

November 2010



Sister Mary Ann Verkamp with her father, John Verkamp, at Lake Atitlan in Guatemala.

A modern friend of St. Benedict

By Sister Mary Ann Verkamp

Beginning at the September Oblate meeting and continuing until next summer, regularly scheduled meetings and presentations will focus on St. Benedict and his friends, including his sister St. Scholastica, St. Gertrude, St. Hildegard, and others. In this article, Sister Mary Ann Verkamp writes about another friend of Benedict. As you read this article, Sister Mary Ann invites you to consider people you know who can be considered a friend of Benedict.



Among the Tools of Good Works in chapter 4 of the Holy Rule, Benedict says: “Do not aspire to be called holy before you really are, but first be holy that you may more truly be called so.” John Verkamp, my Dad, certainly never aspired to be called holy in his life time but it is my honor and privilege to call him such – truly a holy man.

John was imbued with the spirit of Benedict from an early age. As a child, he was guided and nurtured by the Benedictine Sisters who taught at Schnellville, his hometown. He was a country boy, close to the earth. Some of that “humus”(humility) soaked into him as a young boy.

When John married at age 24, he moved, with his new wife, to Huntingburg. Shortly thereafter, he interviewed for the maintenance position at St. Mary’s Church. He told the Board of Trustees: “If you hire me, you can count on me.” Whether it was digging a grave in mid-winter or firing the furnaces at 4 a.m., John could always be counted on. Being available and willing to serve

Continued

“Truly, we are forbidden to do our own will, for Scripture tells: Turn away from your desires. And in the Prayer too we ask God that God’s will be done in us.”

— Rule of Benedict Ch. 7



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in any way needed became John's signature characteristic. He lived that "good zeal" Benedict writes about in chapter 72 of the Holy Rule. John loved working with the Sisters. Some of them still tell me stories today of how he helped them. Many years later I learned what a challenge it had been to work for a very demanding pastor, but I never heard him grumble. "His heart quietly embraced the suffering." RB7,35

John's way of life spoke of a deep reverence for all of creation and most of all for his Creator. John walked in an awareness that "his actions everywhere are in God's sight." RB 7,13 God's Commandments were close to his heart and he made every effort to put them into practice. Praying for a happy death was a daily practice of John's. Looking back on that custom, I think it was Dad's way of living out Benedict's exhortation: "Day by day remind yourself that you are going to die." RB 4,47

John was content with who he was. He lived out of a deep inner peace. He never pretended to be better than others. He knew his weaknesses but drew strength and comfort from the frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. God's unconditional love carried him through the rough times. I remember the day when he heard so and so was worried because he thought he had upset John by deciding not to buy insurance through him. That very same day John went to see him and reassure him there were no hard feelings between them. Years later when I studied the Holy Rule and read: "If you have a dispute with someone, make peace with him before the sun goes down," RB4,73 – I thought, my Dad had a kindred spirit with Benedict.

No one was ever treated as inferior or of less value by John. As a volunteer for SIRS, he showed great respect and patience with the mentally and physically challenged clients. He always seemed to be at ease in whatever circle he happened to be in. John was not out to impress anyone but he did "try to be the first to show respect to the other." RB72,10

Even though it has been some 55 years ago, I still remember vividly the day Dad came home from the hospital and told us children that Mother had been anointed. In those

days that meant death was imminent. Dad looked at us and calmly said: "the Good Lord will take care of us." Here was a "wise man who had built his house on rock".

Silence for John was an experience of fullness. He didn't need to have the TV on all day. He could sit quietly, say his prayers and count his blessings. After his beloved wife of 63 years died, he learned to be at home by himself and on an ever deeper level with himself.

