

**OBLATE  
FORMATION  
BOOKLET**

for Oblates of Saint Benedict  
affiliated with  
Saint Vincent Archabbey

1995, revised in 2002

*Nihil Obstat:*

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FOREWORD BY ARCHABBOT DOUGLAS R. NOWICKI, O.S.B.

May the peace of Christ abound with all Oblates and with all who seek God in the way of St. Benedict!

The Rule of St. Benedict, a masterpiece of practical Christian wisdom that has guided the lives of Benedictine monks for nearly 1500 years, has also served to influence the lives of many lay people in the way of Christ for most of its long history. The urgent call to “prefer nothing to Christ” even in the most ordinary elements of daily routine offers a vigorous challenge to monks and Oblates alike to grow continually in the love of Christ in every situation and, perhaps especially, in every encounter with other persons. We Benedictine monks feel great encouragement that so many of our sisters and brothers in Christ have discerned the call to accept this challenge by making promises as Oblates of St. Benedict.

At the same time, we realize that documents as ancient as the Rule, as well as the Gospel teachings on which it is based, require persistent study and reflection if the treasure buried within them is to be retrieved, enjoyed, and lived out. Furthermore, just as we monks more and more perceive the need for ongoing formation in Gospel values and in the wisdom of St. Benedict, so must our fellow pilgrims outside the monastery be continually renewed in those Christian values, which are so often at odds with the self-centered impulses of today’s world. We, therefore, are glad to offer you this set of reflections and guidelines based on the Rule of St. Benedict and contemporary interpretations of the Rule to help you to be more deeply formed in the way of Christ as spelled out by St. Benedict.

Know that our prayers are with you as you struggle with us to let Christ penetrate your hearts and minds and to make Christ known to the world around you. Through the intercession of St. Benedict, may God grant all Oblates and others who follow Christ with St. Benedict as their guide the grace to “run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love” (Rule Prologue:49).

Archabbot Douglas R. Nowicki, O.S.B.



## PREFACE

The Rule of St. Benedict stipulates that the abbot of the monastery should have “‘a treasury of knowledge from which he can bring out what is new and what is old’ (Mt 13:52)” (RB 64:9) for the spiritual profit of his monks. As dedicated Christians who share in the spiritual riches of a monastery, Oblates, too, should be able to profit from wisdom that is a prudent blend of both old and new insights; this principle implies that the rich tradition of Benedictine spirituality as well as challenging, contemporary interpretations of that tradition should be made available to Oblates affiliated with St. Vincent Archabbey.

In recent years many Oblates have expressed a desire to have some sort of new “manual” similar to the 1962 Manual for Benedictine Oblates (hereafter referred to as MBO) that would include concrete norms, practices, and expectations for Oblates. This booklet is a small attempt to incorporate what is best in MBO, which is no longer in print and has become outdated in many respects, and to complement it with some of the many recent expressions of Benedictine values that speak to the daily lives of today’s lay Christians. It was written at the request of Archabbot Douglas Nowicki, O.S.B., and with his encouragement. It is not meant to be a new “manual”; rather, it is expected that the Oblate will supplement this booklet with a choice of prayer book for the Divine Office (see options listed in the appendix) and with three pamphlets printed at the Archabbey: “An Introduction for Inquirers and Oblate Novices,” “The Life and Rule of Saint Benedict for Oblates Affiliated with Saint Vincent Archabbey,” and “Ceremonies for Oblates Affiliated with Saint Vincent Archabbey.” This booklet also attempts to introduce new, meaningful requirements for those seeking novice Oblation or full Oblation (see II below) in order to help those attracted to the way of St. Benedict to understand and experience more profoundly their commitment to the Gospel of Christ and the Rule of St. Benedict. These norms became effective in January of 1996 and are not retroactive.

The monks of St. Vincent Archabbey hope and pray that this booklet may become a useful contribution to each Oblate’s reservoir of spiritual riches. May all Oblates, Oblate novices, and other friends of St. Benedict welcome the challenge to receive God’s radiant light, rooted in the wisdom of Christ’s Cross, so that more and

more of God's children may live this mystery of God's love and anticipate with greater hope "what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor 2:9).

Listed below are the sources to which the text of this booklet most often refers and from which it derives its ideas, along with abbreviations that will be used for convenience:

RB - RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in English, ed. by Timothy Fry, O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982)

RB+ - RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes, ed. by Timothy Fry, O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981)

AP - The Rule of St. Benedict, trans. by Abbot David Parry, O.S.B. (Leominster, Herefordshire, England: Fowler Wright Books, 1990)

BW - Pratt, Lonni Collins, and Father Daniel Homan, O.S.B., Benedict's Way: An Ancient Monk's Insights for a Balanced Life (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2000)

CE - "Ceremonies for Oblates of St. Benedict" (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press)

GU - "Guidelines for Oblates of St. Benedict," a pamphlet compiled by the Directors of Oblates of North America, 1972

HG - Parry, O.S.B., Abbot David, Households of God: The Rule of St. Benedict with Explanations for Monks and Lay-people Today (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980)

LD - The Rule of Saint Benedict, Latin & English, trans. by Luke Dysinger, O.S.B. (Trabuco Canyon, CA: Source Books, 1997)

LMS - Dwight Longenecker, Listen, My Son: St. Benedict for Fathers (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999)

MBO - Manual for Benedictine Oblates, 4th edition, ed. by the Monks of St. Vincent Archabbey (Latrobe, PA: Saint Vincent Archabbey Press, 1962)

PC - Vest, Norvene, Preferring Christ: A Devotional Commentary and Workbook on the Rule of St. Benedict (Trabuco Canyon, CA: Source Books CA, 1990)

RC - Renew & Create: A Statement on the American-Cassinense Benedictine Monastic Life, issued by the Thirty-Sixth General Chapter, Second Session, June 1969

SEL - Taylor, Brian C., Spirituality for Everyday Living: An Adaptation of the Rule of St. Benedict (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989)

SG - de Waal, Esther, Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1984)

SK - Tvedten, Benet, O.S.B., A Share in the Kingdom: A Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict for Oblates (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989)

TU - Kardong, Terrence, O.S.B., Together Unto Life Everlasting: An Introduction to the Rule of St. Benedict (Richardton, ND: Assumption Abbey Press, 1984)



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## I. GENERAL STATEMENT CONCERNING BENEDICTINE LIFE AND OBLATE LIFE

### A. Why People Become Oblates

Why do some Christians wish to become Oblates of St. Benedict? They are attracted to the Oblate Program because they are seeking God in Jesus Christ and have begun to find Him through their acquaintance with a Benedictine community and through the Christian values manifested by the community and its Oblates. Such people have recognized that those Benedictine values, which are ultimately values of the Gospel, have great significance in their own daily lives and in their own quest for God amidst the ordinary circumstances of their work, prayer, and relationships. They have a humble awareness of their own weaknesses and yet know that the God of love calls them to holiness in an ongoing struggle to overcome their defects. They recognize Christ's presence in the Benedictine community and in the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict, both of which they have come to regard as gifts of God meant to nurture their spiritual lives. They also realize that the grace of God can work in their lives, lived outside the monastery, to make them channels of prayerful support and encouragement to the monastic community. In all these ways they come to discover that God is calling them to be Oblates so that they may find Him more and more in all people, things, and events, until they themselves are transformed by Christ to the point at which they can say, along with St. Paul, "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

In this modern age Oblation may have particular value because of the decline of family life and community life in our culture, even among Christians. In the preface to MBO, Archabbot Denis Strittmatter, O.S.B., quoted Archabbot Leander Schnerr, O.S.B., from the 1898 edition of the Manual in stating:

In our day, no less, does the growth of infidelity threaten the world with ruin. The bonds of Christian union are loosening everywhere; in the family as well as in public life their place is being largely taken by a code of unrestraint and license.

May St. Benedict, therefore, now as then, with his Order come to the rescue of society, and through the spreading Institute of Secular Oblates effect that families again return to the Christian principles of faith and obedience. Then may we justly hope that society and the state will follow in their wake.

MBO also states (pp. 3-4):

The need which the modern world has of these Benedictine qualities gives the monk a unique role in this day. The Benedictine Order differs from modern congregations in that it has no specific devotion or apostolic work that modifies and determines its type of spirituality. It is simply the leading of the Christian life to the fullest.

This statement can aptly be applied to Oblates just as well as to monks.

