

## AREAS ACCESSIBLE WITH THE GUIDE



### 14. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BASEMENT

Excavations started in 1941 under the nave of the Collégiale have revealed the foundations of five superimposed churches, dating from the mid-7th to the end of the 10th century. It was in the first of these churches, of modest size ( $\pm 20$  m), dedicated to Saint Peter, that Gertrude was buried. The last church featured a westwork, the vestiges of which were discovered below the current western choir. The excavations led by archaeologists Breuer and Mertens were continued in 1952. The basement contains the tombs of Saint Gertrude, Ermentrude, (granddaughter of Hugh Capet) and Himeltrude.



### 15. CRYPT

This underground church (22 x 10 m), which dates from the 11th century, was renovated at the end of the 19th century, when its primitive volume was restored. It comprises three naves of equal height and ends with an apse in the east. In the old days, pilgrims were given direct access to the crypt by corridors known as "alloirs" that surrounded the eastern choir.

### 16. SAINT GERTRUDE'S CHAPEL



This chapel is a pair with that of Saint Agatha. It is accessible by the stairway of the Jean de Nivelles tower and by a vertical stairway from the western choir.

The chapel has two elliptical cupolas and ends to the east in an apse. It is lit by a large trefoil window. The chapel has been rendered in plaster to enhance the vestiges of polychromy that appear on the corner columns, and the décor of stylised

flowers on the pendentives.

Local folklore relates that only people in a state of grace will manage to pass through the 25 cm that separates the column from the central pier.



### 17. IMPERIAL ROOM

Situated 20 metres above the parvis of the church, the room occupies the whole interior space (25 m x 8) of the westwork at this level. Large cupolas cover each of the three bays of the room at a height of 9 metres. The central bay ends with an apse in the east, flanked by two recesses. The room is lit by a continuous row of gemel windows.

This room houses amongst other treasures, a reproduction of the 13th century shrine (which was destroyed in 1940), and painted panels from the 15th century that formerly adorned the cart of Saint Gertrude.



### 18. JEAN DE NIVELLES



The jaquemart known as Jean de Nivelles hangs near the top of the southern tower which flanks the westwork of the church. This gilded copper figure, which strikes the hour with its hammer, dates from the 15th century.

Formerly an ornament of the mediaeval town hall, it was moved to its current location around 1620. It is 2.08 metres tall and weighs 350 kilos



### BACKGROUND HISTORY OF THE COLLEGALE

The Romanesque Collégiale of Saint Gertrude was consecrated in 1046 in the presence of Henry III, Holy Roman Emperor and Wazon, Bishop of Liège.

The construction of the 11th century church is in Ottonian style and the westwork dating from the end of the 12th century is in late Romanesque style.

The cloister on the north side was built in the 13th century. The double-ended plan of the church is in the Carolingian tradition and the architectural composition, both inside and out, is of great rigour with simple geometric volumes and sober materials.

Important alterations to the church took place in the 17th century, when the western apse disappeared to be replaced by an axial opening decorated with a baroque portal. In the 18th century, following the prevailing fashion, the interior was decorated with stuccos and wood panelling that adulterated the pure lines of the Romanesque architecture. The restoration of the Collégiale to its pure Romanesque form following the aerial bombardment of 14 May 1940, started in 1948 and was finished in 1984.

The Collégiale bears witness to the existence on this site of an abbey founded in the 7th century on property belonging to Pépin the Elder. His younger daughter, Gertrude, was its first abbess.

The community of nuns and monks later became a chapter of canonesses and canons which was finally abolished in 1798.

### PRATICAL INFORMATION

The Nivelles Tourist Office offers guided tours of the Collégiale Saint-Gertrude and the town, as well as packages combining a tour of the church and another major local attraction.

These group visits are organised on request in French, Dutch, English and German.

#### Guided tour includes:

Tour of the church, crypt, archaeological basement and Imperial Room.

Tour lasts 1hr.30mins approx. Group size max 25 people.

#### Tours for individual visitors:

Daily at 2pm. Weekends and public holidays at 2pm and 3.30pm.

#### Groups (pre-booking required):

Available every day from 9am till 5pm (except during serv

#### Day or half-day packages:

Tour of the Collégiale and Nivelles town or one other attraction from the following: Château of Seneffe, Wellington Museum, Château of Bois-Seigneur-Isaac, Abbey of Villers, Folon Foundation, Arenberg Mill (Rebecq), Tournai Cathedral.

#### Guided walk in Nivelles:

To include any or all of:  
Historic centre, Museum, St Jacques district, Simone Tower, Ramparts, Dodaine Park or themed visit.

