

*A History of the Catholic Church of the  
Immaculate Conception and St. Norbert,  
Spalding.*

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*Church, School, Priory and Hall, Spalding.*



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## Dedication

To all of the Parishioners, Clergy and  
Benefactors of St. Norbert's, past and  
present, in particular, the late  
Peter Robinson.

“I have made no reference to things spiritual, simply because these  
cannot of their nature, be assessed on paper.”

*Quote from Father Norbert Ellis, Parish Priest of  
Spalding (1940 -1957).*

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It was presumably the end of that line which the Editor hit upon when he claimed:-  
"They (the Catholics) appeal to the public in the martyr-like strains of the Rev. Canon Guedens. The prizes Canon Guedens boastfully tells us are not the poor but the rich! Oh how incautious that little sentence; how the cloven foot for a moment is visible and the true colour run up the mast!"

The attacks continued unabated with 'Britannicus' referring to the "Oily utterance of the Jesuit"; the Press opened 1876 in much the same vein but by now the Priests had come to accept the animosity and concerned themselves with the many tasks which were presented to them.

So it was that on Wednesday, 8th December, 1875, Fathers Martin Guedens and Basil Dockx celebrated High Mass at 11 a.m., with an evening service at 6 p.m. At this time no Church had been built so a large room of the existing buildings was used as a temporary chapel, with a table acting as an altar. Father Van Biesen arrived soon after and plans were made for the provision of the Church with Mr. Young, as promised, acting as the source of financial backing that was essential. The architects of the Church were M.E. Hadfield of Sheffield. The building work was carried out by Messrs. S. Dawson and Sons in various stages with the Church proper as the main priority. Building started in 1876 and in 1877 the Church itself was finished. For the next couple of years building works were constantly underway and finally on 2nd October, 1879, the extended Church with sanctuary and a Confraternity in honour of Our Lady of Lourdes added was opened. The school, as promised, was provided and in December 1880 H.M. Inspectors reported:-

"The School has made a creditable improvement during the year especially in Arithmetic and is very fairly efficient."

In 1881 Father Van Biesen celebrated his 25 years of the Priesthood and the large sanctuary windows were given by a Mr. Bothamley to mark the event.

In 1903 Father Van Biesen, now aged 71, retired and returned to the Abbey at Tongerlo. He was succeeded in Spalding by Father Clement Tyck, who had been at Corpus Christi Mission, Miles Platting, Manchester, for fourteen years. Father Tyck's post at Manchester was filled by Father George Toner who had himself served briefly at Spalding for two and a half years (1899 - 1902).

Father Tyck arrived on 27th October, 1903, and in the same week Father Vincent McGhie left Spalding for Manchester to be replaced by Father Stephen Mulligan shortly after in 1904. Father Mulligan had been studying in Belgium prior to his posting to Spalding.

Father Tyck had been transferred from Manchester to Spalding, a less hectic parish, because his active nature combined with the heavy workload had undermined his health.

Father Tyck immediately set about putting his stamp of innovation and action on all the Parish did, encouraging traditions, involvement, and a whole array of social activities:-

"On Sunday . . . a very pretty ceremony was performed, known as the 'Crowning of the May Queen', an ancient custom introduced into Spalding by the new Prior, Father Clement Tyck."

(Spalding Guardian, Saturday, May 7th, 1904).

It was Father Tyck who set about making plans for the Consecration of St. Norbert's and at last progress was made and dates were set and finalised. The event was looked forward to by many and the Press constantly kept people informed of the plans until finally:-

"The Consecration of St. Norbert's - The arrangements for the special services in connection with the Consecration of St. Norbert's Church are now complete, and . . . the ceremony will be a most imposing one. The white marble altar table, the possession of which is necessary before the ceremony can be

performed, has been placed in position, and it is an additional ornament to the interior of one of the prettiest Catholic Churches in the country.”  
(Spalding Guardian, Saturday, September 3rd, 1904).

Clearly the Local Press had changed its view of Catholics, or at least of their Churches! So on 3rd September, 1904, the Church was consecrated by Dr. Heylen, the Lord Bishop of Namur, and former Lord Abbot of Tongerlo. The ceremony was clearly an important one and such was the demand that tickets were issued beforehand for seats in the Church. The Consecration ceremony took place on the Saturday and on the Sunday there were services at 10.30 a.m. and 6.15 p.m. On the Saturday there had been a public dinner at the White Hart Hotel, Market Place, Spalding, for which tickets cost 2s 6d. At the Consecration Ceremony Father Van Biesen, who had returned from Belgium specially for the event, regretted that he had not built a larger Church but said that the facility had been provided for future growth:-

“However, in case a larger Church should at some future period be needed the community have a larger and more eligible site at their disposal on the Pinchbeck Road, a vacant piece of garden land which was bought by Father Van Biesen with the idea of erecting a Church there.”  
(Spalding Guardian, Saturday, September 10th, 1904).

The entire weekend celebrations were attended by a large number of the priesthood and public, including Father Guedens, now the Titular Abbot of Barlings, Lincolnshire, and Father Seadon from Manchester, both of whom had served in some capacity at Spalding. Also present were two of the descendants of Thomas Arthur Young, the original benefactor of St. Norbert's, who had died in the August of 1891.

Father Tyck, responsible for much activity in and around the Church, had formed a Boys' Club and out of this had grown the “Little Band” which was to achieve much fame locally. The Consecration Ceremony was, of course, the ideal testing ground and the Spalding Guardian of 10th September, 1904, reported:-

“On Monday previous to the departure of the guests St. Norbert's newly formed Boys' Band, smartly attired in sailors suits, and equipped with flutes, drums, etc., gave an excellent performance in the yard attached to the Church . . . not excluding Prior Tyck to whose ceaseless energy their foundation is due.”

In 1907 discussions were held about the building of a Lady Chapel for the Church and it was decided that to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Miracle of Lourdes a replica of the Lourdes Grotto would be constructed in Spalding.

Father Tyck wrote a small booklet in 1910 entitled “The English Lourdes”, as the Grotto came to be known, in which he says:-

“The year 1908 will ever remain in the annals of ecclesiastical history a memorable year . . . it was in the course of that year that, in commemoration of the Jubilee, a Grotto of Lourdes was built at Spalding, Lincolnshire, England, and solemnly blessed on the 17th September.”

The Grotto was the work of Jacque Coomans of Antwerp and his signature and the date of construction can still be seen in the Grotto beneath the statue of Mary, to the right of the altar.

