

# The Oblate

Volume 51, Number 2

Newsletter of the Oblates of Saint John's Abbey

November 2007

THAT IN ALL THINGS  
GOD MAY  
BE GLORIFIED.

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*The Oblate* is a newsletter  
devoted to the interests  
of the Oblates of  
St. Benedict,

Saint John's Abbey,  
31802 County Road 159  
Collegeville, MN 56321

(320) 363-2018  
E-mail: [Oblates@osb.org](mailto:Oblates@osb.org)

Internet:  
[http://www.osb.org/  
oblate/index.html](http://www.osb.org/oblate/index.html)

Abbot John Klassen, OSB  
Fr. Michael Kwatera, OSB,  
Director of Oblates  
Bjorn Gustafson & Joel  
Rainville, Editors  
Fr. Allen Tarlton, OSB,  
Editor Emeritus  
Mary Fran Karanikolas,  
Layout Editor



## From the Oblate Director: A Timely Reflection

by Michael Kwatera, OSB

“We need window decorations!” the lad near me in the aisle shouted to his mother some distance away. “We need some of these,” he declared, pointing to a display of two-sided, variously sized “clings” for Halloween (jack-o-lanterns, ghosts, black cats). His enthusiasm reminded me of what I used to tell the students in my Saint John’s School of Theology course on the Liturgy of the Hours: marking time was an important part of my childhood rituals.

Perhaps my mother had something to do with this. She must have been the prime mover in enabling (encouraging?) me to fill our windows with Halloween cutouts well in advance of October 31 and sprayed-on stencil designs for Christmas. It didn’t matter that we rented the second floor of a duplex and no one could see them very well from the street.

I used to get C’s in art in grade school (my drawings never or rarely made it onto the corkboard that ran around the classroom); maybe that’s why I eagerly bought seasonal cutouts at a stationery store several blocks from my house and then Scotch-taped them onto the windows. Through this activity I came to understand that marking time in human life is important. Every day is not the same as every other day, and some days need a string of days to prepare for them. Even to this day I wonder how far in advance of October 31 I should put up the Halloween decorations; when the (other) kids in the area start doing it, so do I. Such marking of time is a precious lesson that I thank my mother for teaching me.

As we mark the liturgical feasts and seasons, they mark us more deeply with the imprint of the paschal mystery. This is why I like Sr. Delores Dufner, O.S.B.’s hymn text, “In the Cycle of the Seasons,” so much, a text that was written for the 1993 Monastic Liturgy Forum conference on the liturgical year and later published in her collection, *Sing a New Church* (Oregon Catholic Press, 1994).

Only someone who loves and lives the liturgical feasts and seasons could write such poetry that expresses their richness. She knows that “When *we* see the star of Christmas / Far beyond our galaxy, / *We* are called to foreign places, / Promised land of liberty” (emphasis mine). And heaven knows that we need to renounce daily whatever would keep us captive. I especially like the way her words about Advent sneak up on us at the end of the final verse, just as this season of surprises seems to do in real life and time (are we ever really ready for it?). This is one hymn that I want sung at my funeral—which I prefer not to have celebrated anytime soon.

For many people today, over four decades after the Second Vatican Council, the liturgical year remains a rather abstruse system, something whose intricacies are left to professionals. Indeed, some Christian traditions seem quite content with a very lean liturgical calendar. During my century of liturgical studies at the University of Notre Dame, curiosity led me to listen to the Seventh Day Adventist worship services that were broadcast by the public radio station at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. These worshippers celebrated Christmas but without any preparation, at least in their weekly worship. Can you imagine celebrating the solemnity of Christmas without the season of Advent? And yet, a liturgical scholar has observed that the surprising thing is not that the liturgical year evolved so slowly, but that it evolved at all. For us Christians, every day is a *feria*, a feast, because “all time belongs to [Jesus Christ] and all the ages.” Still, because of the Church’s *anamnesis* of the paschal mystery, not all days are the same. Great festivals need a period of time to whet our appetite for the coming feast, and they need a period of time to help us digest its nourishment. May God’s blessing be yours as we prepare to celebrate the incarnational cycle of the Church’s year.

