

January 2010



“The prioress is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery... everything she teaches and commands should, like the leaven of divine justice, permeate the minds of the community.”

— Rule of Benedict Ch. 2, v. 2,5

Oblation Reflection

Reflection given by Prioress Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau on Oblation Day, October 18, 2009

In the Prologue to his Rule, Benedict writes: *What is more delightful than the voice of the Holy One calling to us? See how God's love shows us the way of life. Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way, with the Gospel as our guide, that we may deserve to see the Holy One who has called us to the eternal presence.* (RB Prologue 19-21)

This afternoon we are gathered together to celebrate with the men and women who have heard “the voice of the Holy One” calling them and who have “set out on the way.” The “way” they are taking by becoming a Benedictine Oblate is one way of deepening the commitment they made at their Baptism.

Oblates of St. Benedict are Christian men and women who choose to associate themselves with a particular Benedictine religious community to enrich their Christian way of life. Becoming an Oblate is not something “extra” that you do that is apart from your baptismal commitment. Rather, it is a way to deepen — and perhaps RENEW — your baptismal commitment, even though you may not think of it in this way.

The journey of becoming an Oblate calls each of you into a deeper relationship with God — a God who continually reaches out to you and draws you into a deeper awareness

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Oblation Reflection

(Continued from page 1.)

of the Divine Presence in your lives. What a gift we have! Our God loves us so deeply and continually pursues us and strives to draw us deeper into God's heart and into God's love!

Who knows why God has called you through the Rule of Benedict, through the Benedictine way of life, or to this specific Benedictine community? But the mere fact of your presence here today and your desire to become a candidate or to make your Oblation speaks clearly that God is calling you deeper into the heart of God.

God calls ALL of us! However, often we are too busy, or too tired, or too preoccupied to hear or even notice God's call.

For those of you who are becoming candidates or making your Oblation today, ask yourself: How DID you hear God's call? What was the journey like that brought you to this day? Was it through a person you met? A book you read? Something that caught your eye and your heart? A longing in your heart?

The path that brought each of you to this moment is unique and gift. The fact that you are here speaks clearly that you desire to grow in the love and knowledge of God by incorporating the Rule of Benedict into your life.

Today we gather together in this Church to witness your call, and more specifically, to witness your response to God's call.

Some of you are becoming Oblate candidates, and some of you will be making your Oblation. The words "Oblate" and "oblation" mean offering. Oblates seek to offer themselves more fully to Christ and to the Church by pondering the wisdom found in the Rule of Benedict and by entering into relationship with a particular monastic community.

But becoming an Oblate also means becoming part of the Oblate community. By these means, we hope you are discovering that God calls each one of us to holiness of life, and that the Rule, the Benedictine community, and the Oblate community are instruments of God's grace to enable you to become more of who God created you to be.

No matter what our state of life is, God continually calls us deeper into God's heart and into the "community" that we belong to: family, Church, monastic, or Oblate community.

I pray that as you take this next step in your journey, you know deeply God's presence and love and that you will "listen with the ear of your heart" each and every day.

May St. Benedict and St. Scholastica bless you as you journey deeper into the heart of God.

Getting To Know the Oblates

Mary Thale

Becoming an Oblate has been very important to me. It has been a way to deepen my spirituality and get to know some good people.

I think I've known about the monastery for most of my life, and during a particularly restless stage, I was curious. What was it about Benedictines that made them last for 1500 years? I'm a bit of a history buff and have a curiosity about religious movements that have influenced people deeply and how those movements ebb and flow through history.

At the time, I was a restaurant manager and noticed that people came for more than food. People came out to eat for an experience, for social connection, and something I couldn't quite put my finger on, but I knew that hospitality was more than good, quick food. On a personal level I had that gnawing feeling of "is this all there is?" Looking for something different, I discovered on the monastery's web site the Oblate section, and I knew that I had to check it out.

I am a cradle Catholic, and the Church has been an influence all my life. I love the richness of its very human history, the intellectual depth, the movement of the Holy Spirit, and its ability to actually institutionalize corporal works of mercy.

I live in Calvert City, Kentucky, near the lakes, where I can walk to the store, the bank, the church, and know my neighbors. The area gives me the opportunity to observe a very diverse bird population in a very temperate part of the country. I share my house with a friend, Carlene, a wonderful lab named Grace, who loves to go for walks, and a cat, Claws, who simply claws. I've lived in different parts of Kentucky for the better part of 30 years although I'm a native Hoosier who grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, where my siblings remain. I lived near Chicago for a short time and loved it.

Sisters Eileen, Barbara Ann, and Mary Victor have been wonderful influences. Because I now have a job with regular hours, I can be more active with the Oblate community. I have found it a wonderful experience getting to know some of the sisters in Hildegard Health Center by volunteering a day a month with Sister Agnes, the activities director, who has an enormous amount of patience and a great sense of humor.