The blessing of the Grotto was clearly a grand occasion with much pomp and ceremony and the best account is to be found in Father Tyck's booklet, “The English Lourdes”:-

“The Norbertine Abbot of Leffe, a great admirer of the wonderful events of Lourdes, performed the Ceremony of the Blessing and sang the Pontifical Mass. Three O'clock was the appointed time for the more public Ceremony of

the Procession, which was marshalled by the Very Reverend Father Fletcher, Master of the Guild of Ransom, who had also been the morning preacher . . . It was evident that all were struck at the earnestness and fervour of the processionists, especially of the Irish harvestmen, three hundred in number. The procession came to a stand still in Ayscoughfee Gardens, where Prior Higgins spoke to five thousand people . . .”

The event was also marked by the unveiling of a stained glass window of the Annunciation and the Lourdes Apparition, given by the Right Reverend Adrian Deckers, Abbot of Tongerlo. It was the work of the craftsman Edward Smith of St. Thomas's Road, Spalding. The window was placed in the South Wall of the Church. The Grotto needed more light and so the window placed in the North Wall in 1904 was moved at this date to the South Wall where it now stands.

The Procession through the town became annual and was greeted well by Catholics taking on the nature of a pilgrimage. The event received much coverage in the local press who were no longer quite so hostile towards Catholicism.

The Spalding Free Press reported on the 13th September, 1921:-

“The thirteenth annual pilgrimage to the Grotto of Lourdes took place in Spalding last Thursday, when the processionists walked in tremendous heat, singing and chanting their devotional exercises unperturbed by the powerful rays of the sun . . . It speaks well of the broadmindedness of the people of the Fens that this procession of almost entire strangers passed through their streets . . . without the slightest sneer.”

In 1922 what appears to be the last procession/pilgrimage took place. Following the departure of Father Clement Tyck, the previous year, things were not the same and the Lincolnshire Free Press of the 12th September, 1922, lamented the change noting that Father Tyck himself was not there, he had retired to Tongerlo Abbey, Belgium.

The report also stated that:-

“the genial personality of the Right Reverend Abbot Seadon, C.R.P., who we believe, has visited Spalding for this pilgrimage every year since its conception, was unable to be present due to personal illness.”

There was also a notable absence of so many of those who had been so prominent in the procession in previous years. So it was that with the change of 'leading figures', plans and organisation, the procession was to be no more after fourteen years. Memories of those processions still live on and many 'local elders' still speak of watching 'the Catholics' march through the town in all their 'finery'.

The Procession was briefly revived in 1975 at St. Norbert's School during the Centenary celebrations, for the enjoyment of all, with many there having fond memories of having walked in the processions of Father Tyck.

The procession of 1913 has been preserved on film and is presently under the care of the Lincolnshire and Humberside Film Archive.

In 1906 Father Tyck built St. Thomas's Hall which stood on the site of the present day car park. This was a large wooden building with concert platform and was used on many occasions. It was the headquarters of the Boys' Club which, it must be noted, was entirely non-denominational. At one point, as though to emphasise this, the Little Boys' Band of 24 youths had only 6 Catholics in its' number.

Father Tyck was clearly a man of much energy and in the Spalding Guardian of the 5th September, 1914, there was a report of a Public Meeting held in St. Thomas's Hall:-

“to hear Fr. Tyck speak of his eventful journey through the scene of the war from which he was recently returned.”

The meeting was to:-

"provide means for sheltering the Belgian Refugees who are shortly expected in England, and who will be housed in the St. Thomas's Hall and in part of the Priory . . . It was announced that the collection totalled £10 19s 7½d . . ."

The campaigning spirit did not stop there however and in an undated article of around 1914 from the Spalding Guardian, it says:-

"An excellent concert, promoted by Father Tyck on behalf of the Belgian Refugees, which was held in the Spalding Corn Exchange on Wednesday evening, met with unqualified success . . . A musical description of the War was provided by Father Tyck . . . The collection totalled £17 11s 4d and although this does not compare with Father Tyck's call for '£50 in five minutes' it is a most satisfactory sum, and will assist a worthy cause."

A report in the Spalding Guardian, 3rd March, 1916, relates the arrival of the Refugees and was written by Mr. Charles Martin, an active Catholic and heavily involved in accommodating the Belgians:-

"It was on September 8th, 1914, one night after service, that Father Tyck called a meeting . . . to discuss the matter of bringing here (Spalding) some Refugees . . . It was decided to bring 16 refugees and house and provide for them . . . Father Tyck went off to London where he was so overcome by the misery of his fellow countrymen that he forgot our original estimate . . . I received a wire from him at 8.30 one afternoon which read - 'prepare cold supper and hot coffee for 22. Tyck.' . . . No sooner had the scheme been set on foot by the arrival of the refugees than Father Tyck was simply inundated with offers of help . . . So much so that he was emboldened to keep popping off to London to bring fresh batches of refugees until the number reached the large total of 130."

The Spalding Guardian of August 1914 (note the incongruity of dates with the previous report related by Mr. Charles Martin) printed the following list of 121 Belgian Refugees:-

"Edmond Batkin (78), and Anna Batkin (68); Arthur Beelaerts (48), Marie Beelaerts (50), and three children; Frans Boedts (Herent), Clarisse de Bry (38), and child; Aldof Deluwor (40), Mathilde Deluawer (38), and three children; Josef Deraedt (70); August Deraedt (44), Caroline Deraedt (37), and seven children; Marie Dewever (16); Marie Dons (23), and child; Augustine Dumont Mathilde Feyaerts (49) and two children.

Louis Fleerackers (38), Theresia Fleerackers (38) and three children. Loius Gillis (56), Theresia Gillis (55), and four children; Louis Grauwels (59), Elizabeth Grauwels (56), and two children. Isabello Kindermans (36), and eight children. Marie Lauwers (18), Alfons Lauwers (11), Louis Lauwers (3), Isabella Lindard (18).

Alexander Michotte (49), Charlotte Michotte (41), and seven children; Josephine Moortgat (80), Josef Moortgat (49), Catherine Moortgat (49), and four children.

Albertine Naalties (70).

Andre Piette (33), Louise Piette (35), and two children; Jules Piron (32), and two children.

Rosali Roelandts (40), and six children; Leopold Roop (32), and three children.

Josef Scheirs (37), Virginia Scheirs (38), and three children; Joanna Simeons (63), Louis Simeons (28), Marie Simeons (21), and one child, Rosali Smets (64), Alice Tierens (23), Jeanne Tierens (21), - Tierns (18), Leontine Tirens (21).

Victoor Vandenbosch (23), Marie Vandenbosch (23), and child; Ferdinand



Vandenbranden (32), Jeanne Vandenbranden (22), and two children; Antoinette Vanhombecck (48), Adolph Voirhomme (34). Jules Weiss (42), Louise Weiss (40), and child."

