

My Experience in De Pere Abbey

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The single language spoken in Brazil is Portuguese. Brazil, different from other countries like Canada and Belgium, does not have two official languages. Also it is different from other countries like Africa and India that have English as a second language. In Brazil's schools until the 70s, students were learning French, but it was not sufficient for an efficient conversation.

After the Second World War and the expansion of commerce from the USA, English became a global language for communication between countries, for example in international conferences and in airports. Therefore, after the 70s, Brazil introduced English in the schools but as a secondary subject and just once a week. This is not sufficient for learning English. If people wish to learn English fluently, it is necessary to go to a private school or to go overseas to study this language in some country where English is spoken.

Brazil will have to choose Spanish as its second language, because all countries in South America speak Spanish, but for political reasons they chose English to be taught at schools in my country.

The Premonstratensian Order does not have an official language, but the Portuguese language has no place in the grand meetings, conferences or General Chapters, because the speakers of Portuguese are so few. Therefore the Brazilian Norbertines need to learn a second language so they can communicate with other confreres that live on the five continents. For Brazilian Norbertines, English is an option to learn in addition to French and German.

Abbot emeritus Paul Meyfroot, vicar to South America, and my Prior, Antonio Galvão, asked Abbot Gary Neville (De Pere, WI) if I could live at Saint Norbert Abbey for two months to learn English during my summer vacation from my theology studies. With his permission I started the preparation for my trip. First of all I needed to pick up my passport at the Police Federation, get a visa at the American Consulate at São Paulo city and then buy the plane ticket from Belo Horizonte to Green Bay, WI.



Because I study theology, I could only travel during my vacations in December and January. It was not easy for me to travel from Brazil to USA. First of all, my flight from Belo

Horizonte to São Paulo was delayed and therefore I lost my connection to Chicago. The airline representative changed my flight from São Paulo to Washington (DC), and then to Chicago. But when I arrived at the airport in Chicago, I thought that I had lost my flight again because I did not know that there was a one hour time difference between Washington and Chicago.

I did not know English very well, therefore I lost my flight, but I had showed my ticket several times to the airline representative and she always told me that it was not time for my flight yet. When I showed my ticket to another woman, she told me that my flight had gone. So she looked for other flights to Green Bay, but they were all full. She asked me if I could change my flight to Appleton. I told her that Father Jay was waiting for me at the airport in Green Bay and that somebody needed to call him by cell phone so he could pick me up at the airport in Appleton. So the woman called a man that spoke Spanish to communicate with me and he called Father Jay by cell phone and told him that my flight was changed to Appleton. I had one more problem; I did not know that the flight would change gates. That is what happened. My flight to Appleton changed gates and I had to take the next flight at 8.00 pm and I had arrived in Chicago at 10.00 am!



After all these problems I arrived at Saint Norbert Abbey safely. The first week at the Abbey for me was an adaptation week. I understood little English, foods were strange, the schedule was different and above all it was cold. In Brazil it is summer, but here it is winter. To my joy, on the second day in De Pere it snowed on December 8, 2009. I had never before seen snow in my life. I walked in the snow and was delighted with the designs of the snow on trees and the way the snow made the world more beautiful; it was a new and wonderful experience.

Another striking experience was being for the first time in a Norbertine Abbey outside my country. Like Montes Claros, community prayer is sung in the choir, but in De Pere, lay people join the confreres in the choir, while in Montes Claros, the laity joins the prayers in the body of the Church. The melody of psalms and the book for the liturgy of the Hours was developed together with Daylesford Abbey. In both communities confreres go out from the community to minister in nearby parishes. While De Pere has daily recreation and monthly house chapters, at Montes Claros we have recreation on Friday evening and house chapter twice a semester. The De Pere associates are more heavily involved with the community than the associates in Montes Claros. De Pere Abbey operates 2 schools; a high school, Notre Dame Academy and Saint Norbert College.

At the Mass there are three differences from Montes Claros: each Father writes and reads his own homily, the associates prepare the gifts for the Altar, and all the faithful can drink from the chalice. The silence inside the Abbey is excellent for prayers and studies. Another element

that I noticed was the fellowship after evening prayer and before dinner in the community room. For me it is a moment more pleasing because most confreres are present, they can talk to one other and share experiences about the day. I see this as a unique moment to foster fraternal life.

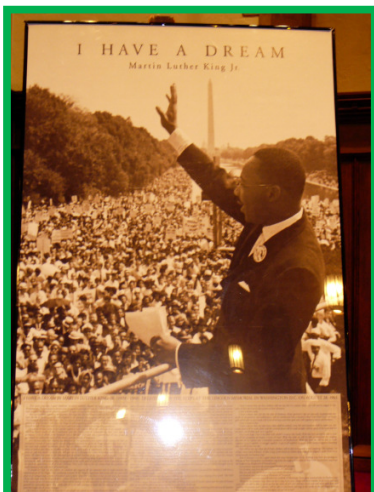
At Morning Prayer every day the presiding priest reads the martyrology and necrology of deceased Norbertines. Another difference is that at evening prayer on Sunday there are two moments when the presider puts incense on the fire and the smoke rises up to sky while confreres sing the incense Psalm.

