



Transformation in the Benedictine Way of Life

Retreat, Benedictine Oblates of Monastery Immaculate Conception

Sister Kathryn Huber, OSB, and Oblate Shirley France
March 19-20, 2016



Sister Kathryn Huber and Oblate Shirley France listen during the Oblate retreat.

The annual Oblate retreat was held March 19 and 20. Oblate Shirley France and Sister Kathryn Huber served as the leaders for this retreat. The theme was “Transformation in the Benedictine Way of Life.” Both Shirley and Sister Kathryn emphasized that Benedictine spirituality is pre-eminently practical.

Benedict’s most fundamental insight in the Rule is that we seek God through ordinary means and that we are transformed through the daily rhythms of prayer and work: ora et labora. The leaders reminded everyone that the most common aspects of our daily life can cultivate love of God, self, others, and all creation. While transformation is the work of God, it is a work in which we all have a role to play.

On Saturday the theme was Ora, or Prayer. The overarching theme on prayer was Listening for the Sacred Presence in the Daily. Both presenters emphasized that a deeply personal and loving union with Christ is the cornerstone of Benedictine spirituality. Sister Kathryn gave brief presentations on deepening our relationship with God through prayer by waking up our hearts to the fact that indeed we are God’s Beloved. In addition, we can learn to listen for the heartbeat of God in all of life by listening to scripture (especially the gospels), the Rule of Benedict, one another and the world around us. As one Oblate candidate stated: Gospel, Rule, Others, World = GROW.

Shirley France shared how she, as an Oblate, lives the value in her life as wife, mother, and in her work and service both in her employment and as a volunteer. Shirley shared several experiences of being aware of God’s presence in some ordinary moments that became extraordinary prayer experiences. Shirley then led the Oblates in various activities to aid them in incorporating these values in their lives. She led

them in an experience of Visio Divina I in which the retreatants contemplated photos in silence and solitude. She also led them in an experience of contemplative prayer.



Melissa Barnes is enjoying a recent experience with those present.

On Sunday the theme was Labora, or Work/Service. Since this is the Year of Mercy the overarching theme was Extending God’s Incredible Mercy. Sister Kathryn emphasized that mercy is part of hospitality and that spiritual transformation is the process by which Christ is formed in us for the Glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives, and for the sake of others. The possibility that human beings can be transformed to such an extent that they image Christ is central to the message of the Gospel and the Rule of Benedict. Sister Kathryn gave examples of mercy in scripture, in the Rule, and in literature and the arts. Sister pointed out that in the “Prologue to the Rule,” Benedict reminds his followers that “we make this journey with the Gospel as our guide.” She emphasized that as our hearts expand in Christ, we become more and more the presence of Christ today.

Shirley France shared examples of mercy shown to her and the family when their 13- year-old daughter, Trista, was diagnosed with a brain tumor and when she died 18 months later at the age of 14. It was another powerful moment when she shared an experience of struggling to show mercy and forgiveness in a family experience.

(See Transformation, p. 2)



Oblate Ellen Stanton shares a personal prayer experience.

Day of Reflection on the Gospel of Luke

By Father Eugene Hensell

February 20, 2016



Father Eugene Hensell, OSB

Father Eugene is a Benedictine monk from St. Meinrad Archabbey. He has a PhD from St. Louis University and travels throughout the U.S. and several foreign countries giving retreats and workshops. Having Father Eugene do a day of reflection on “The Gospel of Luke” was a real privilege for the 60 participants, including Oblates, sisters and other guests. I heard so many affirmations of him. The attendees recognized Father Eugene’s gift of making the Gospel of Luke come alive. Not only is he a scholar, but he has a marvelous sense of humor. Below I am including a few comments that the Oblates shared with me. *Sister Brenda*

Father Eugene covered selected parables and did a masterful job of inviting us to put on the mindset of the times. When we looked at our own biases, he exhorted us to be a David and push the boundaries of our thinking. It struck home in its relevance to what we have been hearing during this political season. Within the Gospel of Luke, I found a way of discernment. *Oblate Ellen Stanton*