The Refugees were to remain for the duration of the War living in various houses in and around Spalding, many settled and subsequently married in the area. Father Tyck was greatly helped in his work with the Refugees by his assistant Brother Aldrick who was a Norbertine Lay Brother, one of four who were stationed in Spalding from 1900 to 1920. The Free Press of 3rd March, 1916, quoted Charles Martin when he said:-

"I would like to pay a tribute of praise and admiration for the untiring energy, devotion of Bro. Aldrick . . . there is no man I have ever met whom I respect more than Bro. Aldrick. He is one of those men who seek not the limelight but remain quietly in the background doing their work."

Although Spalding only had a small Church for a relatively small resident Catholic population, one regular problem was that of overcrowding on Sundays. This was due essentially to the large numbers of Irish seasonal workers whose population fluctuated from year to year. Indeed one of these workers recalled:-

"Spalding was the nearest town which was five miles away. The tiny Church was not able to accommodate all the Irish on Sunday mornings. Many of us had to kneel on the pavement outside where we were given curious looks by passers by."

(Michael Hannon, "High Tides and Travelling Men", article undated).

In order to try to cope with this problem the Priest set up a system of 'Mass Centres'. This was first begun by Father Frederick Van Santen in 1903.

The Spalding Guardian, 17th May, 1913, reported:-

"Sir Frederick Van Santen was the pioneer of the Mission to Irishmen in the Spalding District. He found these unshepherded labourers totally unable to come to the Church at Spalding. 'If the mountain will not go to Mohammed', he mused, 'then Mohammed must go to the mountain', and he forthwith set out every Saturday morning at 7.30 a.m. to say Mass at Tongue End at 9.00 with a second at Littleworth at 11.00 o'clock, all before breakfast. The first Mass at Tongue End was celebrated in a Public House, but later schools were available. In those days as many as 100 Irishmen attended the service at Tongue End and over 200 at Littleworth, but the influx into the district was much greater than now. Still he goes every Sunday by Sunday at the age of 69."

The importance of the vast number of Irish seasonal workers is shown by the way efforts were made regards the annual pilgrimage to the Church's Grotto:-

"The pilgrimage coincides with the presence in the district of the large number of Irish Labourers, and the deliberate picking of such a day as Thursday was in one sense favourable to them, for with little doing in the harvest field they were enabled to take part . . . Thus the Irish 'Bodyguard' was larger than usual."

(Spalding Guardian, Saturday, 17th September, 1910).

One of the figures of St. Norbert's who has not, so far, been mentioned much save in reference to the Irish seasonal workers, is Father Frederick Van Santen, C.R.P. Father Van Santen, Belgian by birth, came to Spalding on the 4th July, 1888, he was to stay for 33 years, the longest serving priest at St. Norbert's to date. He perhaps witnessed some of the most grand services and ceremonies that St. Norbert's has experienced; the Consecration of the Church in 1904, the building of the Lourdes Grotto in 1908, the twelve years of pilgrimages, and the joy of seeing Father Tyck's Little Boys' Band formed!

When he died on the 7th November, 1920, he was given a fitting burial in Spalding Cemetery, the first Catholic priest to be buried in Spalding for many centuries. The altar servers at the funeral were John Evans and Rex Ashby. The Spalding Guardian ran an extensive obituary under the apt title of "A Faithful Priest". For his work and commitment Father Van Santen had been awarded a Knighthood of the Royal Red Cross (K.R.R.C.), and also made Knight of the Order of the Crown (K.O.C.).

Soon after the passing of Father Van Santen, Spalding was sad to lose its other 'old campaigner', Father Clement Tyck, who retired due to failing eye sight. The Lincolnshire Free Press of April 26th, 1921, reported:-

"The Very Reverend Father Clement Tyck, C.R.P., the popular Prior of St. Norbert's, Spalding, has resigned. But we hasten to add, that this does not mean that Spalding is to lose him, Parishioners were told on Sunday."

Father Tyck was succeeded by Father Aloysius Firth but remained in Spalding until the assistant priest Father Milo Pillot had arrived.

Father Tyck was clearly held in much esteem locally for in 1934 this article appeared in the Spalding Guardian on 13th October:-

"Prior Clement Tyck, more familiarly known as Father Tyck, who was for 18 years Roman Catholic Priest in Spalding, paid a flying visit to the town on his way to Harwich on Tuesday. Apparently last Monday he came to England to preach in Manchester and felt that he could not return to Belgium until he had had another glimpse of Spalding . . . During the time he was in Spalding he organised a Boys' Band - still remembered as 'Father Tyck's Little Band'. 'Spalding Sports for Spalding Boys' was and is his motto."

The 'golden age' of activity in Spalding's Catholic Church passed with the retirement of Father Tyck. The new Parish Priest was Father Aloysius Arthur Firth, C.R.P., who arrived in Spalding on the 11th April, 1921. He was to serve the Parish for some 19 years. The financial and economic restrictions of the 1920's and 30's placed much hardship on the Church's congregations and hence material progress in the Church was limited and little is left to record.

The Annual Processions ceased in 1922 and the Little Boys' Band was disbanded. In February of 1922 Father Firth celebrated his Silver Jubilee of the Priesthood and this was marked by a seated meal in the White Hart Hotel, Market Place, Spalding.

On the 8th September, 1934, this article appeared in the Spalding Guardian:-

"Catholic Church - On Sunday the renovated organ at the Spalding Catholic Church, which has recently been installed in a new position by Messrs Walker and Taylor, organ builders, of Lincoln, was used for the first time. The organist was Mr. W. Reynolds, the church organist . . . The old organ stood just inside the church on the right, but for this rebuilt organ a balcony has been erected at the back of the church and this will also accommodate the choir, thus giving additional seating capacity to the body of the church."

The departure of Father Firth and the arrival of Father Norbert Ellis in the January of 1940 heralded a period of 'restoration' in the Church which was very much in a state of disrepair. The stained glass window which had stood in the North Wall of the Church had been moved into the opposite wall, after the building of the Grotto, and the spaces had been left empty. In 1942 these spaces were finally filled in with simple cathedral glass windows. The money for this had been donated by the Polish soldiers who had been resident in the Spalding area during the Second World War. The large window behind the organ loft was also replaced and the wooden altar steps were removed and new altar rails put up. Plans were made to replace the entire wooden floor of the Church and for total redecoration.