Mary Thale volunteers her services in the monastery Activities Department and in the Oblate office one Tuesday each month.

Monastery Moments and Oblate Offerings

January 17

Oblate Meeting. The focus of the meeting will be on obedience. Obedience is part of our ongoing conversion, the constant turning to God.

February 14

St. Scholastica Dinner. This event honors benefactors who have gifted the monastery with \$5,000 and above during the past year.

February 21

Oblate Meeting. This month's topic is conversion. Conversion is one of the three vows — stability, conversion, and obedience — that St. Benedict asks of his followers.

February 26-28

High School Visiting Weekend. High school girls visit, pray, and recreate with the sisters while enjoying the company of peers who want to deepen their Catholic faith and learn about the Ferdinand Benedictines.

March 19-21

Come & See Weekend. An opportunity for young women to experience the Benedictine life, meet the sisters, and visit with other women discerning religious life.

March 21

Oblate Retreat Afternoon. Spend the afternoon in prayer.

April 13-18

Vocation Workshop. The sisters will sponsor the 17th annual vocation workshop, "Awakening: A Rebirth of Enthusiasm in Vocations." Nearly 1700 individuals from 39 countries have attended past workshops.

April 18

Oblate Meeting. Stability will be the focus of the meeting. Dynamic, constructive stability can enrich religious communities and families. Stability offers an alternative to a "throw away" attitude.

Oblate Birthdays

January

2 – Kathleen (Murphy) McTiernan, 6 – David Richards, 13 – Lynn Belli, 16 – John Kohl, Jackie Richards, 19 – Barbara Gordon, 25 – Susan Roussin, 30 – Kathy Knust



February

1 – Richard Huggins, 6 – Angela Zaccardelli, 11 – June Berg, John Wallace, 12 – Zelma Peltier, Sister Marilyn Schroering, 15 – Mary Ann Stoll, 18 – Rita Kohl, 20 – Sister Wilma Davis, 24 – Carolyn Adler, 26 – Patti Schroeder, 29 – Mary Martha Salas

March

2 – Jo Ann Desjarlais, Sister Barbara Ann Offerman, 10 – Beverly Belgarde, 12 – Scarlett Winters, 13 – Sister Mary Victor Kercher, 17 – Patty Allery, Kathy Dixon, 21 – Paula Dumont, 22 – Verna Jeanotte, Ruth Keethers, 25 – Denise Leinenbach, 26 – Sara Manis, 29 – Gary Pope

April

4 – Sharon Cavanaugh, 6 – Lawrence Willegal, 7 – Judy Bueckert, 11 – William Heberling, 28 – Shirley Stern, 29 – Marcia Brown, Carole Swim, 30 – Ron Allery, Leeny Hardesty

Belcourt Chapter News

At their last meeting the Oblates of the Belcourt Chapter decided to make a donation at Christmas to St. Ann's Church. The Church is purchasing new pews and carpeting, and the donation will be helping that project.

An organization in Rapid City, South Dakota, sent gift bags to the

needy in Belcourt and Dunseith. Oblate Josef Marion delivered these to 400 children.

Each year Oblate Phyllis Jollie gives toys, candy, and stuffed animals. This year Josef helped Phyllis deliver the gifts and sought other items for the families.

Oblates Sandy Turner and Theresa Bauer work part time in Hildegard Health Center, the health facility for the Sisters of St. Benedict.



New Oblate



Barbara Gordon from Owensville, Indiana, made her Oblation during a private ceremony at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand on November 14. Barbara is a member of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Princeton, Indiana. Barbara was unable to make her Oblation on October 18 because of illness.



Highlights from the World Congress of Oblates

Held in Rome, Italy, October 2–9, 2009 • Written by Oblate Paulette M. Campana

“The World Congress of Benedictine Oblates was like visiting grandma’s house at Christmas and meeting lots of cousins we didn’t know we had.” This was the sentiment expressed by one of the Oblates at the closing meeting. I agree wholeheartedly. Oblates came from all over the world to participate in the Congress and, despite language and cultural differences, bonded with one another in the common goal of learning how to be agents of peace in the world.

The main work of the Congress was to explore and discuss the role of Benedictine Oblates in meeting the challenges of living in a global

society amidst the “noise” of the technological era and the plurality of religious and spiritual beliefs, or lack thereof. What can Oblates do to promote harmony, understanding, and peace? How can Oblates remain grounded in Benedictine/Christian spirituality while engaging in interreligious dialogue? What is interreligious dialogue? What isn’t it? What are the obstacles that must be overcome?

The overarching theme of the Congress was LISTEN. Listen to God in the silence of contemplation, listen to God in the stranger, listen to those whose religion is different from your own, listen to the signs of the times, be

One of the special Benedictine sites that Paulette Campana visited as part of the World Congress last October was the Monastery of St. Benedict in Subiaco, Italy. This monastery enshrines the cave in which St. Benedict lived as a hermit before he organized his first monastic community.