## B. The Meaning of Oblate Life

“Oblate life” may be described as a Christian’s affiliation with a Benedictine religious community to enrich and reshape his or her life by the Gospel of Christ as interpreted by the Rule of St. Benedict. Oblates neither live in a religious community nor take religious vows. Instead they seek God by striving to become holy in their chosen way of life as married people, single celibates, or secular clergy. Through their commitment to Benedictine values, Oblates bring the light of Christ into the world and, by their witness to Gospel values, encourage humanity to respond to God’s ongoing call of love. Especially in this age of secularization and widespread loss of religious values in Western culture, Oblates can provide a powerful witness to the real possibility of intensive Christian life, even amidst the environment of a largely non-Christian society. Through its pervasive characteristic of encouraging extraordinary holiness in the lives of ordinary, fallible people living among other ordinary, fallible people, whether they be monks or lay people, the Rule provides a significant foundation for such a witness. It is by their good zeal, which brings forth mutual respect, patience with others’ weaknesses, and obedience to others out of love of Christ, that such people make room for the grace of God and call upon Him to “bring us all together to everlasting life” (RB 72:12). This vision of mutual

support for the sake of spiritual growth is embodied particularly in Chapter 72 of the Rule.

At St. Vincent Archabbey the Oblate movement was officially begun by Abbot Boniface Wimmer in 1865. In more recent years Oblates have been drawn from those seeking personal renewal through the Retreat Program and those in Benedictine parishes seeking a share in the spirituality of the Benedictines who staff their parishes. A growing number of individuals in locations throughout the United States have also sought Oblate affiliation with the Archabbey out of a deep thirst for spiritual renewal, according to the varied paths by which God has led them to contact with St. Vincent and its monks and Oblates.

The Oblate Program of St. Vincent Archabbey welcomes all Christian men and women who are truly seeking God and who have discerned a desire for affiliation with the Archabbey to contact the Director of Oblates about novice Oblation, as specified in II. below. The period of a year or more as an Oblate novice gives the person time to become acquainted with the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict and to let its values have a transforming effect on his or her Christian life. At the end of this period, if the Oblate novice discerns an ongoing call to follow the Benedictine way, he or she may apply for Oblation. It is the Act of Oblation that formally makes one an Oblate. The Oblate then continues to share in the prayers and works of the monastic community, to grow in communion with other Oblates, and to live out the promise of ongoing conversion in Christ, with an ever more persistent turning to Christ in the decisions of one's daily life. This growth in Christ, achieved by God's grace, comes about as monks and Oblates, who belong to the extended family of the Archabbey, offer mutual encouragement to one another to seek God by embracing the values proclaimed in the Rule of St. Benedict.

### C. Oblates as "Monasticism's Gift to the World"

(edited from a reflection by Fr. Bede Classick, O.S.B., Director of Oblates at St. Paul's Abbey, Newton, New Jersey)

Oblates are monasticism's gift to the world. I hope that through this statement all Oblates will come to appreciate who they are. The Oblates are indeed a gift and have much to give to the world, a world which is seeking and searching for its ultimate salvation. The Oblate stands between monasticism and the world as a mediator, linking the two, drawing them together, bringing to the world the values which monasticism holds up as important for the Christian way of life.

Monasticism has done much throughout history to shape life in the world, but monasticism has not influenced the world simply on its own. It has been able to shape Christian life in the world in its day-to-day activities only because those who live in the world have sought to carry out its program of spiritual growth and commitment to Christ.

Oblates especially have understood the close relationship between monastic life as envisioned by St. Benedict and the ordinary Christian life in the world. Affiliating themselves with monastery and convent, they provide a vital link with the world as they reach out to bring hope and inspiration to those struggling to find Christ in the midst of a sinful world.

It is through the Oblates that monasticism opens its heart to the world, and the gift that monasticism offers through Oblates is hospitality, a "cosmic hospitality," a reaching out to embrace the whole universe. It is only in this way that the brokenness of our human lives and of our world can be healed. Oblates will reach out into all areas of life to bring forgiveness and healing, peace and consolation, springing from their affiliation with the monks. As Oblates listen to those in need in order to help them, they will realize that peace and justice are not just causes for which we wave banners but forms of Gospel proclamation. Such is the work of redemption. Hospitality finds its meaning in the Cross. In stretching out His arms on the Cross, Christ opened Himself to the world. He excluded no one but forgave even His enemies. He embraced all so as to redeem all.

The Oblate of today must be ready to walk in the steps of Jesus Christ. The Oblate must be ready to embrace the world in order to forgive and heal and reconcile. Such a welcoming gesture will give others the courage to turn to Christ. Through



the hospitality of the Oblate, the monastic values of prayer, humility, obedience, peace, patience, charity, and reverence will be brought to bear on the world and guide it in the way of salvation.





## II. GUIDELINES FOR FORMATION OF OBLATE NOVICES AND ONGOING FORMATION OF OBLATES

### A. Entering the Oblate Program

Any Christian seeking to enter the Oblate Program should inquire of the Director of Oblates at St. Vincent Archabbey or of one of the Benedictine monks who serve as local moderators at St. Marys, PA; State College, PA; Johnstown, PA; Annville, PA; Pittsburgh, PA; Baltimore, MD; and Virginia Beach, VA. One may also inquire of the diocesan priests who serve as moderators in Williamsport, PA, and the Niagara Area, Ontario, Canada, or of the local lay leaders in any of the other areas. If the person continues to discern God's call through an attraction to the Benedictine way of life, he or she may be invested as an Oblate novice in a simple ceremony by the Director of Oblates (who is actually the representative of the Archabbot), the local moderator, or some other Benedictine monk of St. Vincent delegated for the occasion. Those who are unable to travel to a location where a Benedictine monk can invest them may obtain permission from the Director of Oblates to be received by a priest in their home parish. The new Oblate novice receives a blue investiture card, and a duplicate card is kept in a file in the Oblate Office. Oblate novices are encouraged to make a retreat at the Archabbey during their year of intensive reflection and to share the Divine Office with the monks whenever possible. Thus affiliation with the Archabbey can deepen into a genuine participation in the monastic community's own spirituality. After a year or more of study of the Rule and of efforts to live according to Benedictine values, the Oblate novice may, according to God's call, seek to make a lifelong commitment as a full Oblate of St. Benedict. Although one's Oblation may be rescinded by decision of the Oblate (since such a commitment is not binding under pain of sin), the promise to live as an Oblate should nevertheless be taken seriously in context of one's relationship with God, the Church, one's community of affiliation, and one's fellow Oblates. For special reasons (such as the occasion of an infrequent visit to the Archabbey), the Act of Oblation may be made up to one month short of a full year after novice Oblation, with the permission of the Director of Oblates. At the ceremony of Oblation the new Oblate

signs a certificate with the words of the Act of Oblation; a copy is kept by the Oblate, and another copy is deposited in the Archives of the Archabbey.

### B. Who Is Called to Be an Oblate of St. Benedict ?

Being invested as an Oblate novice or making full Oblation is not a matter of entering a religious order. Deciding whether to seek novice Oblation or Oblation would, therefore, not ordinarily require the long, ponderous discernment that a Christian might undergo to make a long-range vocational decision to enter a religious community or take religious vows. However, Oblation does involve a serious and normally lifelong commitment; so the decision should be made with some careful discernment. MBO states, “The Act of Oblation is not a vow and thus does not carry with it the binding force of monastic profession, nor does it bind under sin. Its obligation need not be lifelong; it can be terminated at any moment by the monastery or the Oblate. On the other hand, it should not be looked upon as of no consequence, since it involves the giving of oneself to God in a solemn way” (pp. 4-5). As in all matters of Christian decision, one should basically be asking, “Does God want me to do this?” In this specific case one should ask, “Does God want me to become an Oblate (novice)?” In other words, “will becoming an Oblate (novice) draw me closer to Christ and the Church, given my state in life and other responsibilities?” A genuine desire to grow in holiness and a sense of gratitude for the gift of contact with the Rule and/or Benedictines can generally be interpreted as a sign of God’s call.

St. Benedict gives us some helpful criteria to make this decision. He says that a candidate for monastic vows should “truly seek God” and “show eagerness for the Work of God, for obedience and for trials” (RB 58:7). We can explore these four criteria in terms of the commitment of every Christian:

1. truly seeking God: All Christians should seek God above all else and seek to grow in discipleship of Jesus Christ. Oblates should seek to intensify their daily commitment of faith to making their journey of life in Christ and with Christ.
2. being eager for the Work of God: Oblates should have a desire to enter more fully into community prayer and, in particular, the “Divine Office” as prayed by

the monastic community. Normally, this desire will be expressed by a frequent praying of the Office from a breviary of the Oblate's choice.

3. being eager for obedience: Listening for God's word in every person and every situation is a fundamental goal and an ongoing task of the monk. Oblates should long for growth in attentiveness to God's word and in loving, faith-filled response to God's word, whether spoken through Scripture and liturgy or through the ordinary people and experiences encountered in daily life.
4. being eager for trials: "Becoming obedient to death" in imitation of Christ can be a heavy yoke indeed, and yet it is a yoke that becomes light when shared with Christ. Psychologically healthy people do not welcome trials for the sake of hardship itself; however, monks and Oblates come to realize that God can speak to us and transform us in a special way through trials. A patient, faith-filled response to trials can lead the Christian to deeper identification with Christ and greater compassion for others in their suffering.