So it was that in 1948, as a temporary measure, the Congregation moved out of St. Norbert's to St. Peter's Church so that the decorating could take place. St. Peter's Church had been placed at Father Ellis's disposal by the Vicar of Spalding, Canon Carnegie. St. Peter's stood in Priory Road, opposite the Johnson Hospital, but was pulled down in 1967 to make way for a car park for the new Offices of the South Holland Urban District Council.

A fairly good account of the work done in the church survives because Father Ellis had a small leaflet printed outlining some of the details. This passage begins in 1948 and reads:-

"As the work proceeded we used to peep in the Church and it looked like a veritable 'shambles'. But when we came back in September what a transformation! There, was the new floor of polished terazzo, in simple yet dignified design, with the coloured monogram of St. Norbert to welcome us at the entrance door. The font had been moved to where the Confessional had once stood, and the latter had been transferred to what used to be almost a lumber room, at the entrance of the Grotto, but now an attractive side chapel; presided over by St. John Vianney. The radiators had moved back into recesses, cut in the walls, and all the hot water pipes in like fashion. Furthermore these now meandered discreetly all round the back of the church, up into the organ gallery and down into the new Confessional and into the Grotto."

In 1949 the Sanctuary was decorated and the altar moved forward and modified in line with the "demands of the new liturgy" (Father Ellis).

In 1950 the final phase of 'restoration' took place and that involved the decorating of the nave of the Church itself.

By September 1950 the bulk of the work was complete and the congregation returned to their redecorated and refurbished church. It has changed little in the last 40 years and the Church one views today is essentially as a result of the work carried out under Father Ellis. It must be noted that this might not always be so, for at present discussions are taking place for the possible re-ordering of the sanctuary and the redecoration of the church proper.

One feature of Father Ellis's time in Spalding was the annual dance which he started. To co-ordinate this he formed a 'Dance Committee' which planned the event. The dances were held in the Corn Exchange, Market Place, Spalding, and were one of the principal sources of finance for the restoration work.

In February 1957 Father Norbert Ellis retired to become Chaplain to the Holy Child Sisters at Coombe Bank. He was replaced in Spalding by Father Joseph Edward Dodds, C.R.P. Father Dodds had previously served in Moorends, Yorkshire. Father Dodds was not to remain long in Spalding and although it is not fair to say that nothing happened during his stay, there is little of substance to record.

In March 1959 Father Dodds set up the Youth Group, which met every Tuesday and it was to run with some success for many years. In April of 1959 children over the age of 11 who had attended St. Norbert's Spalding, were transferred to the St. John Fisher School, Peterborough.

Father Dodds did not enjoy good health and very much missed Moorends and so it was that on 12th January, 1960 he returned to Moorends. He was replaced in Spalding by Father Gerebern John Pelgroms. Father Pelgroms, a Belgian by birth, was to serve Spalding for some 22 years.

St. Norbert's School had, since its opening, been based in the halls next to the Church but by 1962, had easily outgrown these premises. For some time St. Thomas's Hall had been used as another classroom and clearly the time had come for a change. After extensive fundraising and effort the plans for a new school were finally realised. The Lincolnshire Free Press of Tuesday, July 3rd, 1962, reported:-

"New Primary School Dedicated — Pupils of St. Norbert's Roman Catholic School on Tuesday saw the Bishop of Nottingham, the Right Reverend Edward Ellis, dedicate and formally open their new buildings in Tollgate, off Pennygate, Spalding. It was a ceremony full of colour and dignity. The actual ceremony took something like 40 minutes during which time the Bishop made his way round the outside and inside of the building. Many representatives of the Roman Catholic Church were present and also there were representatives of the Holland Education Committee and headmasters and headmistresses of local schools. Cost of the New School was about £18,000 excluding site and furnishings. St. Norbert's is now a primary school. Its' senior section moved to Peterborough some two years ago."

In 1963 a Christian Giving Scheme was inaugurated so as to place the Parish finances on a steady footing. The scheme, still in operation, worked with people pledging to give a regular weekly sum according to their means.

On the 25th August, 1965, Father Pelgroms celebrated his Silver Jubilee of Priesthood and this was marked by the Parishioners with a presentation of a cheque for £104 and a Parker pen by Mr. Adrian Jansen, Chairman of the Mens Guild, after a celebratory Mass.

In 1966, after extensive discussion, it was decided to demolish St. Thomas's Hall and also the old caretakers house (previously occupied by Mr. Clough) which stood between the Hall and the Priory in St. Thomas's Road.

St. Thomas's Hall had been built in 1906, under Father Tyck, and had been variously used as the Labour Exchange, and extension to the school, a temporary hostel for the Belgian Refugees, and also for numerous functions social or otherwise. The site is now used as the Church car park. The demolition was carried out by a Mr. Lewis of Hawthorn Bank, Spalding.

1975 stands out in the Parish as being the Centenary Year of the Church. This was marked with extensive celebrations within the Parish beginning with Holy Mass on the 8th September, 1975, exactly 100 years on from the Mass celebrated by Fathers Guedens and Dockx on a table in the Priory.

Harking back to the processions of Father Tyck, a procession in honour of the Blessed Virgin was held on the School field, Tollgate, on Sunday, May 23rd, 1976. About 200 people took part including 70 pupils from the primary school. The children strewed flowers before the Blessed Sacrament and there then followed a ritual crowning of Our Lady by ten-year-old Katerina van der Werf.

As a culmination to the Centenary Celebrations there was a special Thanksgiving Mass on Wednesday, 15th September, 1976. The Mass was concelebrated by 16 Priests including the Abbot of Tongerlo, the Right Reverend J.M. Boel; the Bishop of Nottingham, the Right Reverend J.J. McGuinness; the Very Reverend G.I. Joye, Prior of Storrington, and Monseigneur E.H. Atkinson, Vicar General of the Diocese. During the service the Bishop of Nottingham read out a telegram greeting from the Pope. After the service a reception was held in the Tollgate School Hall.

Summing up the Centenary Year, Father Pelgroms was reported in the Lincolnshire Free Press as saying:-

“It has been a wonderful year, which the people have enjoyed very much. We are a Parish of many nationalities and this has brought us all together.”

To mark the Centenary a small booklet on the history of the Parish was produced by Pat Ward. The booklet was very well received but is no longer generally available.

On 22nd March, 1982, Father Gerebern Pelgroms passed away. He was buried in Spalding Cemetery, only the second Catholic priest to be buried there since Reformation Days.

When Father Pelgroms died preparations were underway for the visit of the Pope to Coventry - sadly he did not see these come to fruition.