#### Information:

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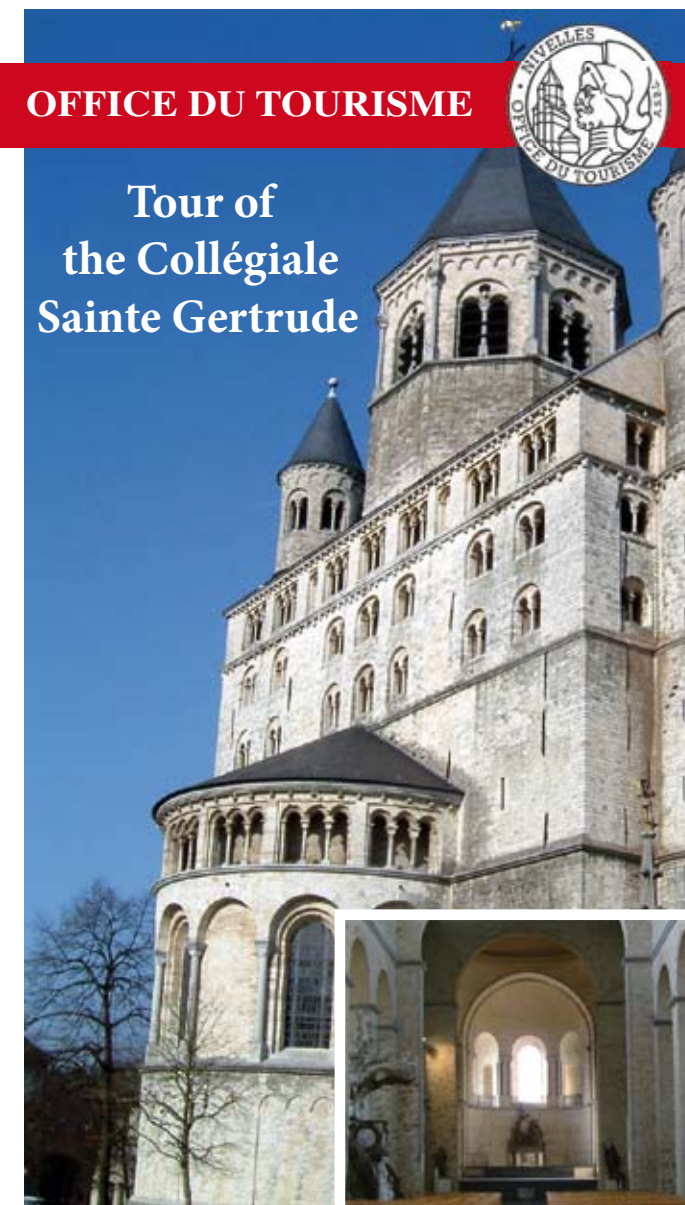
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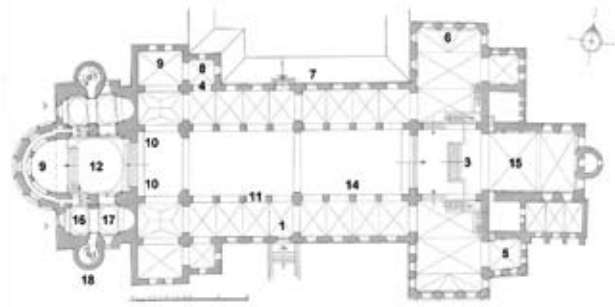
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OFFICE DU TOURISME



## Tour of the Collégiale Sainte Gertrude





### 1. SOUTH DOOR



This inner porch in varnished oak set off with gilding is the work of the sculptor Laurent Delvaux and is surmounted by statues representing the virtues of Fortitude and Prudence. It was donated in 1739 by the Canoness Charlotte Emmanuelle de Poelgeest, restored (City of Nivelles, Christian Patriarche) and re-installed in 2004.

### 2. THONON'S ALTARPIECE

The marble and alabaster altarpiece dating from 1623 is the work of the artist Jean Thonon of Dinant. It is currently set into a baroque surround which was formerly the housing of an organ. Originally placed in the eastern choir, the altarpiece was moved to its current location when the choir was restored at the beginning of the 20th century. It comprises nine alabaster bas-reliefs, including the Adoration of the Shepherds and legendary episodes from the life of Saint Gertrude. Originally, this altarpiece included two beautiful statues representing:

- Saint Gertrude
- Saint Peter-both now exhibited in the Imperial Room.



### 3. EASTERN CHOIR

In the mid 11th century, the relics of Saint Gertrude were removed from the tomb in the Church of Saint Pierre, the foundations of which can be seen today in the archaeological basement. During the consecration ceremony of the Collégiale in 1046, a shrine containing the relics was placed here near the high altar, where it became the focal point of the cult of Saint Gertrude. In later times the shrine was enclosed in the brass case (16th century) mounted on a support, or aedicula, in blue stone.