#### A Note on "Family Oblation"

A whole family which includes children under 14 years of age may be received, according to the usual ceremonies, as an "Oblate (novice) family." Such a practice can encourage all the members to live out Benedictine values as a family. In such a case the children, upon the completion of their 14th birthdays, can decide on their own whether to be received, in their own right, as Oblate novices and then as Oblates.

### **C. Conditions for Becoming an Oblate Novice**

(effective January 1, 1996):

1. Membership in the Oblates of Saint Benedict of Saint Vincent Archabbey is open to all those who have committed themselves to follow Jesus Christ through Baptism and have completed the fourteenth year of age and who wish to deepen their commitment to the Christian life by studying and following the Rule of

Saint Benedict. A Roman Catholic seeking membership should be in full communion with the Catholic Church (confirmed and receiving the Eucharist regularly). A non-Catholic Christian should be in good standing with his or her particular denomination. Whether lay or clerical, the person should not have official affiliation with another religious community.

2. The person must have a genuine desire to seek God with the help of the Rule of St. Benedict and in affiliation with the monks of St. Vincent Archabbey.
3. The person must submit to the Director of Oblates a signed, written summary of at least several sentences, stating why he or she seeks novice Oblation as a means of enhancing his or her faith-journey with Christ and the Church. (Anyone who finds it difficult to write may have verbal testimony written down by another person before appending one's signature.) The person should also submit a brief autobiographical statement including significant landmarks of one's Christian life. [See the form in VII.D below.]
4. The person must participate in the authorized ceremony of investiture with the approval of the Director of Oblates.

#### **D. Conditions for Becoming an Oblate**

(effective January 1, 1996):

1. The person must have been an Oblate novice for a full year. (In certain situations, with the permission of the Director of Oblates, the period of time may be reduced by up to one month by reason of difficulty of travel or some other extenuating circumstance.)
2. The Oblate novice must have undertaken at least two practices as described under E below.
3. The Oblate novice must submit to the Director of Oblates a written summary, at least two paragraphs long, stating:

- a. how he or she has grown as an Oblate novice and has undertaken the required practices (plus other recommended ones, if desired), and
- b. how he or she hopes to continue to grow closer to Christ and the Church as a full Oblate.

As in C.3 above, the person may seek the assistance of another trusted Christian if articulating a. and b. in writing is found to be difficult. [See the form in VII.E below.]

4. The Oblate novice must participate in the authorized ceremony of Oblation including the Act of Oblation, with the approval of the Director of Oblates. At this ceremony one may choose to take on an “Oblate name,” which may be the name of any saint whose friendship and assistance one wishes to invoke on one’s journey of faith. This optional name has no legal status and is not normally used even in gatherings of Oblates but has personal significance in terms of one’s Oblate commitment. (N.B.: Many Oblates opt for the name of a Benedictine saint; see VII.G below.)

#### E. Required/Recommended Practices for the Oblate Novitiate before Readiness for Full Oblation:

During the Oblate novitiate of a year or more, the Oblate novice should attest to having carried out (1) below, which is required of all, plus at least one of the other practices listed under (2), over and above what he or she was doing before investiture as an Oblate novice. These norms became effective on January 1, 1996, and are not retroactive.

1. practice to be undertaken by all: studying and reading the Rule of St. Benedict at least weekly and trying to apply the passages to one’s daily life; one should read the Rule reflectively as *lectio divina* and study it with the help of a commentary or at meetings with one’s fellow Oblates. [Note that the pocket-size translation by Leonard J. Doyle published by The Liturgical Press has a suggested reading for each day of the year.] (see RB 66:8)

2. other recommended practices (fulfill at least one):

- 2a. praying the Liturgy of the Hours (especially Morning and/or Evening Prayer) at least 3 days a week (with a monastic or parish community, with one's own family from a breviary, or alone from a breviary) (see RB 19:1-2)
- 2b. practicing lectio divina at least 3 days a week (see RB 48:10-16, 22)
- 2c. making a retreat of at least several days or making at least 3 days of recollection (see RB 49:1-3)
- 2d. contributing in a significant way to a project that improves the natural environment for one's community or parish (see RB 31:10-12)
- 2e. participating actively in a movement that works for peace and justice in one's local community, one's country, or the world (see RB Prol:14-17)
- 2f. undertaking in a specific and regular way one of the spiritual or corporal works of mercy: instructing and advising in the ways of faith, consoling, comforting, forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently; feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, burying the dead (see Mt 25:31-46; RB 31:9, 4:14-19)
- 2g. helping to build up one's parish family or civic community by concrete, regular involvement in a parish or community project (see RB 58:24-25)
- 2h. contributing one's services to St. Vincent Archabbey, any of the parishes staffed by the Archabbey, or St. Emma Monastery in a concrete way and over an extended period of time (see RB 72:7-12).

(N.B.: St. Emma Monastery is the community of Benedictine women in Greensburg, PA. From 1931 to 1987 many of the sisters worked in the food service at St. Vincent Archabbey and became very close to the monks.)

## F. Instruments of Ongoing Formation of Oblates after Oblation

No Christian is a fully-developed Christian until the day of his or her glorification in heaven since continual reformation in the way of Christ is an essential part of Christian commitment. In a particularly intensive way, Oblates, who make a promise of “continual conversion” (RB 58:17), recognize that they are never fully formed, and they long for those things that can promote ongoing personal reform according to Gospel values. Thus Oblation should be regarded as a commitment to an even more zealous pursuit of those things that hasten one’s transformation from death to life, from sin to holiness, and from self-centeredness to focus on Christ and community. Oblates, therefore, zealously seek to build upon the formation which they experienced as Oblate novices. Some significant elements of ongoing formation include:

1. praying at least a part of the Liturgy of the Hours each day
2. meditating frequently on the Bible as *lectio divina*; doing the same with the Rule
3. making a daily morning offering and making a daily examination of conscience in the evening or at some other suitable time of day
4. making an annual retreat; in particular, the annual “Oblate retreat” at the Archabbey
5. attending monthly Oblate meetings, where possible
6. participating with others in efforts to promote reverence for life, peace and justice, ecumenism, Christian renewal, or other Christian values; joining with others in spiritual and corporal works of mercy
7. renewing one’s Oblation annually, in person at the Archabbey or at a gathering in one’s deanery or individually at home (in the last case one should send the renewal form from the Oblate newsletter to the Director of Oblates).

### G. Church Regulations Regarding Monastic Practices for Oblates

In Church Law, Oblates of St. Benedict are considered a “private association of the faithful.” As men and women affiliated with the monastic community, Oblates are warmly welcomed to share in the life of the community by visiting, by making retreats or days of recollection, and by praying the Divine Office with the monks. The scapular of St. Benedict and St. Scholastica is an appropriate symbol of Oblation, and these scapulars are available on request. In particular, Oblates may wish to be buried wearing the scapular. However, since Oblates do not take monastic vows or live in the monastic community, it is not appropriate for Oblates to wear the monastic habit. Also, the use of such initials as “O.S.B.” after one’s name is reserved in the Catholic Church to professed members of religious orders.

### H. Transfer of Oblation

An Oblate affiliated with St. Vincent Archabbey may discern that, for geographical or otherwise prayerfully pondered reasons, he or she should seek to transfer his or her affiliation to a different monastic community. Such an Oblate should notify the Director of Oblates of St. Vincent Archabbey and present a request to the Director of Oblates of the other monastery. Permission is normally granted quite easily.

Likewise, an Oblate affiliated with another monastic community may seek to transfer affiliation to the Archabbey. Permission of the Director of Oblates of the original monastery of affiliation should be sought, and the Oblate should submit to the Director of Oblates of St. Vincent Archabbey: (1) a copy of a letter of permission signed by the Director of Oblates of the other community and (2) a copy of his or her certificate of Oblation.

### III. OBLATES AND THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

#### A. Applying the Rule Outside the Monastery

Introducing the Rule to lay people raises certain questions since it was written for monks — specifically for cenobites, men who live together under an abbot and take a vow of stability, which attaches them to a certain community that lives in some separation from the rest of society. How, then, can the Rule be applied to those not living in a monastic community under an abbot? The difficulty can be resolved if one examines more closely the nature of the Rule and its contents.

When Benedict wrote the Rule in the sixth century, the various religious orders, each with its own charism, did not yet exist in the Church; there were no clearly distinct patterns of religious life. Benedict did not set out to create a way of life different from those that preceded him by emphasizing some particular cult or devotion; rather, he wished to formulate the Christian concepts of prayer, work, community, and ongoing spiritual growth into a workable plan that would help the monk to be attuned to God’s presence in every activity of the day. Not adding anything new to Christian doctrine, Benedict took the spirituality of early Christian times, which was based on Gospel values, and applied it to everyday life in an orderly fashion so that a habitual focus on Christ and the values of the Kingdom might permeate the monk’s entire day and all his relationships. It is this spirit of continual refocusing on Christ amidst prayer and work in daily living that characterizes the Rule and gives it its universal applicability. Furthermore, the insights into human nature and into the principles which regulate human relationships, which appear throughout the Rule, remain the same for both monks and lay people, in both the sixth century and the twenty-first century.