Oblates Don and Ellen Stanton



Oblate Elaine Baumgart

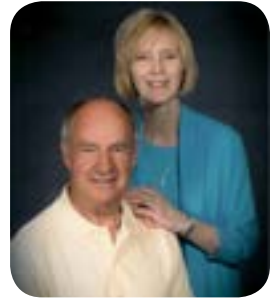
I really appreciated the spark that Father Eugene has with the gift of adding to familiar Scripture readings. He was able to make them very alive for our time and our thinking. He provided an interest that I had never attributed to the readings he dealt with. I would recommend that anyone who has the opportunity to hear him, to take advantage of that. He can also make you smile and laugh when he shares his insights. *Oblate Elaine Baumgart*

Driving home from attending Father Eugene’s Lenten scripture study from the Gospel of Luke focusing on “Jesus’ Journey to Jerusalem,” I did a great deal of reflecting. I pondered how he brought the scriptures to life for me; i.e., by mentioning the time written, the group of people Jesus was speaking to, and what “this” passage meant. This is what I learned from Father Eugene as he discussed and explained the scriptures: 1. To read prayerfully and not to rush; 2. To pause and reflect; 3. To listen and meditate, and 4. To apply to my life. *Oblate Julie Beck*



Oblate Julie Beck

I didn’t know what to expect from Father Eugene’s Day of Reflection back in February. I walked away with some new views of Jesus’ Journey to Jerusalem. Father offered much knowledge of historical facts in Jesus’ time to help gain insight into the parables. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, he explained how clothing marked different peoples, for example. Then he applied that to the Gospel. He drew a link from Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem and our journey through life. He spoke of God’s love and how it is impossible to know how much God loves us, that our journey continues on and on, and that we are transformed along the way. As I heard the Gospel of Luke during Lent, the Gospels were much more meaningful to me this year. *Oblate Ruth Goepfrich*



Oblates Jim and Ruth Goepfrich

Transformation in the Benedictine Way of Life

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She shared other grace-filled experiences in her volunteer work at the Ohio Reformatory of Women, and at the Union County Thanksgiving Dinner. Shirley also gave the Oblates personal reflection time to journal with these questions: Who showed you mercy when you felt you did not deserve it? What was one of the most merciful acts you showed another? Toward whom, individual or group, do you find yourself being least hospitable? She reminded the retreatants that “My relationship with God is only as good as the person I like least.”

Evaluations by the retreatants were affirming. They commented that Sister Kathryn and Shirley made an excellent team. Retreatants affirmed the practice to pair one of the sisters with an Oblate – the sister to teach the Benedictine value and an Oblate to share how he/she lives the value in her way of life. Stories by each presenter made the experience a practical and memorable experience. Visio divina was a first time experience for many and they found the exercise very meaningful. Several retreatants commented on the depth of the table discussions. Gratitude was expressed to the presenters and to Sister Brenda Engleman for organizing the retreat.

As we go our separate ways today, let us ask ourselves, “What ways do we grow in greater love of God? How do we express daily the invitation to prefer nothing to the Love of Christ?”



Inquirer Shannon Shoemaker, Oblate Shirley Stern, and Oblate Candidate Stephanie Smith are getting to know one another.

Part Two: Chapter 4 “The Tools of Good Work” by Sister Rose Wildeman and Sister Anita Louise Lowe April 16, 2016



Sister Anita Louise Lowe (left) and Sister Rose Wildeman share their wisdom regarding chapter four of the Rule of St. Benedict.

Over a year ago we looked at the first half of Benedict’s chapter on “the Tools of Good Work” and shared ways we can incorporate them into our lives today. Due to bad weather, the second half of this presentation had to be postponed. The chapter is set up as a chiasm, a style of writing in the time of St. Benedict in which the most important part, the nucleus, is placed in the middle. The ideas leading up to this point are correlated with a similar set, given in reverse order. In Chapter 4, the nucleus is in two parts: verses 41-50 focus on watchfulness, and verses 51-58 focus on the means of watchfulness.

