

March 2010



Sister Jeana Visel is a high school religion teacher. One of her hobbies is iconography. Here, she is working on an icon of Mary. Sister Jeana will make her perpetual profession on October 2, 2010.

## Commitment

By Sister Jeana Visel, OSB

Spring is a time of commitment to new life. As the natural world launches into greenness, sun, rain, and the mysteries of the soil together bind themselves to another season of life, growth and bearing fruit. As young sheep and calves are born in the pastures around Ferdinand, nature compels another cycle of life to begin afresh. Young couples plan June weddings, daring to plunge into a new adventure together when the earth seems most fair, most promising. In spring we see all these signs of hope. Life is worth living to the fullest, the earth says, and the more you put into living, the more you will get out. Plant your seeds now, and believe in the harvest to come. In spring, one can put faith in commitment.

The spiritual life also takes commitment. If we are to live the Benedictine values of silence, work, obedience, conversion, stability, and stewardship, we have to be willing to plant the seeds when the time is right. We have to prepare the soil of our hearts, and reflect on what these values mean. We need to nourish these seeds with the life-giving waters of prayer, give them the strengthening sunshine of community, and occasionally protect them with cover, guarding ourselves from the frost of distraction by lesser things.

Continued

“When the novice is to be received, she comes before the whole community in the oratory and promises stability, fidelity to the monastic life, and obedience.... She writes her promise in a document drawn up in the name of the saints and of the prioress who is present. The document is signed and placed on the altar. She, then, with arms outstretched, begins the verse “Receive me, O Lord, according to your word and I shall live, do not fail me in my hope” (PS. 119, vs.116). This verse is sung three times by the sister and the entire community... She then prostrates herself while the Bishop says a special prayer of blessing. From that day forward she is counted as one of the community.”

— Rule of Benedict Ch. 58



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## Commitment

*(Continued from page 1.)*

As I ponder preparing to make my own perpetual commitment as a Benedictine, I know that to see one's hopes through to the harvest, one has to be ready to tend them not just through the beauties of springtime, but through the scorching heat of summer to come. In the Benedictine life, one must dig a deep spiritual well and return to it often, to make time and space to connect with God. So often the little everyday challenges are the hardest: How am I responding to someone who irritates me? How am I living out a spirit of hospitality when someone brings me yet another imposition on my time? How kindly am I negotiating a situation of conflict? Being faithful to the daily practices of prayer and mindful work keeps us attuned to the source of our love and joy. The seedlings we desire generally don't just come to fruition on their own; they require some degree of tending. Likewise, daily spiritual practices are what strengthen us for commitment.

At the same time, daily spiritual practices themselves express our commitment. If I want to be Benedictine, I have to act Benedictine. When I make time for *lectio divina*, I am being Benedictine. When I approach my work with a spirit of service and prayerfulness, I am being Benedictine. When I make time for community and try to see God within my sisters and brothers, I am being Benedictine. By my desire to relate to God and the world in this way, I orient myself toward a particular goal of holiness, which is itself reached by living the life I say I want to live. In all of these practices, I am being Benedictine, even if I am as yet relatively new and imperfect at it. Growth takes time. We have to be patient with ourselves and others.

In committing to the process, though, we are not simply working on ourselves, but entrusting our souls to the hands of God, the master gardener. God knows what we need and when we need it. We must be faithful, yes, but in the realm of holiness, God's faithfulness and grace is what allows us to make any commitment to growth at all. God is the one who plants the desire in our hearts, the one who gives us the strength to do the daily little deeds that are hard but good, and the one who draws us ever onward, whether that is like corn stretching upward toward the sun, or a potato or carrot growing secretly deeper into the earth, or like a pea plant, serpentine its way around a trellis in no clear fashion, but developing nonetheless. Whatever our pattern of growth, God is the one who must guide it. In committing to new life, we entrust ourselves to grace.

# Getting To Know the Oblates

## Scarlett Winters

In my early twenties, like many Catholic young women, I considered a vocation to religious life. After searching through my many options, I fell in love with the Sisters of St. Benedict in Ferdinand because the community was so vibrant and diverse. Sister Rose Mary Rexing was the vocation director at the time, and she helped me get to know the spirit of the Rule and the community through a few Benedictine Life retreats and by visiting me for a weekend. While God had other plans for me than religious life, I still felt like Monastery Immaculate Conception was home and felt called to live out the Rule of St. Benedict as much as possible. Sister Rose Mary told me about the Oblate program and gave me a brochure. That was all I needed.

My life has taken many twists and turns since I've been an Oblate, but the sisters and the Rule have always been there to guide me along the way, to celebrate the successes, and to mourn the losses. They have shown me the true meaning of hospitality. I now live in Bloomington, Indiana. Between my naturopathy practice and a part-time job, I keep quite busy. While I have been unable to make it to many Oblate meetings in recent years, the Oblates have not forgotten me, and I certainly have not forgotten them. This group is like family. No matter how far away you are or what is happening in your life, you always have people who care about you and will welcome you home when you find your way back. This community demonstrates for me the love of Christ in that way.