Thus lay people and secular clergy who seek to live according to the Rule are not asked to add anything new to their understanding of Christian life and worship but to be enlightened more fully how to “prefer nothing to Christ” and to practice this fundamental principle in all their undertakings, “whether in affairs of Church, business, government, or any other area of life” (CE, p. 4). Br. Benet Tvedten,

O.S.B., comments, “The Rule is centered on Christ and the Christian life. The ordinary Christian can accept this rule as an aid to living a virtuous life within the Church. The Rule of St. Benedict reminds us of the order we should have in our lives, the priorities, and the discipline” (SK, p. 15).

Many contemporary lay Christians have found great relevance in the Rule as applied to daily life. Esther de Waal, an Anglican lay woman who has been deeply attracted to the Benedictine way since the early 1980’s, writes, “It [the Rule] was neither remote nor past nor cerebral, but immediate and relevant, speaking of things that I already half-knew or was struggling to make sense of. ... Above all, it spoke of a life that was essentially unheroic, much in fact like the life of any ordinary Christian family. ... The Rule speaks to those who like myself are seeking God in the midst of a busy, often confusing and exhausting daily life” (SG, p.12). Oblate Norvene Vest likewise observes, “The whole orientation of the Rule is to the principle that God is everywhere, all the time, and thus that every element of our ordinary day is potentially holy. Very few of us believe that and/or act on it. Benedict urges us both so to believe and so to act. It is an enormous challenge, involving life-long response, and yet it is very simple and can be begun this moment. Because the Rule is so ‘homely’, so oriented to the opportunities of daily life as grist for the mill of Christian consecration, it has a great deal to say which is directly helpful to a Christian lay person, struggling to live the Christian life even in our contemporary secular world” (PC, p. 1). Brian Taylor, another author, remarks about the Rule that “through the development of attitudes about such ordinary things as money, possessions, time, authority, and food, the monk (and the man and woman ‘in the world’) is radically transformed by grace” (SEL, p. 2). Furthermore, “in ordering one’s life according to a form of spirituality that thousands of people have lived with and found freedom in for fifteen hundred years, one has a better chance of growing in grace than through any lifestyle one could dream up on one’s own” (SEL, p. 13).

## B. How to Read the Rule

Before one can begin to read the Rule intelligently and fruitfully, one must understand the type of document it was meant to be. Fr. Terrence Kardong, O.S.B.,

comments, “A monastic rule is a literary phenomenon in its own right, with its own characteristics and genre. A Christian monastic rule is an attempt to concretize the Gospel demands of Jesus in a given situation and community. Because a monastic rule is an interpretation of the Gospel, we should always ask what Gospel values a given passage is trying to inculcate” (TU, p. 7). Thus the Rule is not principally a set of rules. “A rule, in the sense used by St. Benedict, means a plan for living with others in a certain way. It is the glue of monastery life. It is the common denominator. It is the understanding that exists between the members of a monastic community” (BW, p. 9). While the Rule provides norms for the living of Christian life in community, it “is best understood as wisdom literature. The insights of the past provide a basis for understanding ourselves and our world. ... The RB should not be approached as legislation. ... Read it as you would good poetry or allegory” (BW, p. 11). The wisdom of the Rule pertains to all Christians because it arose from the daily lived experience of St. Benedict and the monastic communities that preceded him. Esther de Waal asserts that St. Benedict “was happy to take what was good from the existing monastic heritage, to make it his own, and to color it with his own personal experience. ... The consummate wisdom which it [the Rule] shows could only have emerged from a long and thorough assimilation, not simply in his mind but in his whole being” (SG, p. 18). Modern authors as well as thousands of lay people who have come to cherish the wisdom of the Rule realize that “Benedict’s message is for all of us, not just monks. And it will transform us if we are ready to give up our own way ....” (BW, p. 11).

How, then, are we today to tap into this practical wisdom and to begin to assimilate the Rule’s relevant values? We must read it and reflect on it as *lectio divina*. Having become aware of the marvelous challenge of the Rule from her personal experience, Norvene Vest shares with us that “the modern reader often finds the Rule hard to understand, even though it emphasizes daily life. That is because it is written within the context of the ancient monastic art of *lectio divina*, and it needs to be read in that way, if it is to be truly appreciated. *Lectio divina* literally means ‘divine reading’, and carries the same double meaning in Latin as in English: what is being read is divine/holy, usually the Scriptures; and how it is being read is with the help of God’s Spirit. In order for this ‘how’ to happen, one slows down radically so as to open up freely. It is the monastic insight that reading, if it be

authentic, cannot be undertaken simply with the eyes and the mind. Rather, it must involve the whole person: mind, heart, body and spirit. It is reading not so much for information as for formation, that is, for encounter with the living God in this moment in such a way that one's heart catches fire and one's life is transformed" (PC, p. 1). Fr. Luke Dysinger likewise tells us, "If we wish to recover the wisdom of St. Benedict's Rule, it is not enough simply to read it. As moderns we read in order to acquire information, to be 'in-formed.' In St. Benedict's day reading a sacred or spiritual text was practiced not so much for the sake of 'information,' but rather in order to be 'formed': that is, to be inwardly changed or shaped. ... If we are to rediscover St. Benedict's insights, we must read his Rule in a spirit of lectio divina" (LD, pp. vi-vii).

Thus the aim of "reading" the Rule (i.e., pondering the verses of the Rule in a slow, prayerful way) is to dispose ourselves to welcome God's ever-present grace and His efforts to conquer our hearts and transform us more and more into a holy people, other-Christ. The same principle applies to the reading the Bible. It makes no sense to read the Rule as if it were a novel or a newspaper or a set of directions. One must place oneself in God's presence and be eager to hear God's message and to grow in union with Christ. Such growth is possible because throughout the Rule "St. Benedict points to Christ. It is as simple as that. Christ is the beginning, the way and the end. The Rule continually points beyond itself to Christ Himself, and in this it has allowed, and will continue to allow, men and women in every age to find in what it says depths and levels relevant to their needs and their understanding at any stage on their journey, provided that they are truly seeking God" (SG, p. 23).

### C. The Various Parts of the Rule

According to RB+, the Rule "remains a complete treatment of all the essentials required for cenobitic life [i.e., the life of monks in community]: both the spiritual doctrine and the practical ordering of life are provided in quite a full manner. ... St. Benedict had the clear vision of a man who instinctively perceives what is important and isolates it from the mass of secondary detail" (p. 91). In its overall structure, the Rule is divided between spiritual doctrine (the Prologue and chapters

1-7) and regulations for community living (chapters 8-73); however, these later chapters also contain much spiritual doctrine amidst the details of organization and good order. The Prologue is an exhortatory sermon in its own right which is “designed to produce a direct and dramatic effect on the hearer” (TU, p. 12). Included among the regulations are sections on the Divine Office (chs. 8-20); on delinquency and punishments (23-30, 43-46); on the acceptance of new members and the order of the community (58-63); on monastic officials (21-22, 64-66); on material goods (31-34); on food and sleep (35-42); on work, prayer, and exterior relationships (47-52); and on guests and related subjects (53-57). Finally, there is an appendix (67-73), which deals largely with fraternal relationships, one of the Rule’s special emphases.

### 1. The Prologue

The Prologue may be regarded as a stirring invitation to the reader from God Himself to renew one’s Christian commitment and to receive true life. Here the Rule “speaks to all of us. Right at the very start ... its approach is wide open: ‘Whoever you may be ... he that has ears to hear.’ A variety of images comes tumbling out as in his excitement St. Benedict addresses his listeners at one moment as recruits for the army, and the next as workmen in God’s workshop, then as pilgrims on the road, then as disciples at school. Each of us is to hear the call in different ways. ... But ... the message is to be heard now, we must rouse ourselves, shake ourselves out of our apathy. The Rule questions the assumptions by which we live and looks at some of the most basic questions that we must all face. ... There is no evasion here of the complexity of life, and yet the final paradox is that running the way to God appears modest and manageable while at the same time it is total. These are the demands of extreme simplicity which cost everything” (SG, pp. 28-29). It is significant that the first word of the Rule is “listen” (in Latin obsculta). Like the bells of a monastery calling monks to prayer, the whole Rule summons disciples to persistent, lifelong listening to the voice of the Lord. This call is especially significant in our culture, which tempts us to self-centered indifference to what really matters. “Benedict calls us from spiritual inertia to spiritual initiative, from complacency to action. ... Benedict’s call to holiness is an alarm — a wake-up call. ... All the spiritual traditions teach that the unenlightened state is like being asleep. It has never been more true than in contemporary Western society. ... Television, advertis-

ing, and all the tools of popular culture continually bombard us with seductive and hypnotic false images. If we are not careful, this false culture can dull our senses and lull us into a kind of trance .... Benedict calls us to awake out of this dozy world and face reality. Beginning the spiritual journey means we must wake up and see ourselves and our world for the first time” (LMS, pp. 3-4).