Benedict begins this chapter by making a list of very important tools the monks (and every Christian) can use as guides in living their monastic life. He begins with what Jesus says are the two greatest commandments: “Love God with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” Then Benedict lists most of the 10 Commandments, followed by the Golden Rule which is stated in the negative rather than the positive. He then finishes with the Corporal Works of Mercy.



Oblate Mary Lou Bassler listens to Oblate Lynn Belli share a lighthearted moment.

union with God. It is an abounding trust in God. This hope is not directed toward desirable outcomes in this present life, but its energy lifts up the heart of the believer toward eternal life. Keeping one’s focus on eternal life helps one to continue

In verses 41-50 he gets into his main idea or message that he wants to give—watchfulness. Benedict tells us that the way to be watchful is to place your hope in God alone. Hope, according to Michael Casey, is a theological virtue that allows us to live in

trusting in God through all situations. However, we don’t have to wait until death to experience moments of grace. Casey says that “committing one’s hope to God implies a deliberate action. It means having eternal life as our one principal and motivating goal reducing all other hopes to a lower plane.” Having this one principal and motivating goal reminds me of the main idea in a movie called “City Slickers.” In this movie, some middle aged business men decide to get away for awhile and go on a cattle drive. During this time, they learn from the leader of the cattle drive that the most important thing in life is “one thing.” One of them (Billy Crystal) asked him what the “one thing” is. The leader said that everyone has to discover for themselves what that “one thing” is in their life. For St. Benedict that “one thing” was eternal life. He says that if we desire eternal life, “we must run and do what will profit us forever” (Prologue 44). Some of the ways Benedict says we can do that is “to faithfully observe God’s instructions, stay on the narrow road, keep the Gospel as our guide and patiently share in the sufferings of Christ” (Prologue). By doing these things we will be able to keep that “one thing—eternal life,” as our goal.



(Left to Right) Oblate Sandy Turner, Oblate Marcia Brown, and Oblate Mary Eileen Fritz obediently pause for a picture.

“This commitment of life and hope to God,” says Casey, “is at the heart of the ritual of monastic profession” (Casey, p. 140). The one making profession sings the *Suscipe* three times: “Receive me, O Lord, according to your word and I shall live. Do not fail me in my hope.” The newly professed doesn’t sing it alone, however. The entire community also sings it three times in response. By doing this, the community is offering their support to this new member. We are all on this journey together. We place our hope in God first of all. We need that “one thing”—eternal life—the hope of eventually being in heaven with God to keep us on this journey.

The next two verses, 42-43, tell us to realize that the good in us comes from God and the evil that we do is our own to acknowledge. During Benedict’s time there was a Semi-Pelagian heresy or controversy, claiming that each person had to attain eternal life by their own merits. Benedict insisted that God’s grace plays a primary role.



Inquirer Faye Bilskie and Oblate Theresa Bauer are getting acquainted.

We won't get to heaven by our own merits alone. Casey says: "I have to cooperate in the processes of purification and sanctification, but I am not their initiator or even their principal agent. They are God's work; my struggles are simply the result of having to overcome my inertia and reduce my resistance to what God is achieving" (Casey, p. 144). God is working with the good in us, but we are responsible for our own individual sinfulness. We need to recognize that both are present in us without concentrating primarily on one or the other. It is not all up to God and it is not all up to us. We need to be "watchful" that we keep all of this in balance.

In verses 44-47, Benedict doesn't want us to forget the last things and the day of judgment. He wants us to think daily of our own death. This idea of death, however, is not morbid and not to be dreaded. The sequence here is important. Benedict does not separate death and eternal life. Death is the passage to eternal life, the beginning of the everlasting encounter with Christ. This holding together of dying and new life, that is the paschal mystery, runs throughout the Rule. In chapter 49 we are told that while our life should be a perpetual Lent, we should also daily look forward to Easter with "joy and spiritual longing" (49, 7). Death is the gateway to life with Christ.

Read more of this presentation online.



Oblate Carole Swim visits with Sister Anita Louise Lowe. Carole traveled from West Virginia to attend the Oblate meeting.

Guidelines for Oblates Kordes Hospitality

All Oblates are offered free lodging at Kordes when they are here for Oblate meetings and events. Usually this would be one or two evenings.

