they hope to bring the Order’s ideal of *communio* into the world where they live and work.
5. Communion between members of the Lay Order and with the entire Order is through charity (S35). The members of the Lay Order freely offer their spiritual and material assistance to the Canonry of St. Michael. The canonry of St. Michael is bound in turn to provide spiritual care and fraternal charity to the Lay Order such that they form one flock and one shepherd in service to God and to all by following the example of St. Norbert (S 59).
6. The members of the Lay Order, in offering their day to God, constitute a community of faith and charity, which is a living expression of the communion of saints. All members share in the spiritual graces of the canonry to which they belong, i.e., St. Michael’s Abbey (S 52).

## Structure

7. The Abbot is the spiritual father of the Lay Order, and all members owe him the respect due to a spiritual father. In his place he appoints a religious who is charged with the care of the Lay Order (S 44). The Abbot's delegate is the director of the Lay Order and has the following responsibilities. He may be assisted by others.

- a. Accepts new novices and those to be professed into the Lay Order;
- b. Approves in the Abbot's name the officers designated by the Chapter of the Lay Order (S 44);
- c. Gives spiritual conferences for monthly meetings;
- d. Approves novices' rule of life and approves changes in the rule of life of the professed;
- e. Maintains open communication among the members through newsletters and emails, and between the Lay Order and the Abbot and community. Communicating to members is delegated to the officers.

8. Three Officers are appointed to assume guidance of certain aspects of the Lay Order. They serve for a term of three years and can be re-appointed for a second term. Their duties are outlined below:

a. A president is appointed to provide the overall coordination of the Chapter. He has the following responsibilities:

- Prepare the agenda and preside at chapter meetings;
- Generate and distribute a calendar of Chapter and Abbey events;
- Recommend postulants to novitiate and novices to profession;
- Coordinate with the director to schedule retreats and other activities;
- Receive and announce prayer petitions;
- Appoint persons for special tasks, e.g., retreat and special events coordinator, setup and break down of monthly meetings.

b. A secretary is also appointed with the following responsibilities:

- Record the results and decisions of monthly meetings, and send summaries of meetings to all members;
- Record attendance at each monthly meeting and novitiate class;
- Maintain and update a list of members with contact information, including their dates of vestition and profession.

c. A treasurer is appointed with the following responsibilities:

- Administer the finances of the Lay Order for the benefit of all members;
- Use money-handling procedures that assure transparency and integrity, and that prevent errors in counting;
- Keep records of all funds received;
- Each year present a financial report to the Abbot and the Lay Order chapter;
- The president and director may at any time examine the financial records to see that they are kept in good order.

## Admission

**9.** The admission of members into a chapter of the Lay Order must always be done in such a manner that reveals the spiritual character of the bond with the Canonry of St. Michael (S 49). The Abbot must exercise vigilance that the ends of the Lay Order are observed, and that no abuse of discipline, no defect of faith or morals trouble the activity of the Lay Order. On the other hand, the Lay Order is subject to the vigilance of the Holy See, of the Abbot General, and, to the extent that its apostolic activity is directed into the diocese, to the ordinary of the place (Canon 305).

**10.** The rite of admission may be presided over by the Abbot or the religious who is the director or another priest delegated by the Abbot.

**11.** To be affiliated to the Lay Order of St. Michael's Canonry a person must be at least 18 years of age or older at the time of admission to formation. The candidate must be referred by a professed member of the lay order, or professed confrere of the Abbey. The candidate completes an application form which will be reviewed by the Director. Finally, a candidate must be interviewed personally by the director himself. Once these steps are completed the candidate may begin the formation process.

## Departure

**12.** Every person legitimately inscribed in the Lay Order is free to leave the Order.

**13.** No member legitimately inscribed in the Lay Order can be dismissed by the Abbot or by the Director without just cause. (cf. Canon 308).