Thus the Prologue challenges all Christians to be “ready to renounce their own wills and to labor under obedience to seek God alone” (MBO, p. 26). For the Christian, progress in “faith and good works” constitutes success, whereas pride in one’s own efforts must be seen as a key temptation that is to be crushed by a continual turning to Christ. Ordaining nothing harsh and burdensome, the Rule nonetheless points out the way to amend evil habits and to grow in Christ’s love through moderate discipline. St. Benedict urges all Christians humbly to welcome the radiant light that comes from God, stirring us out of complacency, making us aware of our own sinfulness, and attuning us to the continual outpouring of graces that can heal our defects and make us holy. The monk and the Oblate learn to become good listeners in the ordinary affairs of daily life so that God may lead them on the road to sanctity.

## 2. Spiritual Doctrine

The central values of the Rule appear in RB 4-7. Like the Prologue, these exhortations to Christian living apply largely as they stand not only to monks but to any committed Christian seeking to grow in obedience, humility, a spirit of silence, trust in God and hope in His mercy, devotion to frequent prayer, death to sin and rising to life in Christ, and love of God with one’s whole being. Chapter 4, the “Instruments of Good Works,” stands as a treatise on its own and provides the reader with a list of 74 Christian maxims, each of which could be the subject of prolonged meditation; these are concise phrases that can serve to awaken us to God’s call in the various situations in daily life. “This chapter [RB 4] is full of riches, and four lifetimes would be too short to plumb its depths .... We see how it is imbued with Scripture, and how its simple wisdom flows from a profound understanding of God’s grace working within and through the complexities of human nature” (LMS, p. 42). Norvene Vest suggests that this chapter “is a poem with rhythmic cadences in the

Latin which allow it to be memorized, taking root in one's heart. Thus it can be carried throughout the day, as a way to hold priorities before one's eyes, so as never to be separated from God" (PC, p. 28). The three major values of obedience, silence, and humility pervade the entire Rule. In particular, humility, the subject of the longest chapter of the Rule, "is the virtue upon which Benedict places greatest importance. The beginning of all sanctity is an awareness of our own nothingness and our utter dependence on God" (MBO, p. 39).

It is important to realize that the three key values of RB 5-7 are essentially interrelated as dimensions of a vibrant Christian life. The Latin word for obedience, obaudire, comes from the word audire, to listen, and means "to listen thoroughly." In order to be obedient, that is to listen to and for God's word, one must nurture a certain silence of lips, mind, and heart. In order to obey, one also must be humbly receptive. Humility encourages one to think, "I am not the ultimate source of wisdom; I need to change again and again according to God's will for me, which often reveals itself through other fallible human beings." Humility likewise nurtures an eagerness to let God's word transform oneself so that one seeks to be silent and obedient. Silence is not to be sought for its own sake but for loving obedience to God, for which we were created; and silence is an outgrowth of humility, since a humble heart knows its insufficiency and becomes silent in readiness to hear. All these virtues are naturally directed to love, since the aim of all virtue is to enable the monk or Oblate to "arrive at that 'perfect love' of God which 'casts out fear' (1 Jn 4:18)" (RB 7:67). Our lives are to become permeated by Christ's own life until all our thoughts, words, and actions become reflections of Christ's own generous, self-giving, self-sacrificing love.

### 3. The Liturgical Code (Chs. 8-20)

These chapters form a bridge between the chapters on spiritual doctrine and those on the organization of community life. This arrangement can remind us that prayer is the hinge on which depend both our growth in virtue and our charitable functioning in family and community. Although neither monks nor Oblates are expected to heed the detailed formulas for communal prayer specified by St. Benedict, these 13 chapters testify to the importance of community worship for all committed

Christians and include the eternally relevant plea “that our minds [be] in harmony with our voices” (RB 19:7) when we pray aloud.

Abbot Parry comments, “The amount of space St. Benedict devotes to organizing the Divine Office is significant of the importance he attached to it. Nor was it merely a matter of long vocal prayer. For the early monks understood prayer to be the principal means for attaining union with God, and union with God was the end of human living and therefore of the monastic organization. It should be noted that while Chs. VIII-XX are all about prayer, the subject recurs again and again in the Rule. It is hardly too much to say that it gives meaning to the whole” (AP, p. xiii).

St. Benedict’s allotment of large blocks of time each day for community prayer and lectio divina is aimed at nurturing the monk’s continual awareness of God’s loving presence, or “practice of the presence of God.” This purpose seems to be revealed in the “practical examples which St. Benedict gives of the times outside those times of formal prayer at which the monk offers that particular happening, that particular person, to God with a brief prayer. ... This is a re-focusing of our attention on God at specific moments” (SG, p. 151). This goal of total attentiveness to God is a fundamental value to be lived by Oblates. Genuine prayer must overflow into a prayerful life, a God-centered existence; and our authentic daily Christian living is necessarily supported by prayer that opens us to Christ’s transforming love. Thus “our prayer reflects the way in which we respond to life itself, and so our prayer can only be as good as the way we live” (SG, p. 151). Growing in attentiveness to God’s presence leads us to realize that it is God who seeks us first, so that performing the “Work of God” means “not so much that we actually say prayers as that we live open to grace” (SG, p. 153). St. Benedict offers us the opportunity to be as available as possible to God’s loving call so that “if we are truly seeking God, we know that we shall be found by Him” (SG, p. 154). Amidst all our talk about arduous efforts to seek God in prayer and work, it should be consoling to know that it is He who takes the initiative and He who provides the overflowing grace for our every response; we need only to trust, to let go of our selfish ways, and to respond lovingly to the love of Christ poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit!

#### 4. Practical Arrangements for Community Living, and the Principle of “Moderation”

“... Because it [the Rule] is also essentially a working document, legislation for the common shared life of a group of men (and we know from the Dialogues of St. Gregory the Great, AD 590-604, how disparate a group Benedict gathered around him at Monte Cassino), many of the chapters are concerned with minutiae which today make tedious, sometimes apparently irrelevant, reading. It is important to recognize this and see beyond it. It is in fact ironically just because it is so mundane and so concrete that the Rule continues to speak so forcibly” (AP, p. xix). The very fact that St. Benedict pays so much attention to the details of ordinary life reinforces the Christian truth that we become holy through the ordinary, not by escape from the sometimes wearisome demands of daily life. “To become fully human in this life as it has been given us is to allow the sacredness of the ordinary to become manifest. To seek God in work, cooking, prayer, community, greeting strangers, and dealing with possessions is to enter into the mystery of the incarnation” (SEL, p. 13).

Although many practical details of the Rule may seem harsh to the modern reader, they embodied a spirit of great moderation in St. Benedict’s day. In fact, St. Benedict has been known as a master of moderation, and the Rule has often been praised for its promotion of sensible moderation. This “moderation” entails an avoidance of extremes of too much or too little in such realms as food and clothing, personal asceticism, communal discipline, time spent on prayer, and quantity and rigor of work. Such moderation does not imply mediocrity; on the contrary, maintaining moderation in the details of everyday living was meant to foster a radical commitment to seek Christ in the most intense way. From his experience St. Benedict learned that various extremes do not dispose a monk (or anyone) for spiritual growth whereas moderation can open the way for each individual to become, to his maximum capacity, a whole, integrated, holy, self-giving disciple of Christ. Furthermore, moderation is a natural outgrowth of charity; love for others requires that we not impose on all members of a group the rigid standards that only a select few can fulfill. In the same way, each Oblate is called to find a balanced, moderate discipline of daily life that can open his or her heart to expand as fully as possible in the love of Christ.

Although the concrete practices of the Rule may, in many cases, no longer apply to today's monk or Oblate, the values expressed in the particulars of sixth-century Benedictine life are of critical value today. Hospitality, reverence for God's creation, balance in daily life, patient allowance for human limitations, prayerfulness in all activities, the sacredness of the meal, the need for good order, and the struggle against greed, for example, are no less essential for 21st-century Christian life than for monastic life in St. Benedict's time. Esther de Waal reflects that the Rule "enables me to seek God here and now, just as I am, caught up in all the absurdly down-to-earth chores and demands which I feel trap me day by day. ... It asks of me ... that I do the most ordinary, often dreary and humdrum things that face me each day with a loving openness that will allow them to become my own immediate way to God" (SG, pp. 104-105). In particular, material things can become channels of deeper faith if properly regarded. "Oblates must see everything they possess as gifts and blessings from God, to be used only for proper ends. The vices of avarice and excessive attachment must be excluded. ... Benedict never looks upon material things as evil in themselves, but only warns against the excessive craving for them and against their improper use" (MBO, p. 46).