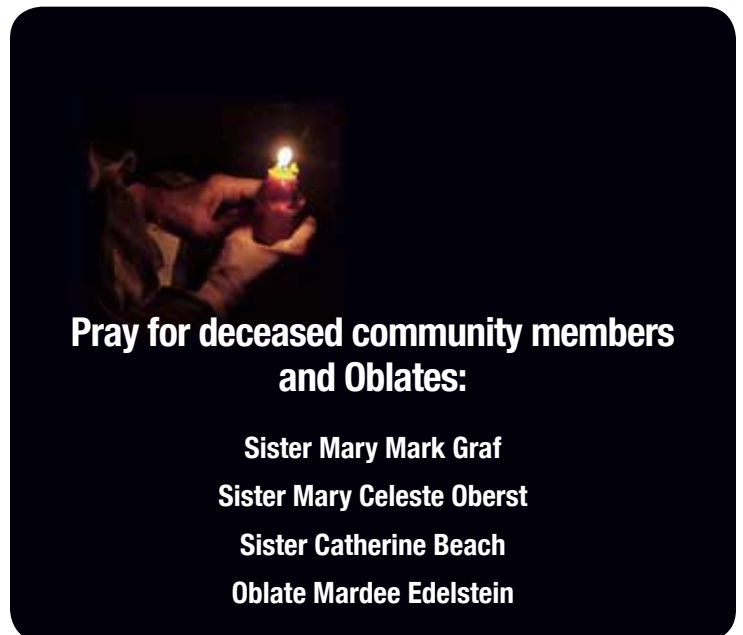
John never met a stranger. He could engage in thought-provoking and cheerful conversations. Never, however, do I recall hearing demeaning or degrading remarks from him about anyone. He seemed to have learned that "the tongue holds the key to life and death." RB6,5

Moderation could well be John's middle name. Just a couple of examples: John enjoyed one glass of wine each day and smoked one cigar every Sunday afternoon. The sense of moderation led to a life of balance between work, prayer and leisure. No one played a game of sheephead more wholeheartedly than John.

John held life and friends with open hands. After living in Huntingburg for almost 60 years, he graciously moved to Jasper so that his dear wife could get the health care she needed. In Jasper he made new friends. I think his outer flexibility and openness reflected a deep spiritual openness to God's transforming grace working within him. His heart continued to expand and overflow with gratitude.

As he lay dying, I asked him if he was afraid of death. He looked at me, somewhat shocked that I had even asked the question. He calmly responded: "Why should I be afraid? I know I'm going to a better place."

Such is the legacy, filled with the spirit of Benedict, he left us. There is no doubt in my mind that John, my Dad, was indeed a friend of Benedict.



**Pray for deceased community members
and Oblates:**

Sister Mary Mark Graf

Sister Mary Celeste Oberst

Sister Catherine Beach

Oblate Mardee Edelstein

Monastery Moments and Oblate Offerings

November 1

Feast of All Saints

November 2

Feast of All Souls On this evening, the Sisters will process to the monastery cemetery to pray for all the sisters who have died. The Sisters would be glad to pray for your departed family and friends, too. Please send your prayer requests to the Oblate office. Intentions will be placed before the statue of the Death of St. Joseph in the monastery church, and a candle will burn for them throughout November.

November 16

Feast of St. Gertrude This Benedictine woman is the patron saint of the Federation to which the monastery belongs. Sr. Joella Kidwell, from Ferdinand, is currently President of the Federation of St. Gertrude.

November 19-21

Christkindlmarkt in Ferdinand Oblates are encouraged to attend and to assist the sisters with Christkindlmarkt activities. Contact Sister Mary Philip at the monastery to volunteer in preparation for the weekend or during Christkindlmarkt.

November 28

Blessing of the Advent Wreath Join the sisters for Evening Prayer and a blessing of the Advent Wreath. Contact the Oblate Office if you will be attending.

December 8

Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary This is the feast day of the Monastery Immaculate Conception. Oblates are welcome at the celebration of the Mass at 4:30 p.m. (ET) Please let the Oblate Office know if you plan to attend.

December 17-23

Evening Prayer Add your voices

with the sisters as they celebrate the "O Antiphons" during Evening Prayer each evening at 5 p.m. (ET)

December 24

Christmas Eve Mass Open to the public, this Mass is celebrated at 10 p.m. with prelude music beginning at 9:30 p.m. (ET) Oblates are invited to attend.

