This thesis explores questions related to the foundation and evolution of the monastic Order of Sempringham, also known as the Gilbertine Order, in twelfth-century England. Previous scholars have noted that, while highly peculiar, the Gilbertines were certainly not unique. And while some have pointed to the importance of circumstantial necessity in the creation and early character of the Gilbertine Order, I do not believe that this explanation is wholly satisfactory.

Thus, I seek to illuminate the combination of events or circumstances that might have inspired Gilbert, the order's founder, to create his dual (including both men and women) monastic communities in the way that he did. I focus primarily upon the *Vita Sancti Gilberti*, Gilbert's own testimony in the Gilbertine *Institutes*, and the accounts of various twelfth-century writers in order to gain an understanding of what Gilbert was like on a personal level, to those who knew him. The research soon suggests that the foundation and early development of the order, peculiar and distinctive as it often was, is closely linked with the intriguing persona of St. Gilbert himself. I believe these two factors, personality and circumstance, together account for the distinctive character of the Order of Sempringham. It is my goal that this study will bring a little more nuance to the discussion of the early history of the Gilbertine Order, and thus to the understanding of the roles played by religious women in twelfth-century England.