##### 5. Living in Community: Seeking God in and through Dealings with People

Chapters 21 through 72 of the Rule state that we become holy not only through the ordinary events of each day but also in our day-to-day dealings with other people — people who are flawed and annoying as well as gifted and supportive. Our journey to God cannot be made in isolation but takes place amidst the ups and downs of a life deeply involved in family and community. "Benedict wanted to establish clear principles for Christian community living, the same principles found in the Gospels and exemplified by the early Christian communities" (MBO, p. 30). Oblates can apply these values to their relationships in family, parish, universal Church, and society. St. Benedict's warnings that those in authority seek first the Kingdom, his call for special sensitivity to the sick and the poor, his mechanisms for dealing with irresponsible behavior, his persistent appeals for forgiveness and healing, his generous tolerance for human weaknesses, and his insistence on mutual love among old and young all have their counterparts in an Oblate's relationships with family and broader communities.

The Rule's concern for each individual as an image of Christ and for the individual's growth in holiness contrasts with our current culture's imbalanced extremes of individualism, on the one hand, and mindless conformity, on the other hand. In Benedictine life each individual is valued precisely because one encounters Christ in that person. The Rule "is pervaded with the idea of sacramental encounter with Christ in the circumstances of daily life and in material things, but most particularly in people. ... Endlessly the Rule makes room for each individual to grow in holiness at his or her own speed, in his or her own way. ... It is in the sections [of the Rule] that might at first seem most dated, the instructions to the servers, the cellarer, the door-keeper and so on, that in fact we can see this most clearly. ... [St. Benedict] shows how the well-organized community life makes possible the growth of the individual" (SG, pp. 115-116). At the same time, the individual is encouraged to grow not for his or her own sake but in the life of Christ that makes the person less self-centered and more capable of serving others in love. Despite its many limitations a community "mediates to me the power and the presence of God. This is the community in which God has placed me, and here I can always, in every situation, find the link of love that connects me with God" (Charles Cummings, O.C.S.O., Monastic Practices, p. 147). This Christ-centered balance of concern for individuals and bonding in communal relationships is highlighted in RB 71-72, in which all are called to mutual obedience and to the "good zeal" in which the monks "should each try to be the first to show respect to the other, supporting with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body or behavior. ... No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead, what he judges better for someone else" (RB 72:4,6). Thus monks and Oblates learn in community to "prefer nothing whatever to Christ" so that He may "bring us all together to everlasting life" (RB 72:11,12).



#### IV. BENEDICTINE VALUES FOR OBLATES

[N.B.: Sources used in this section include RC, GU, HG, and conferences by Sister Dolores Dowling, O.S.B.]

##### A. Seeking God

Seeking God above all else is the root of all the other Benedictine values. Seeking God is a matter of living in God's love and growing in that love. Seeking God means loving Him with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength and, therefore, following Christ wherever He may lead us. Seeking God is not just a part-time activity but a full-time, moment-by-moment quest to know how God works in one's everyday life and how He leads us lovingly on a lifelong journey of faith. The Oblate knows in faith that "God is always with us" (RB 7:23) and is "aware that God's gaze is upon [us], wherever [we] may be" (RB 4:49). Therefore, the Oblate is eager to surrender to God more and more, with and in Christ, until his or her thirst for God's presence is fully satisfied in heaven. This quest for God is undertaken not only in solitude and private prayer but also in the busyness of work and amidst a community of fellow-seekers.

##### B. "Prayer and Work" - a Balanced Life

In a society which often becomes ensnared in relentless work or pleasure-filled indulgence, the Oblate seeks to live a life totally dedicated to God and, therefore, balanced among prayer, work, creative leisure, and reading that nourishes the spirit. The experience of the ages shows that such balance best keeps a person from being caught up in anything other than God Himself.

Prayer is an expression of the Oblate's faith-response to God and is directed to facilitate habitual union with God. It is not simply a matter of praying from time to time but of directing one's whole life to union with God. Sensitivity to God's presence leads the Oblate to gaze with wonder and gratitude upon the gracious deeds that God has wrought, not only in history but in one's personal life yesterday and

today. The Benedictine attitude of prayer is also one of expectant waiting for the mysterious coming of God from moment to moment, so that the Oblate seeks to greet the Lord as He comes in His own sovereign, and often surprising, way in each circumstance.

The Oblate undertakes his or her work not so much as a means of gaining material wealth but rather as an opportunity to share in God's own creative love and in Christ's ongoing redemption of all creation. The Oblate takes up daily work as a task full of hope and promise and as a service to others in family, community, Church, and world. Since for the Christian work is linked with charity to the poor and discipleship of Christ, Oblates must refuse to be dominated by things so that they may be free to serve God and neighbor and have something to give to the poor (RB 31:9, 55:9).

The Oblate also allows for sufficient time with family and time for community activities, according to the way God calls through one's particular circumstances.

The Oblate need not feel guilty for setting aside time for holy reading and holy leisure (See H.1 & 4 below), which can nourish the spirit and ward off the frenzy that comes from workaholism.

### C. The Promises: Obedience, Stability, and Conversion of Life (RB 58)

Just as the monk takes these three vows at the time of profession, so does the Oblate implicitly promise at the time of Oblation to live by these values through the commitment to "dedicate myself to the service of God and neighbor according to the Rule of St. Benedict" (Oblation ceremony). These promises of Oblation, while not binding under pain of sin, should be taken seriously as part of a carefully discerned lifelong commitment.

#### 1. Obedience:

Oblates learn to listen to God's call always and everywhere through the regular study and meditative reading of Scripture, with special attention to the Gos-

pels. Oblates also listen for God's voice in the Rule by frequent meditation on passages of the Rule and by efforts to apply the fruits of their meditation to their everyday lives.

In this way Oblates learn to seek God's will in every circumstance and to heed God's word above every selfish impulse and every other desire. The promise of obedience thus forms bonds of fidelity to Christ and to one's family and friends and deepens one's responsibility to community, Church, and world, all of which manifest Christ's presence and cry out for loving responses in His name.

### 2. Stability:

Oblates learn to practice perseverance in carrying out the obligations of their daily lives. Sustained by a deepening faith that grows into an awareness of Christ's presence with them at all times, they become grateful for the seemingly small blessings of each day and struggle against murmuring in difficult times. Stability means being rooted in Christ, no matter what happens. It is not so much a matter of outer, physical stability (although that may at times be helpful and necessary) as the inner stability that prevents one from fleeing from unavoidable suffering and that keeps one grateful for God's grace even amidst the severest of trials. Thus, through prayer and generous concern for others who suffer, Oblates learn to regard their own sufferings as a share in Christ's Cross and as an opportunity to experience loving solidarity with others who bear heavy crosses.

### 3. Ongoing Conversion:

Oblates make use of means at their disposal to let God's grace transform them more and more — spiritually, intellectually, culturally, and socially. Such means might include making retreats, days of recollection, or parish renewals or attending workshops, seminars, or prayer meetings that enrich one's faith. Just as a monk's vow of *conversatio morum* commits him to "grow in perfect charity through a monastic manner of life" (formula for the monk's vows), the Oblate promises to keep trying to seek Christ in the midst of ordinary events so that every moment becomes an opportunity for deeper trust in God, firmer rejection of self-will, and

more generous surrender to Christ as He stretches us in His self-sacrificing, all-generous love.

A helpful analysis of the term *conversatio morum* appears in The Benedictines, pp. 94-98. There Fr. Terrence Kardong shows how it implies a “dynamic process.” The term “morum” probably does not at all refer to “morals” but simply reinforces *conversatio*. The two words together may be taken to mean the whole “monastic way of life,” but in its traditional usage the term refers mainly to the external, tangible elements of that life. Therefore, commitment to *conversatio morum* encourages the monk or Oblate to put the Gospel into practice in the very concrete details of everyday life and also to be open continually to new concrete practices that radical discipleship may demand.

#### D. Silence and Humility

Silence (RB 6) and humility (RB 7), along with obedience (RB 5), constitute another triad of values which St. Benedict places at the heart of his Rule. The practice of silence and humility gives added depth to one’s living of the promises.

Amidst a noisy and unfocused world, Oblates nurture both external and internal silence as a necessary condition for hearing the call of God and responding to it. Outward silence is not necessarily a virtue in itself, but some external stillness is required if one’s inner spirit is to be recollected. There is a good kind of silence that unites people in charity, and there is a bad kind of silence that can be a way of dividing one person from another. A silent heart is ready to listen reverently to others since it is so often through other people that God speaks. The silence valued by Oblates provides a witness to a world which often avoids coming to grips with itself and its problems by promoting an atmosphere of noise and frenetic activity.

Humility involves both an honest admission of one’s own limitations, weaknesses, and sinfulness and a reverent mindfulness of God’s redeeming presence in Jesus Christ. If we are to grow in holiness, we must be aware both of how far we are from the goal and of how powerful is God’s grace to lead us to the fullness of life, in His way and in His time. Humility is neither self-abasement nor a denial of one’s gifts.