December 25

Merry Christmas

January 1, 2011

Announcements of Jubilees for the Year 2011 On this special feast day, the religious community honors all sisters who will be celebrating a jubilee during 2011. The observance on this day is for religious community members only.

January 16

Oblate Meeting Sister Jenny Miller joins the Oblates as she talks about "St. Gertrude of Helfta" also known as St. Gertrude the Great.

Oblate Birthdays

November

3 – Peg Albertson,
4 – Gloria Patnaude
and Ellen Stanton, 8 –
Marie Roberge and Phyllis
Schmits, 10 – Bob Cadwallader, 18 –
Denise Marcellais and Mel Schroeder,
22 – Lawrie Hamilton, 23 – Norma
Lennartz and Janet Ziliak, 29 – Patricia
Hopf



December

4—Shirley L'Esperance and Gloria
Patnaude, 14—Dolores Gourneau,
27—Sharon Champagne, 28—Jeanie
Jollie and Elaine Rodland

January

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

Two New Oblate Candidates

Phyllis Schmits and Mary Cheshire began their year of Oblate Candidacy on Sunday, September 26, 2010. Sister Kristine Anne, Prioress of Monastery Immaculate Conception, presided at the Rite of Reception held during the Oblate meeting at the monastery.

During their year of study of the Rule of St. Benedict and Benedictine spirituality, Candidate Phyllis Schmits will be accompanied by Sister Eileen Reckelhoff and Candidate Mary Cheshire will be accompanied by Sister Donna Marie Herr.

Candidate Phyllis Schmits is a



member of Holy Cross Church in Ft. Branch, Indiana, and Candidate Mary Cheshire is a member of St. Clement Church in Boonville, Indiana.

Getting To Know the Oblates

Mary Lou Bassler



When Sister Mary Victor asked me to write my profile, I wondered, “Where do I begin?” So I decided to give a short pertinent summary of events in my life.

I was born and raised in Washington, Indiana, by my parents, Joe and Catherine Bassler. My elementary education was provided by the good Benedictine sisters, while the Providence sisters were responsible for my secondary schooling. After graduating from Nursing School in Evansville, I remained there to work in Pediatrics at St. Mary’s Hospital for a few years.

As a former member of a community whose main mission was the care and education of mentally challenged girls, I continued work in that field in Chicago, Michigan, and

Pennsylvania. Later on, I became involved in working with adults in that same capacity.

I then returned home to help care for my mother, who was having major health problems. She taught me many things by accepting trials with a loving and faith-filled attitude.

I became acquainted with the Ferdinand Benedictines through my sister, Sister Mary Elise, who was the most kind, gentle and humble person I had ever known

So, why did I decide to become an Oblate? Previously, several persons asked me if I had ever considered becoming an Oblate. After the fourth person asked, I thought, “Maybe God is trying to tell me something.” So after talking to Sister Barbara Ann, I began the process and as the saying goes, “the rest is history.”

I have come to know and love the Benedictine spirituality — its spirit of prayer, hospitality, moderation and service to others. I have met many kind and caring sisters and Oblates and hope to continue my journey with others seeking God in everyday life.

Five New Oblates join Oblate community

Linda Begle, Victor Begle, Judy Luebbehusen, and Charles Luebbehusen made their Oblation, becoming professed Oblates of St. Benedict, during the Rite of Oblation held during the Sisters Morning Prayer on Sunday, October 17. Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, prioress, officiated at the Rite.



Pauletta Adler Jeter (left) from Friendswood, Texas, made her Oblation in a private ceremony at the monastery on October 7 because she was unable to participate in the ceremony on October 17. Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, prioress, also officiated at this Rite of Oblation.

All of these new Oblates completed their year of study and reflection on the Rule of St. Benedict with their sister companions. Sister Mary Beth Maier companioned Pauletta and Sister Karen Joseph companioned Linda, Victor, Judy, and Charles.