## Monastery Moments and Oblate Offerings

April 13–18

### “Awakening” Vocations Workshop

Over the past 15 years, 1600 people from 39 countries have attended this workshop in which religious communities address how to attract new members.

April 18

**Oblate Meeting** Sister Vivian Ramos will present the topic of Stability, one of the Benedictine vows.



April 24



**Tentative Entrance date into novitiate** for Postulant Alexandra Larson

May 15

**Volunteer Appreciation Day.** All volunteers who

have contributed service to the monastic community since May of 2009 join the sisters for prayer, Mass, and brunch. The event expresses the appreciation of the sisters to the volunteers for their generosity.

May 16

**Oblate Meeting** Sister Dolores Folz will present the topic of Stewardship.



May 29–31

**Family Day** at the monastery

June 5

**Silver Jubilee.** Sisters Louise Laroche and Susan Mary Hooks celebrate the 25th anniversary of their monastic profession.



Sister Louise



Sister Susan Mary

June 7–9

**Junior High Camp** — 5th and 6th grades

June 10–12

**Junior High Camp** — 7th and 8th grades

Held at Camp Marian on the Monastery grounds, these two camps allow girls to be with peers as they learn about the Sisters of St. Benedict, pray together, and play together — boating, archery, swimming, crafts and more.

June 25–July 1

**Come & See Week.** Catholic women between 18-40 are invited to spend the week with the Sisters at the Monastery to share more deeply in the Benedictine life. Prayer, work, and leisure will be part of the schedule with the religious community as well as time to share one-on-one with some sisters.

June 27–30

**Illinois Youth Volunteer Group.** Youth and adult leaders from several parishes in southern Illinois do volunteer work for the Monastery. The group will stay on site and join the sisters for morning and evening prayer.

July 3

**Golden Jubilee.** Sisters Mary Lee Hillenbrand, Shirley Ann Schultheis, and Mary Francis Williams celebrate the 50th anniversary of their monastic profession.



Sister Mary Lee



Sister Shirley



Sister Mary Francis

## Oblate Birthdays

May

27 — Julie Beck; 28 — Linda Begle



June

7 — James Werner; Marlis Mahrer; 12 — Karen Rexing, 15 — Bernadette Heeke, Phyllis Jollie; 20 — Dayna Barlow, Joseph Marion; 21 — Theresa Bauer, Anne Howerton; 24 — Brenda DeMotte; 30 — Marilyn Becker

July

4 — Elaine Baumgart; 7 — Mary Lou Bassler, Mary Taber; 9 — Olivia Vega, Chihoko Wake; 11 — Martha Schmitt, 12 — Zella Kueneman, 13 — Charles Luebbehusen; 20 — Ed Brown, Sandy Turner; 30 — Judith Kissel, Carolyn Werner



*Pray for deceased  
community  
members and  
Oblates:*

Sister Geraldine Hedinger

Sister Jennifer Dippel

Oblate Frances Berberich

Oblate Olivia “Wally” Vega

## Reflection for the Feast of St. Scholastica

February 10, 2010

*Luke 10:38-42 and Dialogues of St. Gregory*

*Reflection by Kathryn Huber, OSB*

The gospel of Martha and Mary is an interesting parallel of Gregory's story of Benedict and Scholastica. Let's look first at the gospel, then the Dialogues.

Gospel - Martha welcomes Jesus into her home. Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him. Meanwhile, Martha is busy with the details of hospitality. In their own ways both sisters are faithful disciples of Jesus, one listening to his word and the other performing service.

It is this very tension which seems to be the source of conflict in the story. The text does not say that Martha wants to sit at the feet of Jesus; it states that she wants her sister to share in the responsibilities of service. Overwhelmed with the tasks, Martha complains that the holy talk needs to stop. Martha rebukes Jesus for his indifference and then gives him directions for remedying the situation. Jesus is being asked to do more than intervene in a domestic squabble. He is being called on to decide which responsibility of the disciple takes precedence. Martha's action is neither praised nor condemned, but she is challenged by Jesus to consider her priorities. Jesus' response, though stated clearly, is somewhat ambiguous.

What exactly is the better part that Mary chooses? The context of the story might give us a clue. The story opens with a statement about hospitality, "Martha welcomes Jesus into her home." (NRSV) Might the



**St. Scholastica window in the monastery church**

answer be as simple as this, that true hospitality is found in giving personal attention to the guest rather than in being distracted from that person by the duties associated with hospitality? Christian discipleship is first and foremost an adherence to Jesus and his "Word"; this is the "one thing required." When one's priorities are in order, one need not choose one obligation of discipleship to the exclusion of the other. The relationship with Jesus shows itself in loving service, but without prayer, care for others' needs may not be love. The heart of the Gospel is found in the deep connection of contemplation and compassion.