It was on Sunday, 30th May, 1982, that Pope John Paul II conducted the Great Pentecostal Mass at Coventry Airport, to almost half a million people. A 100 strong party from St. Norbert's travelled to be there, and a report by Sheila Robson, who travelled with them, in the Spalding Guardian of Friday, 4th June, reads:-

“For the rest of us it was a 1.30 a.m. departure by coach and then a gruelling walk of getting on for three miles to arrive at the site by 5.00 a.m.! For this day of pilgrimage was no easy option for anyone. For the sixteen stewards from Spalding under team leader Mike McDonald it meant 20 hours on duty.”

Despite the length of time before the arrival of the Pope, the day was clearly regarded as a very special one by those who attended and it is remembered with much fondness by many of the present parishioners.

Following Father Pelgroms' death in March, there was quite a period of time before Spalding's new priest, Father Oliver Michael Martin, moved down from Aviemore, Scotland, where he had been acting as a supply priest. During this time Spalding also was served with various supply Priests.

Father Martin eventually arrived on the 8th September, 1982. The house and the Church Halls were very much in need of some attention and Father Martin set himself to the task of modernising and improving facilities. One of his first 'jobs' were the Church Halls which he redecorated and substantially improved. The lock-up garages erected under Father Pelgroms were moved from the far side of the car park to near the back of the Sacristy, where they presently stand.

The Priory underwent drastic redecoration from May 1985 — September 1987, with all of the rooms being refurbished and refitted. The outdoor toilets were entirely rebuilt to their present state.

The Grotto, in order to improve the warmth, was re-roofed, a carpet laid, and, with subscriptions from a number of parishioners, the chairs were replaced, and finally the glass door from the Confessional Chapel was fitted.

Prior to serving in Spalding, Father Martin had been a supply Priest in Aviemore, Scotland, sent there from the Abbey of Kilnacrott, Ireland. In the Autumn of 1987 it became clear that Father Martin would be going back to Kilnacrott to become the new Prior. He left Spalding on 18th October and was replaced that day by Father Andrew Henry Smith, a Yorkshireman. Father Smith still serves the Parish three years on and will, no doubt, be the subject of future 'histories' of the Parish.



*To left:  
Father Martin Guedens (seated) and Father  
Thomas Van Biesen (standing) — first  
Parish Priest at Spalding's Catholic  
Mission. Taken circa 1880 by Robert  
Appleby, Market Place, Spalding.  
Original 58 x 93 mm.  
Photo courtesy of the Norbertine  
Community at Storrington, West Sussex.*

*To right:  
Father Gerebern John Seadon (standing  
left), Father Martin Guedens (seated)  
and Father Clement Tyck (standing  
right).  
Father Tyck was the second Parish Priest  
of Spalding and Father Seadon and  
Guedens both had connections with the  
Parish. Taken circa 1895 at Whitehouse, 59  
Piccadilly, Manchester.  
Original 103 x 138 mm.  
Photo courtesy of the Norbertine  
Community at Storrington, West Sussex.*





To left:  
Father Frederick Van Santen — Priest at Spalding for some 32 years. Pictured wearing his medals of the Order of the Crown and as a Member of the Red Cross. It was Father Van Santen who set up the Irish Mass Centres.  
Photo enlarged from memorial card.  
Memorial Card courtesy of St. Norbert's Church, Spalding.

Below:  
Father Milo Pillot seated with a group of Irish Potato Pickers. Taken circa 1923 by Austin Martin. The photo is thought to be taken in a barn in Littleworth.  
Original 138 x 88 mm.  
Photo courtesy of the Priest of St. Norbert's, Spalding.





*Bishop Heylen and Attendants.—Consecration of St. Norbert's Church, Spalding, Lincolnshire.*

*Above: The Consecration of St. Norbert's on 3rd September, 1904. Centre is Bishop Heylen of Namur flanked by the Abbot of Manchester to the left and Abbot Guedens of Tongerlo to the right. Next to the Abbot of Manchester is Father Thomas Van Biesen, first Parish Priest of Spalding's Catholic Church.*



*Church of the Immaculate Conception  
and of St. Norbert, Spalding.*

*Above: The interior of the Church looking north towards the altar. Taken in about 1920. Note the extensive painting of the walls and chancel arch, this was covered over in 1949. Also the old boiler, wooden altar, gas lighting and the old Stations of the Cross.*

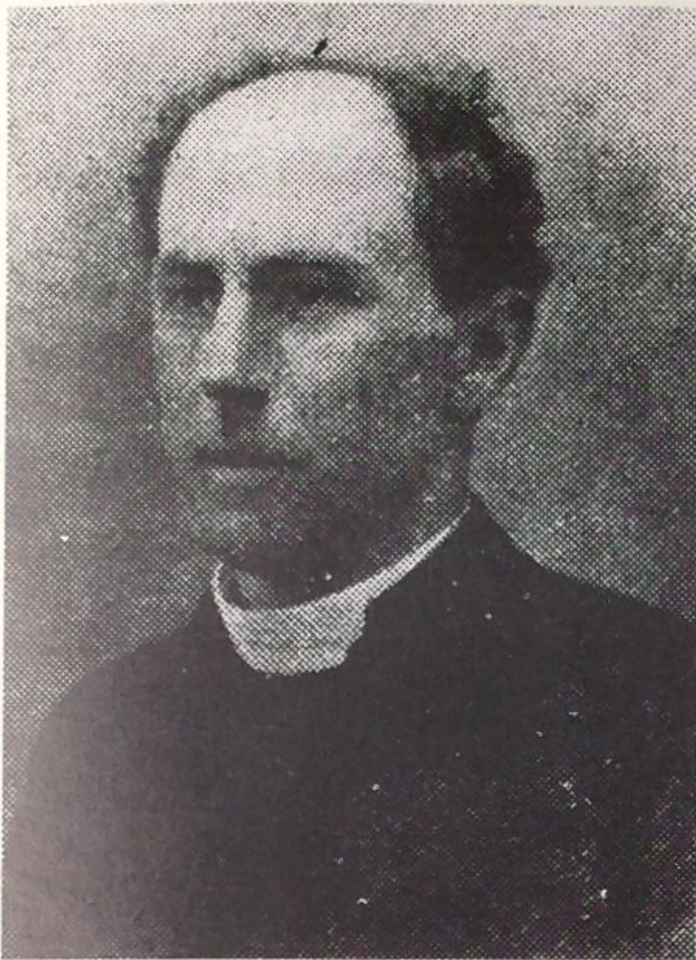




*Above: The Catholic procession of 1913 seen here coming back over High Bridge from Ayscoughfee Hall. In the forefront to the left of the photograph can be seen a tall lady pushing a young girl in a wheelchair, this is Mrs. Ashby and her daughter Lilian. In the centre of the photograph can be seen Father Stephen Mulligan.*