I love and appreciated my experience, but the cold was too much for me, but nevertheless, nearly every day, I walked around the Abbey or to downtown De Pere, or to Saint Norbert College or to the State Prison near the Abbey.



Father Jay, vice-president of the College, hired a teacher named Dawn Shimura, who works in the ESL program at the College. She worked with me on my English on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

In the third week of December, confrere Father John Tourangeau took me to Chicago to meet confreres and novices who lived at Holy Spirit House of Studies. I visited downtown Chicago and some churches and the Cathedral. I also rode some busses and the metro, and viewed some of the monuments.



I participated in three events in Green Bay. The first was at the Norbertine Parish, of Saint Willibrords for a celebration in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I was invited by Father John Tourangeau and Abbot Gary. The church was filled with Latinos who honor the Virgin of Guadalupe. They also had a presentation of music in Spanish and dance about



Spanish culture. The second event I went to with Father James Nielson was the 16th Ecumenical downtown Christmas walk on December 27. We visited 8 churches (catholic and non-catholic).

Inside each church the Pastor spoke briefly about the foundation of church, the faithful prayed a prayer and sang a hymn, and then the pilgrims walked to next church. The third event was when the Prior invited me to celebrate, at First United Methodist Church, the homage to Martin Luther King Jr., on January 18, 2010. It was wonderful. The guests sang songs about freedom, the speaker talked about justice and peace for all peoples and nations. He spoke too about violence and prejudice in the USA. In the end we watched a video, the last speech of Martin Luther King Jr. He spoke about hope when he said several times: “I have a dream...”

I went with the Prior to visit Father Steve in a Milwaukee hospital. Father Steve is a confrere of De Pere who has been sick for a long time. Then the Prior took me to visit the Harley Davidson Museum, a motorcycle’s museum. Harley Davidson was born in Milwaukee and he invented, in 1903, the first motorcycle. He made several wonderful designs and he also created different and specific motorcycle designs for policemen, for racing, for families, and also he adapted motorcycles for different seasons: a specific motorcycle to run through the forests and hills in the spring and other kinds of motorcycles to drive in winter when it snowed. Inside the museum there are some 200 different motorcycle designs. We also visited an art museum. It is a fantastic place.



This art museum situated on the coast of Lake Michigan and its format is like a large ship. We also visited the Cathedral and two designs attracted my attention: a large crown of thorns above Jesus Christ, with huge nails made of wood and a baptismal font where a person can dip one’s whole body. In my

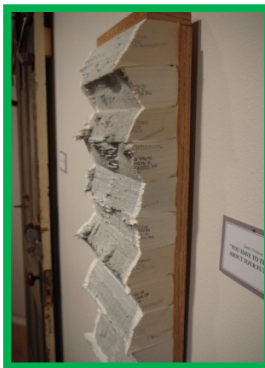


country, it is not possible for people to be dipped because it is a small baptismal sink.

Abbot Gary invited novice Mathew and me to watch “Avatar” at a cinema in 3D. It was the first time that I watched a movie in format 3D. It was spectacular because I felt like I was inside the movie. Avatar is a planet where live beings seem human. These beings lived in contact with fauna and flora, but they (citizen of Avatar) were expelled into “tree houses,” but their “tree houses” were destroyed by explorers and greedy Americans.

In Saint Norbert Abbey I participated in three big events. First, I attended the concert of Organist Isabelle Demers at the Abbey Church. It was fantastic! The organ in the Church has a good sound.

The second event, I participated in a retreat together with the confreres of the Abbey. The retreat had two speakers: a professor of ethics at Saint Norbert College named Paul Wadell, who spoke about Friendship, Augustine and Reconciliation; and Bishop Bob Morneau who spoke about the Life of Prayer. At the retreat I met confreres from the Pories of Jackson and Albuquerque, and the confreres from the College and the parishes. The second event was the exciting prayer for all the sick of the Abbey. They were anointed with oil of unction and then all confreres present in the Church put their hands on the head of each sick confrere.



Abbot Gary, Father Salvatore and I were participating at the Saint Norbert College art exhibition organized by Father James Nelson. He exhibited his works with books. He gave a new format for books: open but like circle, folded and ripped. It did that peoples worked their imagination and their curiosity.

The third event was the Taizé Evening Prayer which is celebrated ever 3rd Sunday of the month at the Abbey Church. It was my first time to participate in this kind the prayer. The Taizé Evening Prayer consists of two entrance songs, a reading from Holy Scripture, and Prayer around the Cross while the faithful sing as they kneel down before the cross and then touch it.

My Priory in Brazil is different from De Pere in that my Community is smaller and younger.

The Saint Norbert Abbey building is immense. It has 4 cloister gardens, a large Center for Spirituality, a guest wing, the Abbey Church, several chapels, the Shrine of Saint Joseph, a large refectory, an infirmary, all this above a basement. In the basement, there are several halls, offices, computer stations, mechanical rooms and laundry rooms.

In the end, two months at Saint Norbert Abbey were a big and exciting experience, although it was not easy to speak English in the beginning; however, with my studies and the help of the confreres and my tutor it became more possible and easier. Thanks very much to all the confreres of this Abbey. I am very grateful for your fraternal hospitality.