It rather involves a continual refocus from self to Christ and an acceptance of oneself as one is and of God as He is — One ever ready to transform us, redeem us, and surprise us in His all-embracing love.

### E. Peace

In the Prologue of the Rule, St. Benedict urges us to “let peace be your quest and aim (Ps 34:15)” (Prol:17). “Pax” has become a Benedictine motto. Thus Oblates are women and men of peace, as they seek to dwell with peace in their hearts, to work for healing and reconciliation within family and community, and to join with other peacemakers to bring about a world of peace and justice. The Rule speaks to ordinary people who experience tension and conflict with others, and as such, it offers guidelines for an ongoing healing of relationships that nurtures a continual abiding in the peace of Christ and that springs from that inner peace.

### F. Glorifying God in All Things

In his chapter on the artisans of the monastery, St. Benedict urges that the monks should charge a little less for their products than the commercial world charges “so that in all things God may be glorified (1 Pt 4:11)” (RB 57:9). “Ut in omnibus glorificetur Dei” (UIOGD), the actual Latin phrase, has become another Benedictine motto, embodying monks’ and Oblates’ ardent desire to seek God, to praise Him, and to manifest His redeeming presence, His glory, in every dimension of life. Glorifying God means looking for His goodness in every person and situation and, in Christ, nurturing it. It means avoiding murmuring, gossip, and all that destroys or tears down. It means looking at every difficulty with eyes of faith, with hope in God’s mercy, and with encouragement of others in their weakness. It means “blessing God and not murmuring” (RB 40:8), even when the redeeming quality of a situation is hidden; in faith we know that Christ is present to bring light out of darkness and to manifest the strength of His love in our weakness.

In his book Households of God, Abbot Parry comments, “Indeed, ‘that God may be glorified in all things’ is the key to human sanctity. For sanctity implies the

exploitation of every human action and situation to God's glory. It is the secret demonstrated in the lives of the saints. The point is made here because buying and selling would seem to be the part of the monk's life nearest to the pattern of the ways of the world, and correspondingly remote from the service of praise. Hence the insistence that God is to be glorified in it — not merely by a passing thought — but by the entry of kindness and self-restraint into the deal itself. It is when God is glorified and praised and made part of all life's transactions that life becomes rich, and progress is made in sanctity. Thus also is the dualism of dividing life simply into the sacred (directed to God alone) and the profane (at best useless, maybe worse) is avoided" (pp. 151-152).

### G. Community

The context of the Rule, with the possible exception of the Prologue and RB 4-7, is that of Christian community. Oblates necessarily live in a spirit of community, of oneness with others with whom they share Christ's love, even if necessity keeps them living alone or without tangible Christian support. Oblates realize that we cannot live Christian lives as mere individuals; we seek everlasting life together, and only as a community do we form the Body of Christ. Oblates nurture family values and, if possible, take an active part in those efforts of their parishes and civic communities which best utilize their gifts. Oblates love the monastic community to which they are affiliated and strive to keep in touch with it through prayer and through a local moderator and/or correspondence with the Director of Oblates or other monks.

### H. Other Elements of Benedictine Life Significant for Oblates

#### 1. The Practice of *Lectio Divina*

"*Lectio divina*", the meditative reading of holy writings, especially the Bible, is an important part of the Oblate's life of prayer. (The Rule prescribes several hours each day for *lectio*, which is far more than most monastic communities could prescribe today.) Such reading is done not for intellectual information or for emotional stimulation but for the sake of savoring God's word and, through the Word, entering more

deeply into relationship with God. Holy reading can enable us both to hear what God is saying to us today and to enter into contemplation, a total, wordless attention to the Lord in which we welcome Him to pray in us.

It might be well here to note the traditional teaching of *lectio* leading to *meditatio* (“meditation”), and *oratio* (“prayer”) leading to *contemplatio* (“contemplation”). A slow, gentle reading of the text should lead the mind to savor each portion of the reading so that one can listen to the Lord’s still, small voice. Memories and thoughts which rise up in this process are a part of meditation. Then one can respond by speaking to God in “prayer”; in other words, one gives to God what has been found in one’s heart. Finally, one may be led simply to rest in God’s embrace without words, thoughts, or emotions, such simple abiding being contemplation. This process is not normally a steady, neat progression but rather a gentle oscillation among the four stages, according to one’s disposition and God’s graces. [See the article by Luke Dysinger, O.S.B., “Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of *Lectio Divina*,” in Valyermo Benedictine, Vol. I, No. 1.]

One suggestion for doing daily *lectio* is to use one of the readings for the Mass of the day, which can be found in a parish missalette.

## 2. Reverence for Scripture

In conjunction with *lectio*, the Oblate is called to nurture a great reverence for the Scriptures as the Word of God. Oblates are urged to gain a basic understanding of the Bible through group or private study, through the reading of commentaries, and through special attentiveness to the Word when it is read in the liturgy of the Church.

## 3. Hospitality

St. Benedict urged his monks to welcome all guests as Christ (RB 53:1) and to show special concern “in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received” (53:13). Likewise, the Oblate is called to welcome Christ in every person coming into his or her life. To welcome the stranger is an act of faith; such faith helps us in general to greet the “otherness” of life, not as a threat but as a possible gift. God is the ultimate Stranger — unpredictable and potentially threat-

ening to our security yet also promising us new life as we stretch ourselves out to meet Him. True hospitality means opening not just our homes but our very selves to others, so that we make them feel welcome, give them our time, allow them to become what God envisions for them, and thus help to restore some measure of balance, wholeness, and dignity to their lives. People in our hectic, impersonal world really need the warmth of genuine hospitality that will give them a new vision of life and a glimpse of God.

#### 4. "Holy Leisure"

Benedictine spirituality sets out to develop people who reflect on what they are doing and who see their world through the eyes of the Gospel. Play and rest are essential to healthy spiritual life. Play consists of activities done for no purpose at all except the release and recapture of energy. The practice of silence and adherence to *lectio* and other forms of prayer require a somewhat leisurely attitude towards life that rejects the view that everything depends on human achievement and so must be rigorously planned and controlled. Holy leisure is the foundation of contemplation, which is the pursuit of meaning, the finding of God's will everywhere, and the ability to see the world around us as God sees it. The practice of holy leisure can stretch the soul to regard all life as sacred, and not merely as utilitarian.

#### 5. Liturgy of the Hours ("Divine Office" - *Opus Dei*)

The significance of the *Opus Dei* in the Rule is shown by St. Benedict's devotion of 13 chapters (RB 8-20) to the practice of community prayer. The Liturgy of the Hours is the official prayer of the Church which marks off the various parts of the day as sacred, i.e., consecrated to God. Praying the Hours provides Christians with the occasion to sanctify daily life and thus make it an offering to God. Monks are obligated to pray the Divine Office; as spiritual affiliates of the monks, Oblates strive each day to pray some part of it, as the circumstances of their lives permit, since the *Opus Dei* is such a significant dimension of Benedictine spirituality. St. Benedict himself admonishes the monk, "Indeed, nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God" (RB 43:3). When visiting St. Vincent Archabbey, Oblates are welcome to join the monastic community for Morning Prayer, Midday Prayer, Evening Prayer, and the daily Conventual Mass.

## 6. Eucharist

As Christians who know the value of liturgy, Oblates are careful to attend regular worship services in order to celebrate and intensify their union with Jesus Christ and their fellow Christians. Those Oblates who are Roman Catholic eagerly attend Mass, even daily if possible. A full, attentive participation in the Eucharist captures and capsulizes many other faith-moments in one's life and brings them to a new value in the light of Christ. Eucharist also makes us pass over into what we receive and energizes us to see our struggles, the many kinds of "death" that we suffer each day, as intimately connected with the death of Jesus Christ. His death gives us hope that life will come out of our "dying" in the sacrifices of each day, which become part of Christ's eternal sacrifice, offered out of love for us. The Eucharistic meal also gives us a longing for a greater share in Christ's life, as we hunger for completeness and strive to "hasten the day" (2 Pt 3:12) when "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

## 7. Care for the Poor; Social Concerns

Towards the end of his earthly life, St. Benedict had a special vision of the whole world as penetrated by a single ray of light (St. Gregory's *Dialogues*, Book II, ch. 35). Striving to find God in all things and all things in God, Oblates are encouraged to nurture consciousness of the needs of the world's poor and to share in God's solidarity with those who suffer oppression, violence, hunger, prejudice, and the denial of their dignity, whether they be the unborn, the elderly, or the handicapped. One means to deepen such awareness is involvement with the missions of St. Vincent Archabbey in Brazil or Taiwan or with monasteries of the Third World through AIM, the Alliance for International Monasticism.