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## Announcements

### Deceased

Oblate Lucille Weatherhead + 2 June 2007  
Brother Linus Ascheman, OSB+12 July 2007  
Father Angelo Zankl, OSB +12 July 2007  
Suzanne De Hauwere, +19 September 2007  
*mother of Oblate Lucie Johnson*

### New Oblate Candidates

Laura Hanson 27 July 2006  
Bob Lesniewski 8 May 2007  
David Wallace 16 June 2007  
Teresa Marie Danielson 23 June 2007  
William Griffiths 25 July 2007  
Maryellen Griffiths 25 July 2007  
Stephen Kosowski 3 August 2007  
Christine Kosowski 3 August 2007  
Eric Simon 4 August 2007  
Mark Gagliardo 27 October 2007

### Final Oblation

Barry F Joseph Cox 23 June 2007  
Darryl Thomas Hensel 14 July 2007  
Don Marlette 24 August 2007



## LIFE CYCLES

Scott Wright, ObISB

We are born out of the stillness of spring,  
quiet surprises out of the dead earth

We grow and flourish during the early days of summer,  
that crazy time of profligate growth  
and sudden, passionate storms

By late summer, like the grass and other vegetation,  
we have grown dusty and yellow,  
and the waxy freshness of youth has departed  
...but crickets sing in the nights

Autumn catches us up, stuns us,  
with its blue skies and its brilliance,  
calling us to reflection

And in November we die,  
in the time of bare, leafless trees, and silent earth,  
awaiting again the eternal mystery of rebirth.

### ***BE SURE TO ATTEND—***

## **S** TABILITY OF HEART

OBLATE ADVENT DAY OF REFLECTION  
SAINT JOHN'S ABBEY  
9 DECEMBER, 2007

What does it mean for an oblate to take a vow of stability? It does not necessarily mean “staying put.” It might be more aptly described by a metaphor like “staying grounded” in the values and instruction of the Rule of Benedict. Through reflection on our experience and exploration of some key texts, we will consider this fundamental part of Benedictine spirituality and what it means in the lives of those of us who do not live within the walls of a monastery. Join us for this day of reflection in this busy holiday season, to refresh and recommit to stability of heart in the new year.

Susan Sink is a poet and a writer and editor at Liturgical Press. She is the author of *The Way of All the Earth*, a book of poetry, and *The Art of The Saint John's Bible*.

Mass is at 10:30 AM in the Abbey Church. Lunch and conference will follow. Donation is \$20. To register contact the Oblate Office:(320) 363-2018; email: [oblates@osb.org](mailto:oblates@osb.org)

# Benedictines Across North America Meet, Discover Insights

*Br. Benet Tvedten, OSB, Oblate Director at Blue Cloud Abbey in South Dakota, has graciously permitted the editors of The Oblate to reprint his article on the recent Oblate Directors' Biennial Meeting at St Martin's Abbey in Lacey, Washington. Fr. Greg Miller, OSB, and Fr. Allen Tarlton, OSB, also attended this meeting.*

Dear Oblates,

I have returned from the biennial meeting of the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors. This year it was hosted by St. Martin's Abbey and St. Placid's Priory, both in Lacey, Washington. A little over a hundred directors and oblates attended. The theme of the conference was "The Charism of Benedictine Leadership." The speakers were Abbot Peter Eberle, former Abbot of Mt. Angel Abbey, Oregon, and now Abbot President of the Swiss-American Congregation, and Sister Jacquelyn Ernster, former Prioress of Sacred Heart Monastery, Yankton. After meeting so many oblates from all over the country and being at the tables with them during the small group discussions, I came away deeply impressed by these oblates. They have a good knowledge of Benedictine spirituality and are sincerely committed to it. And as is the case most everywhere else, not all of these oblates are Roman Catholic. The conference theme of leadership was clearly manifested by those oblates who were present bearing the title "Associate Oblate Director."