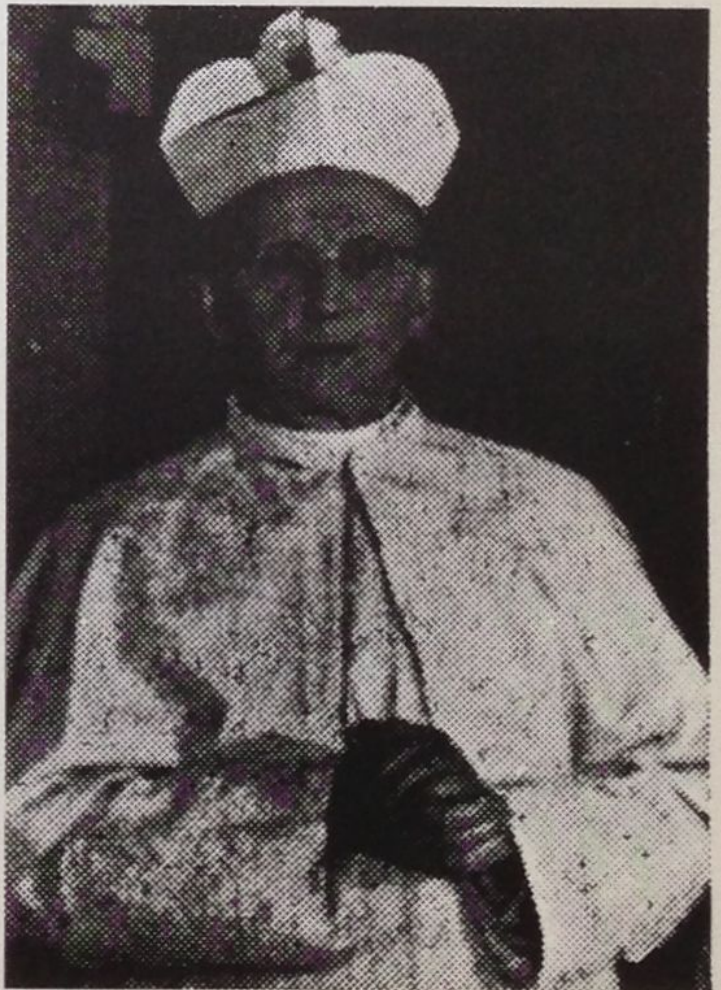


*Above: St. Norbert's Little Boys' Band all set for an outing. 35 faces in all can be counted. In the middle of them all can be determined the head of Father Van Santen.*



*To left:  
Reverend Father Aloysius Firth, third  
Parish Priest of Spalding. Taken circa 1921  
from an undated cutting, thought to be  
from the 1921 Directory Handbook issued  
by Lincolnshire Free Press.  
Original 42 x 61 mm.  
Cutting courtesy of the Parish Priest of St.  
Norbert's, Spalding.*

*To right:  
Rev. Father Norbert Gabriel Ellis, fourth  
Parish Priest of Spalding. Taken circa 1956.  
Photo taken from memorial card.  
Original 30 x 44 mm.  
Memorial card courtesy of Mrs. E.  
Goddard, Spalding.*





*Above:  
Father Joseph Dodds, fifth Parish Priest of  
Spalding. Taken circa 1958 in the present  
day car park at St. Norbert's, Spalding.  
Enlarged from a photo of a group shot of  
Holy Communion.  
Photo courtesy of Mrs. Sadzenyia,  
Spalding.*



*To right:  
Father Gerebern Pelgroms, sixth Parish  
Priest of Spalding. Taken circa 1964.  
Slightly reduced from original 97 x 150 mm.  
Photo courtesy of the Priest of St.  
Norbert's, Spalding.*

# Appendix A

## The Diaries of Father Martin Guedens

Father Guedens kept a diary from 1873 - 1882, these extracts are principally those concerned with the plans to open the Mission at Spalding.

Father Guedens was Belgian by birth and although very capable his English is not always perfect.

"I saw Mary" means that he went to Mass, and references to the "Lord Abbot" are to the Lord Abbot of Tongerlo, Belgium.

The Diaries are presently in the care of the Norbertine Community at the Priory at Storrington, West Sussex, England. They have not been transcribed.

### *June 1875*

Friday 25th — I received a letter from Mr. Young to give us a house in Spalding and inviting us to go there — I wrote to the Lord Abbot absolutely.

Monday 28th — I went to Spalding by Grimsby. Where I had to wait two hours. I reached Spalding about 5 O'clock and saw the outside of the house on the corner of St. Thomas Street and Henrietta Street. Then I went to see Mr. Callagan in the old Abbey where I got the keys of the house — with these I unlocked the doors entered the house and was very much disappointed, the rooms being few and low and the house a corner house. I wrote at once to Father Basile saying that I did not like the house and would not accept it — I visited several streets of Spalding and slept in the White Hart (I believe). On Tuesday I saw Mary in Boston - went by Lincoln to Market Rasen and enquired the matter to Mr. Young.

Tuesday 29th — I saw May in Market Rasen and returned home not at all pleased with the result of my journey.

### *July 1875*

Thursday 8th — There was a letter from Lord Abbot about the house in Spalding this gave me a great deal of trouble as the house is not acceptable and the Abbot wishes to accept it. I will explain the matter to Mr. Young in a letter that I will write afterwards.

### *September 1875*

Saturday 11th — Lord Abbot and Father Basil went to Market Rasen to see Mr. Young. Mr. Young promised £1,000 towards the new nunnery of Spalding. Let us pray that Spalding may succeed . . .

Tuesday 28th — Received letter from Mr. Young with plans for alterations in the house at Spalding. Mr. Young's plans is to enlarge the dining room and have a large side door in Henrietta Street and window to the garden.

*October 1875*

Friday 15th — I wrote to Mr. Young on this occasion and about Spalding with respect to Lord Abbot's letter and the Bishop's Hemingboro's house and garden.

Monday 18th — I received a letter from Mr. Young expressing his joy on the work at Crowle and ask me for what price Mr. Hemingboro will sell his property.

*October 1875*

Tuesday 19th — I go to see Mr. Hemingboro seemingly to inquire after their health in reality to know whether and what for they will sell all their property. They will for £1,400.

Wednesday 20th — I went by one O'clock train to Market Rasen to see Mr. Young and to ascertain how much he will contribute towards the purchase — Mr. Young approved very heartily of the purchase what he thinks a quite providential affair; he will pay the £1,400 but I must pay the other expenses for Solicitor and fire etc. I returned by the last train with a cheerful and thankful heart.