Candidates and inquirers need to continue to pay for lodging. Meals are covered by the monastery. If desired, Oblates can leave a free will offering to help cover the cost of the facilities and meals.

When Oblates, candidates and inquirers are volunteering here at the monastery at other times, their lodging and meals are taken care of by the monastic community. Sister Mary Philip, volunteer coordinator, usually makes these arrangements.

When Oblates come for retreats or other programs offered through the Spirituality Ministry, they need to register through Anita Aders at Kordes and pay the program cost, which includes rooms, meals and presenter fees.

If you have any questions, please contact Sister Betty Drewes at (812) 367-1411, extension 2902.



Oblate Sharon Bittner and Sister Linda Bittner (first cousins) are catching up on family happenings.

Oblate Directory Update

I want to express my appreciation to all of you Oblates who were able to send pictures for the directory. We received pictures from 76 % of the Oblates. In my opinion, this was an encouraging response. Just so you know, we hope to incorporate additional pictures in the future.

I made several attempts to contact everyone listed in our files, either by email, phone or both. Throughout this whole process, I found that many of you have had address, phone number and email changes in recent years. Please let us know when you move because I want to make sure that you receive my mass emails and the Oblate newsletters in the future.

I do want to acknowledge Candidate Dianne LeDuc for all of her technological assistance and Joann Rubeck who will be doing the final steps of putting the directories together.

Actually, I enjoyed communicating more personally with many of you, those of you who live close to our Ferdinand monastery as well as those who live far away. Perhaps I will get to visit you sometime in the future, God willing. Thanks again. Sincerely, *Sister Brenda*

Oblates is published four times a year under the leadership of Oblate Director Sister Brenda Engleman.

Send comments to the Oblate Office

Monastery Immaculate Conception
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oblates@thedome.org
Sister Brenda: 812-367-1411, ext. 2827

Getting to Know the Oblates

By Rev. Pamela Gale Smith and Rev. Earl Menchhofer



Rev. Pamela Gale Smith and Rev. Earl Menchhofer

Rev. Pamela Gale Smith and Rev. Earl Menchhofer met at Bangor Theological Seminary in Bangor, Maine. They were married the summer after Earl graduated from Bangor Seminary. Earl's first ministry positions were serving churches in Kansas, Missouri, and Utah. Pamela returned to seminary in Kansas City, Missouri (Midwest Baptist Theological Seminary) while they were living in Utah. Upon Pamela's graduating from seminary Pamela and Earl served as co-pastors in churches in Washington state and Nebraska. They moved to Illinois in 1999 in order for Pamela to serve the church in Wyoming, Illinois, that her great grandfather founded. Earl served a nearby church in Brimfield, Illinois. Then they moved to southern Illinois and Pamela served a church in Hoyleton, Illinois, and Earl served a church in Carlyle, Illinois. Now, Pamela serves Zion United Church of Christ in Central City, Illinois, and Earl serves St. John's United Church of Christ in DuQuoin, Illinois. They reside in DuQuoin.

Pamela first got interested in Benedictine spirituality by reading *Heart Whispers – Benedictine Wisdom for Today* by Elizabeth J. Canham. Then in a conversation with a friend she discovered there were two Benedictine monasteries in southern Indiana within 3 hours driving distance of home. So, on one summer Saturday morning both Pamela and Earl visited and toured first the monastery in Ferdinand and then the one at St. Meinrad. We preferred the sisters at Ferdinand. Then Pamela inquired about a spiritual director and discovered that the sister who had given our tour, Sister Kathryn Huber, was a spiritual director. Pamela then had, and still does have a Spiritual Director, Sister Kathryn. The next phase of Benedictine spirituality came when we both inquired about being Oblates – it was something we wanted to do together. Sister Mary Ann Verkamp was our Companion. We really appreciated the love and sharing about Benedictine spirituality

that we received from Sister Mary Ann. During our candidacy for being Oblates, Earl was convinced to have a spiritual director. He asked Pamela's spiritual director, Sister Kathryn Huber, for a suggestion for a spiritual director and was given the name of Sister Karen Joseph. So, now we both have a spiritual director and we make monthly visits to the Dome for spiritual direction. We also visit the Dome for Saturday Oblate meetings.