### 4. BLESSED VIRGIN

This exceptional statue of the young Virgin Mary, represented with uncovered head and joined hands, is by an unknown sculptor, probably one of the masters active in the last years of the 15th century in the immediate entourage of Jean Borman.



### 5. SAINT GERTRUDE'S SHRINE

This contemporary shrine (1982) which contains the relics of Saint Gertrude is the work of the artist Félix Roulin. It replaces the Gothic shrine of 1298 which was destroyed in the fire of 14 May 1940. Made in stainless steel, it is decorated with silver and bronze and is composed of a central case that contains the relics and four volumes which transform the general appearance of the shrine according to its use. The shrine, with its 36 panels in solid silver, is placed on a cart for the annual procession known as the "Tour Saint Gertrude".



Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament (place for quiet prayer)

### 6. STALLS



The Renaissance stalls date from 1566 and consist of 32 oak seats for the canonesses who attended the religious services in the Ladies Choir. The decorative elements are taken from the pagan repertory of the time. These choir-stalls were removed when the Chapter was suppressed at the end of the 18th century, and were subsequently restored and re-fitted by the wood-worker and artist Christian Patriarche. They bear witness to the existence of a religious community here of which Gertrude was the first abbess.

### 7. CLOISTER



The cloister constitutes, together with the collegiate church, the only remnants of the abbey founded in the 7th century. The abbey complex used to adjoin the galleries of the cloister, where only the northern gallery has retained its primitive 13th century appearance. The other galleries were renovated in the mid 19th century. At present the Town Hall occupies the former abbey complex.

### 8. WALL PAINTINGS

Some of the paintings which used to decorate the plastered walls of the church have been conserved. On the flat chevet of the eastern choir is a fresco from the 14th century repainted in oil in the 16th century and representing the martyrdom of Saint Laurence. Other traces of wall-paintings can be seen in the abbess's chapel (western transept) and in Saint Gertrude's chapel, situated on the first floor of the westwork.



### 9. WORKS BY LAURENT DELVAUX



The sculptures by Laurent Delvaux (1696-1778) are the choicest pieces remaining of the decorative art dating from the 18th century in the Collégiale. Born in Ghent, Laurent Delvaux was one of the foremost sculptors of his time and was famous for his subtle way of synthesising the various prevalent artistic trends. Based in Nivelles, he executed works as sculptor to the court of Charles of Lorraine and religious orders from the Chapter of the Collégiale. Exhibited in the western transept, these are: the Lamb of the Apocalypse, the Apostles Peter, Andrew, James and Paul and the Conversion of Saint Paul (western choir).

### 10. PIPPIN THE ELDER AND SAINT GERTRUDE

These works by Laurent Delvaux represent the first abbess Gertrude (or perhaps her mother, Itte of Aquitaine), and her father, Pippin the Elder, Mayor of the Palace of the King of Austrasia, Dagobert. The saint is represented in a triumphal manner unlike any iconographic anecdote, while her father is dressed like a Roman emperor. These statues stand at the location where construction on the church commenced at the beginning of the 11th century against a previous westwork dating from the 10th century.



### 11. PULPIT

Laurent Delvaux began this pulpit at the age of 74, assisted in the wood carving by Lelièvre, and in the joinery by Bonnet. Delvaux himself sculpted the group representing Jesus and the Samaritan woman, as well as the medallions that represent the Parables of the Sower, the Prodigal Son and the Good Father. The pulpit epitomises the art of Delvaux who, contrasting white marble and varnished wood, harmoniously combines the different movements: Baroque, Rococo, and Neo-classicism.



### 12. WESTERN CHOIR

This choir is flanked at mid-height by tribunes that connect the chapels of Saint Gertrude and Saint Agatha and is covered by a cupola more than 14 metres high, ending to the west in a vaulted apse. This choir of the Saviour, which occupies the ground floor of the 12th century westwork, is situated over the vestiges of the original westwork, which dated from the 10th century.



### 13. PROCESSIONAL CART

The old parts of the oak cart date from the 15th century. It is used to carry Saint Gertrude's shrine during the annual «Tour Sainte Gertrude», the origins of which date back to the 13th century at least. This 14-kilometre procession is held on the Sunday after the feast of Saint Michael (29th September), patron saint of the town. The body of the cart was originally adorned with 24 painted panels on a gold background, representing the miracles of Saint Gertrude, the work of Jacop Sourdiaus (student of Rogier van der Weiden) around 1460. Some of these are exhibited in the Imperial Room on the upper floor of the westwork.