One panelist made the observation that we are all looking for water — the same substance — but call it by different names.



Highlights from the World Congress of Oblates

aware, be in the present. Listen.

Our first session focused on the value and necessity of practicing contemplation (or meditation) in order to be grounded in one's own faith. We need to recover our contemplative energy to be more effective in the world and to counter the onslaught of noise all around us. Contemplation leads to greater effectiveness in service to others. It enables us to engage the world in love. Oblates are called to integrate contemplation and action in their lives — to develop a balance between prayer and work. Meditation requires poverty of spirit, i.e., a willingness to try to let go of images and thoughts for a period of time. We were encouraged to practice meditation by repeating a sacred word or verse in order to control the problem of distractions, and to be gentle with ourselves if our attention waned. If we began thinking again, we returned to our mantra, the sacred word or phrase we had chosen. The goal of Benedictine life, we were reminded, is contemplation — prayer without ceasing.

Subsequent sessions dealt with the necessity and benefit of interreligious dialogue, as well as the obstacles to meaningful discourse. Being anchored in one's own faith tradition and having respect for one another are prerequisites for conversation with those whose beliefs are different from ours. Dialogue is person to person, and not religion to religion. It requires humility and the ability to listen non-judgmentally! We can acknowledge differences, but not concentrate on them. Rather, we reflect on what humans have in common, i.e., values, concerns about old age, sickness, and death, and desires for living in peace and with dignity.

Four methods of interreligious dialogue were described:

1. Dialogue of life
 - a. Communicate by our way of living.
 - b. Share our life with persons of other faiths.
 - c. Seek understanding.
2. Dialogue of action
 - a. Have projects in common.
 - b. Perform common action for the common good.
3. Dialogue of experts
 - a. First, know who you are, then exchange thoughts with others who know who they are.
 - b. Try to understand another's point of view.
 - c. Reduce prejudice through gained understanding.
4. Dialogue of experience
 - a. An example of this is to learn more about Buddhism by living in a Buddhist monastery for a month.

Interreligious dialogue is NOT intended to address political issues. It is NOT a means to convert others to what we believe. But it IS a tool to build a bridge of understanding and peace between and among all peoples.

Note: Accepting differences in the belief systems of others does not mean we agree with their views; it means we are respectful and sincerely trying to expand our understanding of their faith and who they are as individuals.

Barriers to broad participation in this peaceful way of engaging with people of different faiths include the inability to listen, fear, seeing only through our own "lenses," not having a strong self-identity,



and a lack of true humility.

The Rule of Benedict provides a guide for pushing aside those barriers. For example, in chapter 72 of the Rule, Benedict instructs the monks — and by extension, Oblates — to try to be the first to show respect to the other. And guests, he tells them in chapter 53, are to be treated as Christ.

Benedictines Oblates, grounded in the precepts of the Rule and disciplined in the art of listening, are called to prophetic witness through peaceful and respectful interaction and dialogue with all. Our vocation is to contribute to the enterprise of helping the world become a new creation in Christ. St. Benedict shows us how, beginning with the word "listen."

Oblates is published four times a year by the Oblate Leadership Team: Sisters Kathy Bilske, Wilma Davis, Mary Victor Kercher, and Barbara Ann Offerman.

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Seek. Pray. Share.

Oblates

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Bona Opera Form

Believe it or not, it is time to begin preliminary planning for the season of Lent. This year Lent begins on February 17 — Ash Wednesday. For Benedictines, that means it's time to start preparing our Bona Operas. For those who are new to this custom, a bit of explanation may be helpful.

In Benedictine monasteries it is the custom for each monastic to list on a Bona Opera form (Latin for good works) the good works of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that the monastic resolves to do during Lent. The Bona Opera is then submitted to the prioress or the abbot, who blesses it with a signature of approval (as recommended by St. Benedict in Chapter 49 of the Rule).

We invite you as Oblates and Oblate Candidates of Monastery Immaculate Conception to participate with us in this Benedictine custom by preparing your own Bona Opera. You might want to begin by prayerfully reading Chapter 49 of the Rule. Then, consider what you feel God is calling you to do this Lent in the areas of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. There are infinite possibilities of what this may be; you just need to find something that fits your circumstances. Perhaps you will want to focus on doing one thing well rather than listing many things that you might not be able to accomplish.

Once you decide, with the help of the Holy Spirit, what you need to do this Lent, we encourage you to write your intention(s) on the Bona

Opera form included as a separate sheet with this newsletter. (This is the same form the sisters use.) Sign the form and mail it to: Oblate Office, 802 E. 10th Street, Ferdinand, IN 47532-9239.

Please post the envelope so that it reaches the Oblate office by February 10. Our prioress, Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, OSB, will read and bless your Bona Opera and place it at the altar for Mass on Ash Wednesday. We will then return it to you before the First Sunday of Lent. In your possession again, your Bona Opera will be a personal reminder of your Lenten offering to God.