The best part of our spiritual journey has been to discover the sisters at the Dome. Being Benedictine Oblates and students of Benedictine spirituality has assisted us in life challenges and has helped to keep us grounded as we were going through those life challenges. Without our journey with St. Benedict and learning from our experiences at the Dome we would not have made it through the challenging times of first, Pamela losing her job and thirteen months later she got a small church part time job on a regular basis and then Earl losing his job. It was the tenets of praying, study and our spiritual directors that helped us get through the trying times of job loss, to be able to come out on the other side being able to let go of anger, and hurt.

The reminder that Jesus said: "I am with you, I love you, and trust me" were the phrases, along with prayer and trusting in God, that helped us through the times we endured.

Since we began this journey of Benedictine spirituality we discovered that Benedict has been in our lives all along in life. Pamela lived near Atchison, Kansas, where her college played against St. Benedict College (which is in Atchison, Kansas). Plus, she lived just south of Clyde, Missouri, and toured Abbey Press and the monastery in Clyde. When we were in seminary together the craze at Bangor was music of the Monks of Weston Priory. One of their songs was sung at our wedding in the 80's. So, Benedict had been a part in our lives before we actually got involved in Benedictine spirituality in the here and now. The greatest blessing for us has been to find Ferdinand and become an Oblate of St. Benedict. We have been blessed greatly by the experience and grown a great deal from our time at the Dome.

In Memoriam:

Lucy Tuggle, Oblate Elaine Nolan's mother and Candidate Marcia Stroud's sister, died February 24, 2016.

Robert Zack, Jeanne Zack's father-in-law, died April 18, 2016.

Our thoughts and prayers are with you in this time of sorrow.

Monastery Moments and Oblate Offerings

Sunday, May 15, 2016

Prayer According to *The Holy Rule* will be held in St. Gertrude Hall from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (ET)
 Presenter: Sister Jane Will, OSB

Saturday, June 18, 2016



Celebration of Golden Jubilee will be held for Sister Joyce Marie Newton, Sister Jennifer Miller, and Sister Marilyn Schroering.

June 24 – July 1, 2016

Preached Retreat: Living Life as a Sacrament so that God May Be Glorified will be held in St. Gertrude Hall in the monastery. The retreat begins on Friday, June 24, at 7:30 p.m. (EDT) and ends on Friday, July 1, at 10:00 a.m.
 Presenter: Sister Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB, from Erie, Pennsylvania.

July 24 – 31, 2016

Private / Personal Retreat will be held in Kordes Hall. This retreat is for those who like the retreat atmosphere of quiet, meals, and prayer without a director. The retreat begins on Friday, July 24, at 7:30 p.m. (EDT) and ends Friday, July 31, at 10:00 a.m.

August 20, 2016

Founders' Day – opening of the 150th anniversary of Monastery Immaculate Conception.

August 28, 2016

Oblate Picnic with Sisters
 Details to follow.

September 9–16, 2016

Directed Retreat will be held in Kordes Hall. The retreat begins Friday, September 9, at 7:30 p.m. (EDT) and ends Friday, September 16, at 10:00 a.m. Participants will have the opportunity to meet six times with a spiritual director.

Saturday, September 17, 2016

Reception of Oblate Candidates will be held in St. Gertrude Hall at 1:00 p.m. followed by **The Spirituality of the Eucharist**. Presenter: Sister Anita Louise Lowe, OSB

Friday, October 7 – Sunday, October 9, 2016

Catholic Women Leadership Conference will be held at Monastery Immaculate Conception. For more information, go to the following website: www.womenofthechurch.org.