I used to think that being our Oblate Director was all up to me. A couple confreres once offered to give the monthly conference or to speak at the retreat. When I asked them to do so, neither one was available—thereby proving that it was indeed all up to me. The Sioux Falls oblates, however, have proven that they can get along without me. Leadership emerged from them when it became impossible for me to be at every monthly meeting. I'm pleased by what they do when I'm not present. They have chosen books to read as a basis for discussion at the meetings. Of course I'm especially pleased that the first book they chose was *How to Be a Monastic and Not Leave Your Day Job*. (Several of the Sioux Falls oblates bought it at Barnes and Noble. One oblate tried in vain to purchase it at the Catholic religious goods store. She was finally able to find it at the Christian bookshop.) The present book under discussion is Norvene Vest's *Preferring Christ: A Devotional Commentary & Workbook on the Rule of St. Benedict*.

Sister Antoinette Purcell, the President of NAABOD (Nay-bod) and the moderator of the sessions saw to it that we didn't always sit with the same people. She was able to do that in her own community last year when I when I gave a retreat to the oblates of Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, Indiana. Oblates are encouraged to have stability in their communities but not necessarily stability at the same tables. Although there was no seating arrangement in the St. Martin University dining room where we had all our meals, the mingling at different tables following the conferences made it possible to meet even more people and to exchange ideas with them.

Although we had come from different parts of the country and from different religious backgrounds and even from conflicts within our particular denominations, we were there as a community of Benedictines. Regardless of our differences, we were all bound together by The Rule of St. Benedict and Benedictine spirituality. We were related.

Oblates, of course, have stability in their own communities. But the Benedictine family is larger than the one in which we have made vows or oblation. Gatherings such as the NAABOD remind us that we have relationships beyond our own monasteries.

One of the things I learned at the Lacey meeting is that several monasteries have an Oblate Council. St. Meinrad Archabbey is one of those and the current issue of its *Benedictine Oblate* publishes the minutes of a recent council meeting. There is also an Oblate Finance Council which makes a report to the General Council. St. Meinrad's is a much larger community than ours. And it has far more oblates than we have. An interesting fact provided in the council minutes is that 110 oblates are under the age of 45 and 900 are over that age. (When I went off to a Blue Cloud oblate's 80th birthday party a couple months ago, someone here remarked that I should tell her that she is now the average age of our community's oblates.) Father Meinrad, the Oblate Director at St. Meinrad Archabbey, is assisted by four monks and a secretary. This community has a fulltime dedication to its oblates.

Both monastics and oblates at the NAABOD meeting mentioned the practice of mentoring. I suspect this is more common in women's communities. I can't imagine asking my confreres to be mentors for our oblates. A mentor forms a guiding relationship with an oblate. I suppose this is akin to being an A.A. sponsor. A number of monasteries, I've learned, have formation classes in the year following investiture and up to the time of oblation. Ongoing oblate formation is also in effect in some monasteries. I have reason to come away from these meetings realizing how much is being done in other monasteries for the Oblate Program and how much Oblate creativity is evident each time the directors and Oblates get together.

## Ora et Labora

*"As an oblate, doing volunteer work at Saint John's Abbey simply follows St. Benedict's principle of "ora et labora" and brings it into real time. Working and praying with the monks throughout their normal day provides a feeling of closeness to the community that we as oblates can not experience in our temporal lives. The rewards are many."*

*Ford Royer, Oblate of Saint John's Abbey*

The Monk/Oblate Matching Program has continued this year with several on-going activities. The program, which is coordinated by oblate Nan Gianoli and Fr. Michael Kwatera, Oblate Director, brings together the needs of monks or others on the Saint John's campus, with available time and talent of oblates.

The program offers great opportunities for oblates to become more personally acquainted with individual monks, and also to learn more about the operations of various departments of the monastery and school.