## Formation Process

### 14. Formation consists of three stages:

- a. Affiliation—one year before entrance into the novitiate one must be affiliated with the Lay Order. Monthly meeting attendance is mandatory to discern a vocation to the Lay Order.
- b. Novitiate formation— (1 year) begins with the imposition with the small scapular and ends with profession. Besides monthly meetings, novices are required to undergo a more intense formation. A weekend retreat is also required. The purpose of the novitiate is to discern definitively a vocation to the Lay Order, to develop a Norbertine spirituality, and to strengthen the spiritual bond with St. Michael's Canonry.
- c. Ongoing formation—begins with profession, reception of large scapular, and continues throughout life. The purpose is to grow in Norbertine spirituality and maintain a spiritual bond with St. Michael's Canonry. This is accomplished by fidelity to a rule of life drawn up during the novitiate, revised as necessary with the director or another suitable priest, and submitted to the director of the Lay Order. To remain an active member, one should attend at least seven out of nine meetings annually; otherwise, one is considered an inactive member. An annual retreat is also recommended. An active professed member has active and passive voice in all decisions submitted to the chapter for vote. Inactive members retain full membership in regard to their sharing in the spiritual benefits of the Order but do not have active or passive voice. Attendance is calculated from September to May.

**15.** Profession concludes the novitiate formation and admits one definitively into the Lay Order. By profession, the candidate promises to strive for Christian perfection within his/her state of life, under the direction of the Canonry of St. Michael, according to the spirituality of St. Norbert as contained in his/her rule of life.

**16.** Rule of life—To ensure the development of a proper Norbertine spirituality and strengthening of communion with other members of the Lay Order and the Canonry of St. Michael, a rule of life is to be drawn up by each member of the Lay Order. Its composition should proceed from two principles:

- a. It should support and facilitate the faithful fulfilling of the duties of one's state of life.
- b. It should consist of specifically Norbertine elements animated by the Norbertine charism of *communio* (communication with God and one another as we live out our faith).

The rule of life is drawn up during the novitiate. It must be revised and approved by the director before profession. Any substantial revision requires approval by the director. Fidelity to the rule should assure an authentic Christian life and Norbertine spirituality.

17. The rule of life should take into account the following elements of traditional Norbertine spirituality:

- a. Devotion to the Holy Eucharist
- b. Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours and personal prayer
- c. Marian Devotion
- d. Penance
- e. Mission or zeal for souls

These elements flow from and are expressive of *communio*.

## 18. The Holy Eucharist

Perfect communion with God and one another is realized only in heaven. The Holy Mass is the sacramental celebration of the heavenly banquet and the highest form of communion with God and neighbor during this earthly pilgrimage. The Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of the spiritual life of the Norbertine. Down through the ages our holy Founder, St. Norbert, has been venerated as the Apostle of the Blessed Sacrament. Therefore, the rule of life should center around the following elements:

- a. Besides attendance at Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, which is binding on all Catholics, the rule must include a commitment to attend an extra Mass per week.
- b. Likewise, members should allow time for Eucharistic adoration at least once per week. If possible, this should be a holy hour. Daily adoration is recommended when possible. Our spirituality moves us to cherish and promote worship of the Blessed Sacrament (cf. C 47).

## 19. Prayer and the Liturgy of the Hours

*Be persevering in the practice of prayer—Rule of St. Augustine*

The communion of saints praises God continually in heaven. In this they fulfill the purpose of creation and salvation. During our earthly pilgrimage we share in their eternal praise through the Liturgy of the Hours. Therefore, the Liturgy of the Hours is also an essential element for communion with God and neighbor. St. Norbert was a reformer of the

canonical life which is charged with the solemn celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours.

The rule of life should include the recitation/celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, at least in part. How much one recites of the Liturgy of the Hours can be determined by consulting one's confessor, taking into consideration one's personal duties. There is required at least one of the hours, either Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer or Compline.

The rule should set aside some time every week for meditation and spiritual reading, daily if possible. Meditation and reading should flow from and lead to a more recollected and fruitful celebration of the liturgy.