Sunday, October 16, 2016

Oblation will be held during Morning Prayer in the Monastery Church at 9:45 a.m., followed by Mass at 10:30 a.m. Dinner will be held in the Monastic Dining Room after Mass. Oblate meeting will be held in St. Gertrude Hall from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Chapter 58 of *The Holy Rule* "Procedure for Accepting New Members"
 Presenter: Sister Louise Laroche, OSB

You are invited to be in touch with the Sisters of St. Benedict in prayer. Use the following link:

mms://web-srv.thedome.org/churchcam

You can also download a liturgy schedule from the Oblate page:

thedome.org/oblates

Oblate Birthdays

May

6—Linda Doyle, 7—Barbara Poitra, 8—Mary Eileen Fritz, 10—Phyllis Claycamp, 17—Shirley France, 20—Sharon Kilpatrick, 21—Jean Siebelts, 23—Bridget Tierney, 27—Julie Beck, 28—Linda Begle, 31—Gail Trottier



June

1—Shannon Shoemaker, 6—Jeanne Zack, 7—James Werner, 8—Jim Goepfrich, 12—Karen Rexing, 15—Bernadette Heeke and Phyllis Jollie, 16—Rev. Earl Menchhofer, 20—Dayna Barlow and Joseph Manion, 21—Theresa Bauer and Anne Howerton, 24—Brenda De Motte

July

4—Elaine Baumgart, 7—Mary Lou Bassler and Mary Taber, 13—Charles Luebbehusen and Dianne LeDuc, 17—Mary Lamberg, 20—Ed Brown and Sandra Turner



Oblate Paulette Campana jots down some thoughts about a reading.

Oblate Service

Dear Oblates and Oblates-to-Be,

I want to thank you again for all the ways that you volunteer here in the monastery. I keep a list of all those who help throughout the year. I hesitate to publish the names because I am afraid that I will leave someone out. However, I am going to list the areas where you serve. Please let me know if I miss a place. *Sister Brenda*

Cleaning

- Body of Church – 2
- Church Gallery – 2
- Upper and Lower Colonnade – 4
- Third Floor Area – 3
- Front Outside Steps – 4

Kordes Center

- Hospitality – 2
- Flowers/Landscaping – 2
- Dishwashing – 2
- Cleaning – 2

Christkindlmarkt – 8

Christmas Eve Helpers in Church – 11

Library Assistant – 1

Switchboard – 2

Oblate Office (*several Oblates serve in many areas*)

- Newsletter Mailings – 8
- Filing Assistants – 2
- Cleaning – 2

Gift Shop

- Clerk Assistants – 3

Hildegard Visitation – 2

Community Health Care Assistant – 1

Oblate Advisory Board

- Members – 6
- Facilitator – 1

Oblate Photographer – 1

Oblate Musicians – 3

Live Streaming Committee – 4

Picnic Helpers – 10

Oblate Directory

- Phone Calling – 1
- Technology – 2
- Assembling, etc. – 1
- Mailing – 5

Fish Fry – 5

Set up / Take down for Meetings – 6

Conference at St. Meinrad (October) – 2

Women of the Church (October) – 5

OPPORTUNITIES FOR OBLATE SERVICE WORK



A CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

WOMEN *of the* CHURCH

Strength of the past. Hope for tomorrow.

“The Women of the Church Conference” for October 7-9 will be held at the monastery here in Ferdinand. Leaders are needed in the following areas:

___ parking ___ registration desk ___ monastery hospitality ___ event hall setup ___ technology

If you would be willing TO TAKE CHARGE of this kind of coordination, contact Sister Jeana Visel at: jvisel@thedome.org or 812-357-6721. For more information on the conference or to register as an attendee, see www.womenofthechurch.org. The conference is made possible by the partnership of the Sisters of St. Benedict and St. Meinrad Seminary & School of Theology. Both women and men are invited to attend.

Oblates

**Monastery Immaculate Conception
802 E. 10th Street • Ferdinand, Indiana 47532-9239**

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

*“ Listen readily to holy reading and devote yourself often
to prayer.*

—Rule of St. Benedict 4:55-56”

Share the Joy of Being an Oblate of St. Benedict

We encourage all Oblates and Oblate candidates to share their joy of being an Oblate with others. Talk about your Oblate experiences with your friends, relatives and members of your church. Be on the lookout for persons that might be fine Oblates. Give Oblate brochures to interested persons or invite them to attend an Oblate meeting. We welcome those who want to learn more about the Oblates to contact Sister Brenda Engleman. Contact information can be found on page 4 of this newsletter.