Some examples of the work that oblates have done around the abbey include: Ford Royer, Nan Gianoli, and John Pieper assisting with a mass mailing at the Liturgical Press; Angie Del Greco and Nan providing rides for visiting priests and monks to and from the airport;



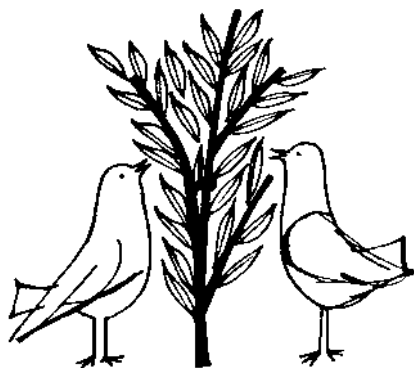
Oblates Nan Gianoli and Maria Christina Perez

Maria Christina Perez and Nan working at the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library; and Ford spending several days assembling some of the furniture for the new Abbey Guesthouse, in the Abbey Woodworking Shop.

Opportunities that are currently available include additional work at the Manuscript Library, various duties at the School of Theology, and assistance at the reception desk at the Abbey Guesthouse. Fall clean-up in the vegetable garden and around other areas of campus are also needed.

If you are interested in volunteering or for more information about this program, please contact Nan Gianoli at [ngianoli@pressenter.com](mailto:ngianoli@pressenter.com) or at 651-734-1585.

# “That in All Things...”



## Benedict and Relationships

by Peggy Stokman, OblSB

Hands down, John and I choose St. Benedict as the best marriage counselor in our 48 years of married life. His wisdom, *The Rule of Benedict*, is practical and affordable. Humility is the capstone for us.

It takes humility to “Listen ...with the ear of your heart” (Rule-Prologue). Our pattern had been to listen with the head, through our egos, often polarized by the opposites in us that once were attractions. The heart helps us listen to the person behind his or her words and actions. Recently I was short with John. “You don’t seem yourself, Peggy. What’s going on?” A problematic computer and a botched sewing project had side-tracked my day. He responded by listening with his heart, rather than reacting from his head. Responding builds up a relationship. Reacting breaks it down.

It takes humility to hear the voice of God in your partner, to honor the Spirit poured out equally on men and women, introverts and extraverts, Irish and Germans (Rule-3<sup>rd</sup> step of humility). When we were looking for a house in Minnesota, John chose one on Country Club Drive because both he and God are golfers. Two showings later, we found a better house, God’s choice. We wait to make decisions until we are united in plan and purpose.

It takes humility to walk in the light with each other (Rule-5<sup>th</sup> step of humility). Self-revelation is both a security and a necessity for our growth as a couple. When we are real with ourselves and each other, we experience acceptance and forgiveness.

Benedict’s office hours are unlimited. Just open the Rule and read it through the lens of relationships.

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## The Oblate: Our Sense of Place

Beginning with this issue, *The Oblate* will be issued quarterly. It also has a new editorial team: Fr. Allen Tarlton has graciously offered to serve as the editor emeritus and continues to offer his wisdom and guidance to Bjorn Gustafson and Joel Rainville, now serving as co-editors and Mary Fran Karanikolas as layout editor. In order to better foster a sense of community, the editors would like readers to provide feedback and material submissions.

Our next issue will be coming out in early February, as Lent begins. Some seasonal topics to consider if you feel inclined to share in the preparation of this next issue might be: a) Ash Wednesday, our *momento mori*; b) Conversion, *metanoia*, *conversatio morum* c) “The Ladder of Humility” in The Rule—It’s not just for Lent! A short article on any of these topics might be perfect for our regular column, “That in All Things...” where an oblate describes how he/she applies one aspect of the rule to daily life. Other recurring features might include poetry, stories of Benedictine relationships, or your reviews of books, films, or anything else on Benedictine themes that may have inspired you, and which you deem worthy of sharing with our community. The editors of *The Oblate* may be reached at [sjaoblates@gmail.com](mailto:sjaoblates@gmail.com).

## ***It's not cheesy, it's gouda!***

Film Review: "The Cheese Nun"  
by Bjorn Gustafson, ObISB

If you love cheese, you will love this one-hour documentary, a 2002 production of PBS, Paris American Public Television and distributed by Connecticut Public Television. I recently stumbled across it on the internet movie rental house, Netflix, though I'm sure it may be found anywhere PBS movies can be obtained. What a joyful stumble it turned out to be!