Dialogues — We have a similar situation in the Dialogues of St. Gregory where he relates the story of Benedict and Scholastica. In this narrative, Benedict comes down from his monastery and welcomes Scholastica into the house near the monastery gate. The story recounts how the twins met outside the Monte Casino grounds, as they did yearly, for holy conversations and prayer. As the day comes to a close, Scholastica requests that Benedict stay with her and continue speaking of God. Benedict responds, "What are you saying, sister? There is no way I can remain outside the monastery!" Like Martha, he complains that the holy talk needs to stop. In this case, Benedict's love for the Rule seems to pass over the line to legalism. Scholastica, on the other hand, having an inner wisdom and desire for the holy, appeals to God and she is the one God listens to that night. It poured down rain and Benedict could not return. He was dismayed and said, "God forgive you, sister. What have you done?" She answered, "Look, I asked you and you wouldn't listen. So I asked my Lord and he listened. Now leave me if you can, and go back to your monastery." And Gregory makes it quite clear that Benedict got what he deserved.

In his commentary on the Dialogues, Terrence Kardong, OSB, states that the Rule had taken Benedict as far as it could; now he needs to give himself over to love. Indeed, he needed to give himself over to the love of God and the love his sister had for him. We know from the Dialogues that Benedict

## Reflection for the Feast of St. Scholastica

learned his lesson. If he had not, he might have sat there all night wet and fuming; but he did not. Gregory says the holy twins spent the night happily discoursing on the joys of heaven.

Three days later Scholastica dies and Benedict sees her soul entering the heavenly realm in the form of a dove.

Our story of Benedict and Scholastica provides us with a helpful principle for monastic life. After all, the final purpose of monasticism is not discipline. It is divine contemplation --whose full expression is a life filled with compassionate love. Scholastica

did not urge Benedict to forget about his rules so they could indulge in dissipation. She was intent on sharing the happiness of the vision of God that both of them longed for.

Conclusion — In the two accounts Mary and Scholastica know what is essential:

- they know how to be single-hearted;
- they are aware of the person to whom to commit their lives;
- and they hear the “Word” and live the “Word.”

In the end both pairs, Martha and Mary, Benedict and Scholastica, learn the “one thing required,” namely the adherence to Jesus and his “Word.” The Rule of Benedict envisions a community that works to support each person’s developing relationship with God and with others. As we celebrate the Feast of Scholastica let us support one another in this quest, as did the two sisters and as did the holy twins. And may we know God’s presence and strength as we walk this journey of seeking God together!

### NAABOD 2011

Preparations for the 2011 meeting of the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors began with a meeting on Tuesday, March 2, 2010, at Saint Meinrad Archabbey which is the setting for the NAABOD Meeting July 1-6, 2011. Oblate directors collaborating in the planning process are Sister Antoinette Purcell, Beech Grove, Indiana, President-NAABOD; Father Paschal Morlino, Baltimore, Maryland, Vice-President NAABOD; Father Meinrad Brune, St. Meinrad, Indiana; Sister Mary Victor Kercher and Sister Barbara Ann Offerman, Ferdinand; and Sister Mary Tewes, Villa Hills, Kentucky. Oblates Janis Dopp, St. Meinrad, Larry Fourman, Beech Grove, and Lynn Belli and Mel Schroeder, Ferdinand, are contributing their services on the committee. A remembrance in your prayers would be a special help along the way to July 2011.

### Monastic Institute for Benedictine Oblates

Would you like to meet and share with other Oblates? The Benedictine Sisters of Atchison, Kansas, offer the 3rd Annual Monastic Institute for Benedictine Oblates on the weekend of July 15 to July 18, 2010. This is an opportunity to pray, connect with other Oblates, and gather wisdom to share with the world at the only institute designed especially for Benedictine Oblates.

Presentations will be given by Father Dan Ward, OSB. There will also be evening gatherings and a panel by participants. The Institute will be held in the Sophia Center Mount St. Scholastica, Atchison, Kansas.

For more information contact Sister Micaela Randolph, OSB, Phone 913-360-6160, or e-mail [micaela@mountosb.org](mailto:micaela@mountosb.org).

### Oblates on-line

A world of Benedictine Oblate information is available online — programs, newsletters, and much more. Check out these great sites:

**Oblate Spring**  
[www.oblatespring.com](http://www.oblatespring.com)

*This page has examples of the Divine Office, a blog, and other Oblate resources.*

**Google**  
[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

*In the search box on their home page, enter “Benedictine Oblate Newsletters” or “Oblate Programs” to find a wealth of information. The Ferdinand Oblates are also listed there.*

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

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*Oblates*

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*“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.”*



We wish you abundant “Resurrection” blessings  
as we approach and celebrate the Easter season.