## **20. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints**

- a. The communion of saints gathers around Mary, their Mother and Queen, to form one family in God, giving continual praise to Him. After the Resurrection of the Lord the Apostolic community was found together in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus. As Norbertines, we see Mary as the model and the most effective means of reaching communion with God and each other. This is seen in the lives of St. Norbert and St. Herman Joseph. Every member of the Lay Order is expected to make the act of consecration to Our Lady. This consecration should be renewed frequently, especially on Saturdays and Marian feast days. Therefore, the provision should be made for regular devotion to Mary in the form of recitation of the Rosary, the Litany of Loreto, etc., but especially celebrations in honor of Our Lady.
- b. Devotion to the Norbertine saints should be fostered. On the following feasts, there is granted a plenary indulgence to members of the Lay Order under the usual conditions (Confession, Communion, prayer for the intentions of the Pope) and with the condition that they make or renew the promise to observe these Statutes:

St. Herman Joseph	May 24
St. Norbert	June 6
Sts. Adrian and James	July 9
Bl. Gertrude of Altenberg	August 13
St. Augustine	August 28
All Saints of our Order	November 13

Devotion to other Norbertine Saints is also recommended; their feasts are:

St. Godfrey of Cappenberg, January 14;  
St. Frederick, February 4;  
Bl. Hugh of Fosses, February 10;  
St. Evermode, February 17;  
St. Ludolph, April 26;  
St. Isfrid; June 15;  
Bl. Hroznata, July 14;  
Bl. Bronislava, August 30;  
Bl. James Kern, October 20;  
St. Gilbert, October 26;  
St. Siard, November 14.

## 21. Penance

*Subdue your flesh by fasting and abstaining from food and drink, insofar as your health permits.*  
—Rule of St. Augustine

The saints in heaven have reached perfect communion with God and each other. They no longer have need of conversion and penance to remove obstacles and impediments to achieve holiness. We, the Church militant, are sinners and often put obstacles in the path of communion with God and each other. We need conversion of our ways and penance to remove obstacles to communion. St. Norbert taught this by his example and penitential life. Thus, penance has always been an essential mark of our Order.

The most efficacious means of conversion and penance is the Sacrament of Penance. The rule should include Confession as our primary expression of living a penitential life. The sacrament should be approached regularly. Monthly confession is recommended, preferably from a regular confessor.

In the footsteps of St. Norbert, apostle of peace, we wish to be men and women of peace, among ourselves, in our relationships, in the social and political sphere. This ideal of peace and reconciliation must be sustained by our life of prayer and readily put into action by reconciling enemies and heartily forgiving our own enemies for God's sake.

Fasting is biblical and characteristic of our Order. The rule should include the minimal observance of fasting (Ash Wednesday and Good Friday) and abstinence from meat (Ash Wednesday and Fridays throughout the year). Another work of penance or piety may be substituted for Friday abstinence (except on Fridays of Lent). Other days of fast are



recommended, especially the vigils of solemnities such as the Immaculate Conception and the feast of St. Norbert, and the penitential season of Lent.

With discretion one's rule of life should specify days of fast, especially during Lent after consultation with the Director or another priest. Other forms of penance are also encouraged, especially those which pertain to the fulfillment of one's duties and help one to live the mystery of Christ's cross. Suffering in patience and resignation to one's daily cross is a mark of a true son or daughter of St. Norbert.

## **22.. Mission and Apostolic Service**

Through grace we partake of the inner life of the Blessed Trinity, the communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By the same gift we can rely upon the communion of saints "on whose constant intercession in your presence we rely for unfailing help" (Euch. Pr. III). On Pentecost the Holy Spirit united the disciples in a communion with God and with each other, a gift extended to those who heard the preaching of the Gospel. As sons and daughters of St. Norbert we are to participate in that dynamism of communion-mission through our apostolic zeal for souls. The spirituality of our Founder, St. Norbert, calls us to service and sends us forth in mission.

The first mission of members of the Lay Order is the faithful fulfilling of one's daily duty to one's family, neighbor, and in the workplace, to which all else is subordinate. Let our example of charitable speech and modest dress particularly proclaim Christ.

Ongoing study is necessary for apostolic service so that we are made ready to give reason for the hope we have in Christ (cf. 1 Peter 3: 15). We should especially seek to promote Norbertine vocations, to promote membership in the Lay Order, to participate in Abbey projects both spiritual and material, to participate in parish and other programs, e.g., pro-life apostolate, Militia of the Immaculata, charitable organizations. With all of this, we must never forget how prayer in our daily lives is a most vital apostolate.