*November 1875*

Tuesday 16th — I received another letter from Mr. Young about Spalding, why will no priest be there — I had another letter from T. Van Biesen who seems to delay.

*December 1875*

Monday 6th — Father Basil and self left this morning for Spalding. An altar and other things were sent from Crowle to Spalding, arriving at Spalding we prepared the house and the room now turned into a chapel.

Wednesday 8th — The altar etc. have not arrived, so made one of a table put on boxes. Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Opening of the chapel and mission of Spalding. I preached both morning and evening. A few Catholics and about four Protestants present. A strong vehement letter against our coming in the Free Press.

# Appendix B

## The Norbertine Clergy of Spalding Catholic Church

The exact date of service is not always known and so this has been left blank, in many cases the dates are known from written note in the Parish archives and so subject to human error.

The best source for dates of service are the Memorial Cards which are frequently printed for general distribution, prior to a funeral.

C.R.P. — Canon Regular of Premontre

Later in the 20th 'Century the Order started to use "O'Praem" (Ordo Premonstratensis)  
— Order of Premontre.

### Parish Priests of St. Norbert's

Father Thomas Aquinas Van Biesen, C.R.P.

15th Dec. 1875 — 27th Oct. 1903

Father Clement Tyck, C.R.P.

27th Oct. 1903 — 20th Jan. 1921

Father Aloysius Arthur Firth, C.R.P.

11th Apr. 1921 — 21st Jan. 1940

Father Norbert Gabriel Ellis, C.R.P.

12th Jan 1940 — Feb. 1957

Father Joseph Edward Dodds, C.R.P.

1957 — 12th Jan. 1960

Father Gerebern John Mary Pelgroms, C.R.P.

Jan. 1960 — 22nd Mar. 1982

Father Oliver Michael Martin, O'Praem

8th Sept. 1982 — 18th Oct. 1987

Father Andrew Henry Smith, O'Praem

18th Oct. 1987 —

## Assistant Priests of the Parish

|                            |                                 |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Fr. Basil Dockx            | 6th Dec. 1875 - 31st Jan. 1876  |
| Fr. John Jochems           | 16th Jul. 1877 - 1882           |
| Fr. Gerebern John Seadon   | 22nd Nov. 1880 - 24th Dec. 1889 |
| Fr. Patrick Maguire        | 19th Feb. 1885 - 4th Dec. 1893  |
| Fr. Augustinus Wallace     | 27th Jul. 1885 - 1890           |
| Fr. Frederick Van Santen   | 4th Jul. 1888 - 7th Nov. 1920   |
| Fr. Gabriel G.H. Bertram   | 9th Oct. 1895 - 1898            |
| Fr. George Alexander Toner | 26th Oct. 1899 - 19th Jan. 1902 |
| Fr. Vincent McGhie         | 29th Jan. 1902 - 27th Oct. 1903 |
| Fr. Stephen Mulligan       | 4th Apr. 1904 - 7th Nov. 1914   |
|                            | also                            |
|                            | 1940 - 1945                     |
| Fr. Thomas Craig           | 5th Nov. 1914 - 1922            |
| Fr. Milo Pillot            | 1922 - 1925                     |
| Fr. Wilfred Maclean        | 1925 - 1929                     |
| Fr. Patrick Mulligan       | 7th Jul. 1955 - 5th Sep. 1956   |

There were also several lay brothers who served the Parish, of these record of only four could be traced, there may have been more:-

|                  |                            |
|------------------|----------------------------|
| Brother Laurence | 10th Nov. 1908 - Aug. 1920 |
| Brother Edward   | Dec. 1909 - c. 1910        |
| Brother Aldrick  | 29th Dec. 1910 - Nov. 1919 |
| Brother Hroznata | 7th Jul. 1913 - c. 1915    |

# Appendix C

## Mass Centres for Irish Workers

These were set up by Father Van Santen to serve the large number of Irish seasonal workers who were temporarily resident in the area.

Initially the Priest, with at least one altar server, would cycle out, in about 1910 a horse and trap was made available by a Parishioner and later a car was used. The Mass Centres fluctuated in number but continued until the outbreak of the Second World War.

Brother Aldrick drew a map of the South Holland area showing the various 'centres', in which he gives details of the numbers of Workers who attended the Masses. The map itself is undated but is probably circa 1912. It gives the following numbers:-

|              |            |                    |           |
|--------------|------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Dunsby Fen   | 70 people  | Weston Marsh       | 40 people |
| Guthram Gowt | 50 people  | Spalding Marsh     | 30 people |
| Tongue End   | 60 people  | Holbeach St. Marks | 90 people |
| Littleworth  | 120 people | Dawsmere           | 50 people |
| Fosdyke      | 80 people  | Lutton Marsh       | 50 people |
| Long Sutton  | 250 people |                    |           |

As well as these mentioned by Bro. Aldrick it is also known that there were 'centres' at Moulton Chapel and Fleet Fen.

The Spalding Guardian of 15th August, 1911, gives more details on the administering of the Irish Workers:-

"Some of the services are held in barns, and in other places the schoolroom is hired. Here is the programme for the coming Sunday: Tongue End (Mr. Cook's farm, near the school) at 9.30, Deeping St. Nicholas (in the Hall, Harrow Inn) at 11.30, Sutton Bridge (Mr. Worth's Rookery Farm) 10 O'clock, Holbeach St. Marks (Mrs. W.H. West's farm) at 11.30, Guthram (Three Horse Shoes) at 10 O'clock, Forty Foot Bridge (school near Mr. Caswells) at 11.30."

This clearly would have been administered by several priests, at this date it would have been Fathers Mulligan, McGarity, and Van Santen, leaving Father Tyck in Spalding to conduct the Mass there.



# Appendix D

## St. Norbert's Catholic School

This is intended to give a brief outline of the early history of the School and is by no means comprehensive. There is vast scope for further research, particularly with regard to memories and photographic records.

The early details of the School are vague and conflicting. White's Gazeteer of 1882 states:-  
"Attached to the church is a convent of Norbertine nuns who teach a day and boarding school."

Kelly's Directory of 1896 states:-

"St. Norbert's Catholic School (mixed) . . . erected in 1876."

The Nuns were allegedly from a French Norbertine Convent and opened the school soon after the Church and so foundation in 1876 would fit. The Spalding Guardian of May 1877 printed the following article:-

"On Wednesday, April 25th, a very impressive ceremony took place in the newly-erected Norbertine Convent of Spalding, when two English Ladies — the first after the Protestant Reformation — received the religious habit and commenced the noviciate . . . After the sermon (by Rev. Martin Guedens) the Rev. Thomas Van Biesen . . . performed the ceremony of the Norbertine ritual, and gave the white habit to the new novices, who were respectively called Sister Mary Norberta and Mary Augustina.