The Begles are members of St. Henry Parish, the Luebbehusens are members of St. Ferdinand Parish, and Pauletta is a member of Mary Queen Parish in Friendswood, Texas.



Victor Begle, Linda Begle, Judy Luebbehusen, and Charles Luebbehusen recently became professed Oblates of St. Benedict.

News and Notes from the North Dakota Oblate Chapter

by Sister Mary Victor Kercher



The sign “Welcome to the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation” and coming to a stop at Queen of Peace Inn, Belcourt, North Dakota, August 21 brought smiles and a sigh of relief from Sister Mary Claude Croteau, Oblate Shirley Stern, and me. We were the fourth group from Ferdinand to meet with the Belcourt Oblates since 2004.

Queen of Peace Inn, formerly the residence of the sisters, now a bed and breakfast inn, provided a cool and hospitable place for our weekend of seeing, sharing experiences, and our hopes for the future with our Oblate friends in North Dakota.

Gail Trottier and Kathy Dixon serve as leaders of the Oblates. They, with help from the Oblates, plan and conduct meetings, are responsible for preparing new candidates, and receiving new Oblates.

Sunday Mass was celebrated in St. Ann’s Catholic Church, just across the lot from Queen of Peace Inn.

Celebrating with the Oblates in their parish setting was an impressive and learning experience. Signs of an earlier celebration of the Feast of St. Ann in July, the 125th anniversary of St. Ann’s presence and service to and for the Belcourt community, were evident to remind everyone of their love of St. Ann.

Lunch in the inn was a treat provided by the generosity of the Oblates. As always during a good meal, stories are told, conversation is lively, friendly fun happens, and sometimes a second helping is needed to savor that special dish. It is a new adventure to try foods not on your regular menu.

Oblate Gail Trottier conducted the Oblate meeting at the inn’s chapel. The prayer time consisted of five brief reflections on statements taken

from particular Chapters of the Rule — respect for one another (ch.63), opportunities to express love in service (ch.35), participation in decision making (ch.3), restoring broken relationships and restoring harmony (ch. 13 Our Father), and good zeal (ch.72). Each one present was given an opportunity to share an experience or make a comment after each reading. I affirmed the experience of prayer and faith sharing. Among business discussed were candidates to make oblation, candidates to prepare for oblation, and a schedule of 10 Oblate events, including August Retreat, October Oblation Day, Christmas Potluck/special activity and seven regular meetings. Highlights from the World Congress of Oblates in Rome 2009 were shared. (The basic question continues to be, “What can Oblates do to promote harmony, understanding and peace in a world of technology and the variety of religious and spiritual beliefs? The first word of the Rule “Listen” is key. Listen to God in prayer, listen to God in the stranger, listen to those whose religion is different from your own, listen to the signs of the times, be aware, be in the present. LISTEN!)

Some special remembrances of our gathering include a DVD of the meeting, an arrowhead pendant, and a special hand-made rosary. There are many talented Oblates in the Queen of Peace Chapter. On the free Saturday morning Oblate Shirley Stern and I visited the

International Peace Gardens which borders the United States and Canada. Sister Mary Claude visited family and friends from her hometown. Early Monday morning we set our sights on Ferdinand. The happy memories live on.

The Oblates regret that there is no longer a Benedictine priest, brother, or sister there to help, support, or guide their group. It is important to believe and remember that an active, committed group of Benedictine Oblates is itself a Benedictine presence in the place where they live and work. Oblates are often able to go where or do what a priest, brother, or sister could not go or do. Each of us is committed to seek God in the everyday, to pray for ourselves and others, and to serve in love.

At the close of Monastery Queen of Peace in Belcourt, the Queen of Peace Oblate community formally became members of the Ferdinand Oblate community. Each visit is an opportunity to get to know and support a group of women and men who continue their search for God and continue to witness the spirit of St. Benedict.

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

Send comments to the Oblate Office

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