This self-described “homage to fromage” documents the journey of Sr. Noella Marcellino, O.S.B, nun and cheese microbiologist. A former hippie turned Benedictine, she has devoted her life to the art and science of cheese-making. Her Benedictine monastery in Bethlehem, Connecticut, encouraged her to study microbiology to help understand the process of making cheese, one of many activities that takes place at their rural monastery. Sr. Noella needed to carve out her own education track in many ways as there is relatively little research of microbes in the field of cheese-making—a craft founded on tradition and skill with little emphasis on the science behind the process. After taking a degree in microbiology, she was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to study the artesian cheese process in France for one year. Her extensive knowledge of cheese microbiology has been sought out by cheese-makers, producers, and gourmards across the United States.

Besides being an interesting film about cheese (which I learned is the most complex taste in the gastronomic world), this film also communicates aspects of the Benedictine life. Sr. Noella talks about the importance of place in the cheese process. There are certain cheeses that can only be made in a certain area or cave because of the particular microbiological conditions present in that singular location. Another important aspect

is stability—faithfulness to the tradition of cheese-making as a time-honored art, but painstaking manual labor. Also highlighted is the connection between work and prayer, a mindful and dedicated approach to one's craft in a reverent, thoughtful way. The Rule of St. Benedict calls the individual out to gain a new and richer perspective, and Sr. Noella certainly describes her journey of discovery in such a way. In the process from dairy to cellar, lab to farm, the cheese-maker becomes a partaker in God's process of creation and is in turn humbled by working so intimately with cows and goats, and little creatures so small they are invisible to the naked eye.

An image that has stayed with me from this remarkable film is of a cheese-producing monastery in France. The caves in which the cheeses grow and age is directly underneath the oratory where the monks chant their psalms and prayers. One of the monks says that the singing betters their cheeses, and what a lovely idea this is, that what will be ingested has been permeated by the Word of God, the human voice and the loving craft of men and women in an ancient process. In his entry on cheese in his book *On Food and Cooking*, Harold McGee says:

“Cheese is one of the great achievements of humankind. Not any cheese in particular, but cheese in its astonishing multiplicity, created anew every day in the dairies of the world. Cheese began as a simple way of concentrating and preserving the bounty of the milking season. Then the attentiveness and ingenuity of its makers slowly transformed it into something more than mere physical nourishment: into an intense, concentrated expression of pastures and animals, of microbes and time.”

Such a transformative process of ordinary things into a beautiful and delicious offering is perhaps a fitting metaphor for conversion of life. You decide when you view “The Cheese Nun,” a “celebration of the science, craft and humanity of cheese-making.”

**OBLATE RETREAT 11-15 JULY 2008**

***Saint John's Abbey***

Dec 9 Advent Day of Recollection, Quad 264  
 Jan 20 Quad 120  
 Feb 17 Quad 120  
 Mar 2 Lenten Day of Recollection,  
 Alumni Lounge  
 Apr 20 Quad 120  
 May 18 Quad 120  
 Contact: Fr. Michael Kwatera, OSB  
 (320)363-2018

***Minneapolis***

Nov 25  
 Dec 9-Abbey, Advent Day of Recollection  
 Jan 13  
 Feb 3  
 Mar 2-Abbey, Lenten Day of Recollection  
 Apr 6  
 May 4  
 St. Joan of Arc Church  
 4537 3rd Ave S  
 Minneapolis, MN 55419  
 Contact: Ron Joki, OblSB  
 (952)544-4525

***Red River Valley***

2<sup>nd</sup> Sat of month  
 9:30- 11:00am  
 Church of the Holy Spirit,  
 Conference Rm  
 1420 7<sup>th</sup> St N (N. Entrance)  
 Fargo, ND  
 Contact: Barry Cox, OblSB  
 (701)235-3955

***Faribault Oblates***

1<sup>st</sup> Sat of Month  
 7-8:30am at the Three Links  
 Care Center Chapel in Northfield  
 Other Saturdays  
 7:00am at Bernie's Restaurant  
 in Downtown Faribault  
 Contact: Milo Larson, OblSB  
 (507)332-8350

**The Oblate**

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 Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321

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NON-PROFIT ORG  
 U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
 PERMIT #1  
 COLLEGEVILLE, MN 56321