The Norbertine nuns in Spalding intend to open a boarding-school there and will receive a limited number of pupils."

This last statement clearly overrides any foundation date of the school as being pre-1877. This is the only reference to the names of the nuns but it gives no indication as to their mother convent.

The nuns are clearly resident in 1882 as given by White's Gazeteer, but the problem is that they are not registered on the 1881 Census of Population in Spalding. It is however known that the nuns were not there for very long and had certainly left by the time of the death of Thomas Arthur Young in 1891 for he stipulates that as there are no nuns in Spalding there must be three priests. This is borne out by the absense of any mention of the nuns in the 1885 Kelly's Directory which records:-

"St. Norbert's Catholic School, Miss Louisa Dixon, mistress."

In 1880 H.M. Inspectors made a brief report and said:-

"The school has made creditable improvement during the year especially in Arithmetic and is very fairly efficient."

In 1885 they did not elaborate much further:-

"The order is excellent and elementary subjects are very fair."

The number of pupils at the school saw a steady increase:-

|      |           |      |                              |
|------|-----------|------|------------------------------|
| 1879 | 10 pupils | 1917 | 62 (due to Belgian Refugees) |
| 1896 | 30 pupils | 1932 | 64 pupils                    |
| 1913 | 43 pupils | 1955 | 100 pupils                   |

# Appendix E

## Saint Norbert of Xanten

This is intended to give a brief insight into the life of Saint Norbert and has been compiled with much help from Father Andrew Smith, present Priest of St. Norbert's, Spalding.

For further information on Saint Norbert you are recommended to read "Saint Norbert — Founder of the Order of Premontre, Apostle of Peace", by Hamish Campbell, available from all good Norbertine Priests.

Norbert was born in 1081 or 1082 into a noble German family who were the Lords of Gennep, they also held the Lordship of the town of Xanten, on the left bank of the Rhine. Xanten is the traditional birthplace of Norbert who, as a younger son of the family, was destined for service in the Church where he could be provided with a good benefice and a means of living.

It is presumed that Norbert attended the school at Xanten and he later joined the Court of Frederick, Archbishop of Cologne, to train for high office in the Church. Sometime after 1106 he moved to the Court of King (Emperor) Henry V as a clerk in the Chapel Royal having previously been raised to the office of sub-deacon and a Canon of Xanten.

Norbert grew in favour with the Emperor, and in June 1113 he was offered the rich Diocese of Cambrai, but he refused it.

It was in 1115 that Norbert had his 'conversion' experience. He was apparently out riding from Xanten to Vreden when he was almost killed by lightning. He is said to have realised that life was short and hence determined to put God first at all times. He never returned to the Court and started to change his lifestyle, first of all a hair shirt, then a monastic retreat and spiritual direction. He sought ordination to the diaconate and priesthood from Archbishop Frederick and in 1115 he returned to Xanten to take up his duties as a Canon, but not in the rich habit of a Canon but in the humbler dress of the laity. He called for reform and demanded a return to prayer and penance, but his call was resisted and he was expelled from the Chapter. Norbert then began to preach elsewhere about reform and this drew more opposition from the Church. He was denounced and called to defend himself at the Council of Fritzlar in July 1118. The Council failed to come to any conclusion about Norbert and his way of life.

It is important to see this call for reform by Norbert as part of the Church movement, called the Gregorian Reform, led by Pope, Saint Gregory VII. This reform led to a return to Religious Life and a flourishing of new Orders of men and women. Carthusians, Cistercians and the English Order of Sempringham, amongst others, were all founded about this time. The traditional Benedictine monks had grown influential and rich towns had developed around their abbeys. Now the move was back to solitude, the country, poverty and humility.

Monks were, in essence, laymen who came together for their particular salvation; they were 'monos' (Greek): one, alone. Canonical communities were clergy come together for the good of the people of God. They followed a Canon: a common life. When they vowed to give themselves to Religious Life they became Canons Regular and became professed to a particular church: an abbey or a priory followed the rule of St. Augustine.

Norbert now thought that his vocation lay in being a wandering preacher and received Papal permission to preach anywhere. He entered towns and villages and preached about peace and concord and called for an end to feuds and disputes. He took to serve discipline and having gained a couple of disciples they died in their first winter from the hardships of fasting and poverty. Eventually other men came along to join him and their numbers steadily grew.

Bartholomew, Bishop of Laon, urged Norbert to settle down and found a religious community. After being offered several sites Norbert chose the most remote at Premontre, north of Laon, France. Norbert as a former Canon decided to follow the Canonical life: hence Canons Regular of Premontre — Premonstratensians — Norbertines.

There Norbert settled with his companions in 1120 and the Religious Community was born when they took their vows at Midnight Mass Christmas 1121.

The community attracted many men, women, even families, but soon discipline demanded separate cloisters. Premontre remained a double monastery with priests, brothers and sisters until 1140 when the General Chapter of the Order decided to segregate the communities.

Norbert was soon out of the Monastery on missionary journeys. Nobles gave him property to establish communities and by 1122 and 1123 they were being colonised from Premontre.

At Antwerp Norbert was called upon to preach against the heresy of Tanchlin which was contrary to the Church's teaching on the Blessed Sacrament. Norbert suppressed the heresy and reconciled Tanchlin's followers to the Church, in reward he was given the Church of St. Michael, Antwerp, in which to establish a community.

In 1126 Norbert was passing through Speyer, Germany, when the Diet (medieval Parliament) was meeting. News arrived that Magdeburg, Germany, needed a new Archbishop and the Papal Legate persuaded Norbert to take the post. Norbert took some of his men from Premontre and settled in the Church of St. Mary; he became an unpopular reformer amongst the clergy who even tried to assassinate him.

In 1133 Norbert was in Rome with the Emperor Lothair, his friend Bernard of Clairvaux, and the King of France, to suppress the rebellion of the anti-Pope Anacletus II and to restore Innocent II to the possession of Rome. Whilst in Rome Norbert caught malaria, but on his return from Italy he was kept at Court acting as Arch-Chancellor of the Empire. His health suffered so he returned home to Magdeburg, dying soon after on 6th June, 1134.

Norbert was buried in St. Mary's Church in Magdeburg. Norbert was canonised in 1582 and following Lutheran suppression of the Norbertines in Magdeburg his body was translated in 1626 to the Abbey of Stahov, Prague, where it now remains.