## 8. Prophetic Witness

The monks of St. Benedict's time witnessed to Christian values that were often contrary to the norms of their society. In the monastery there was to be no distinction according to social class or wealth, and there was to be no room for arrogant behavior, vicious talk, or even judgmental thoughts. Likewise, in today's self-seeking society, which worships idols of wealth, status, pleasure, and material excess, the Oblate, standing firm in Christ and with the monastic community, can joyfully

witness in word and deed to very different values. The early monks were seen as successors of prophets like Elijah and John the Baptist, who denounced people's enslavement to the status quo; "the willingness to reject this classic idolatry in order to move resolutely into the mystery of God is therefore an expression of the deepest monastic instinct" (RC, #82) — and of the Oblates' commitment to live with vision and courage that will bring about God's Kingdom on earth. Thus Oblates, as groups and as individuals, seek gently but boldly to proclaim the primacy of God, the sacredness of life, the integrity of the family, and the urgent need to reach out to the poor and underprivileged.

#### 9. Stewardship and Care for the Environment

In the Rule material things are not to be used for personal aggrandizement; rather the goods of the monastery are to be shared by all, and the monks are to "regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar" (RB 31:12). Oblates likewise share in this outlook of stewardship for all of God's creation. In God's plan things are not made to be abused and carelessly thrown away. Therefore, in contrast to the utilitarian, materialistic trends of modern Western society, Oblates learn to use only what they need, to treat all material things with reverence, and to nurture an informed care for the environment according to the delicate balance created by God. Oblates also regard all goods as the common possession of all people on the earth and are ready to share their surplus with the poor, who often suffer the most from environmental destruction.

## V. A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE OBLATE MOVEMENT AND OF THE OBLATES AFFILIATED WITH ST. VINCENT ARCHABBEY

Neither the history of the Oblate movement nor the history of the Oblates affiliated with St. Vincent Archabbey is particularly well documented. Therefore, the following reflections present only a tentative sketch, which was gleaned from various sources. If the reader has any significant information that might fill in some of the gaps, then it would be a welcome addition for future editions of this booklet.

### A. The Oblate Movement throughout the World up to 1930

The following sketch of the history of the Oblate movement is taken from the 1937 edition of a Manual for Oblates of St. Benedict, by Abbot Alcuin Deutsch, O.S.B. (St. John's Abbey Press, Collegeville, MN), with some additions from the Manual of the Secular Oblates of St. Benedict issued by St. Vincent Archabbey in 1898.

The earliest use of the term “oblate” with regard to Benedictine monasteries refers to boys who were offered by their parents to be educated for the monastic life. This custom is described in RB 59 and mentioned by St. Gregory the Great in his story of St. Benedict's life. St. Gregory also seems to imply that some adults living outside the monastery put themselves under St. Benedict's direction and visited his monastery occasionally for spiritual guidance. However, we cannot tell whether such people were “Oblates” in the present sense of the term, and there is no known use of the term “oblate” for adult affiliates until the 11th century. Still, as early as the ninth century the term “confratres” was used in monastic literature to refer to faithful lay people who participated in the life of the monastery through prayer and almsgiving.

In the 11th century St. William, Abbot of Hirschau, gave a more precise status to Oblates by referring to them in two categories: “Interns,” or “Regular Oblates,” who lived in a monastery under its discipline but without vows, and “Externs,” or “Secular Oblates,” who lived on the outside but were affiliated by promises of obedience and turned over a part or whole of their possessions to the monastery, sometimes

by way of legacy. During this age when Benedictine monasticism reached a peak of influence in Europe, many lay people chose to consecrate themselves in the latter way. Since St. Henry II (972-1024), Duke of Bavaria and a Holy Roman Emperor, vigorously promoted Benedictine life, he is considered a special patron of the Oblates. During the 14th century the Congregation of the Olivetans, founded by St. Bernard Tolomei, generated new interest in the Oblate movement by establishing a Brotherhood of Oblates. Frances of Rome (1384-1440) gathered together a number of noble Roman women to place themselves under the spiritual direction of the Olivetan Benedictines, to renounce their lives of extravagance, and to give service to the poor. These women then began to live in community and to engage in daily common prayer in addition to their work with the poor. This group became known as the "Institute of Oblates" and exists in Rome even today. Therefore, St. Frances of Rome is considered a patroness of the Oblates.

With the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, Benedictine monasteries were practically wiped out, and so the Oblate movement also declined; but when monasteries began to be reestablished, interest in the Oblates was likewise revived. In 1884 a General Assembly of the Cassinese Congregation of Benedictines approved of the reception of Oblates for the entire congregation. Oblates first gained an official canonical status as the "Institute of the Secular Oblates of St. Benedict" in 1888, when the Holy See favored Oblates with numerous indulgences and later confirmed a "Ceremonial for Oblates" through the Congregation of Sacred Rites. In 1889 Pope Leo XIII approved a set of statutes for Oblates for a period of 10 years, and in 1898 he issued a brief granting many spiritual favors and privileges to Oblates. In 1904 the Holy See gave official approval of a set of "Statutes and Rules" for Oblates, and in 1927 a new edition of these, including a few alterations and additions, was approved by the Sacred Congregation of Religious. It is important to note that the "Statutes and Rules" were mainly spiritual guidelines, not binding under pain of sin, and that the administration of Oblate programs has been left ultimately in the hands of the monastic communities to which Oblates have been affiliated

## B. The Oblates Affiliated with St. Vincent Archabbey: the Early Years, up to the 1930's

In a letter to Abbot Hugo Lang of Metten, Bavaria (the motherhouse of St. Vincent), on May 21, 1865, Abbot Boniface Wimmer mentioned his desire “to bring about some sort of a third order of St. Benedict into which lay people of both sexes can be admitted.” In a letter to the same abbot on July 11, 1867, Abbot Boniface wrote, “Our ‘St. Benedict Sodality’ is practically established in every parish of ours, and I promise myself much help from it.” This comment may refer to Oblates of St. Benedict. An old certificate of Oblation states that the “Institute of Secular Oblates of the Benedictine Order” was introduced to the United States with papal approval by Abbot Boniface on August 6, 1865. It is not known precisely when concrete efforts to receive Oblates affiliated with the Archabbey began. There is no record of Oblations in the Archabbey’s archives until August, 1917, when Oblates were being received during lay men’s summer retreats, which had begun in 1913. The first edition of a Manual for Benedictine Oblates, with a preface by Archabbot Leander, was published at the Archabbey in 1898; so apparently there were already sufficient numbers of Oblates to warrant such a publication. Second and third editions were printed in 1923 and 1932. In the preface to the 1898 edition Abbot Leander states that, while in Rome, he “humbly petitioned His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII, to be allowed to introduce into the United States of North America the Secular Oblates, according to the Statutes of the Cassinese-Sublacensian Congregation” and that in an audience on May 20, 1894, the Pope had granted the request and had given special privileges to Oblates in the United States. Archabbot Leander reflected that after returning from a trip to Rome, he traveled to Benedictine parishes in Johnstown, Carrolltown, and Erie during February, March, and April, 1901, and exhorted the parishioners to become Oblates; but it is not recorded whether any of the people actually were received as Oblates. Perhaps this sketchy early history of Oblates affiliated with the Archabbey could be researched further.

## C. Revival of the Oblate Program at St. Vincent in the 1930's and 1940's

According to the recollections of Fr. Dunstan Debes, O.S.B. (1910-93), current efforts to encourage the development of the Oblate Program can be traced back to

1933, when Fr. Maurice Costello called a meeting of clerics to organize a monthly publication for Oblates, called The Saint Vincent Oblate. Fr. Dunstan, then a cleric in temporary vows, took a special interest in the Oblates from the time that he was asked to guide two elderly women, who were Oblates, to visit the St. Vincent Cemetery. It was he who officially edited The Oblate from 1937 to 1946, and after his ordination to the priesthood, he was appointed Director of Oblates in 1940 and kept this position until 1946, when other duties prevented him from continuing with the Oblate Program. There was no official Director of Oblates from 1946 to 1960.

During the period of activity in the 1930's, various "deaneries" of Oblates were established. One group involved students of St. Vincent College, and another students of St. Vincent Preparatory School. The "Westmoreland Chapter" of Oblates included deaneries at St. Vincent Parish, Latrobe; St. Bartholomew Parish, Crabtree; and St. Bruno Parish, South Greensburg. Regular monthly meetings were held in rotation at these three sites and included talks by Benedictine priests. Another group of Oblates was established among the Benedictine parishes in Pittsburgh, where there was a similar arrangement for monthly meetings at rotating locations. In 1937 a women's deanery was established among the alumnae of St. Benedict Academy in Pittsburgh, and their local moderator was the priest of the Archabbey who was the sisters' chaplain. Also at this time fund-raising activities were organized by Fr. Maurice to finance the publication of The Saint Vincent Oblate. Furthermore, an annual "Oblate Home Coming" was organized in 1934; this event apparently occurred on the day for ordinations to priesthood at the Archabbey.

#### D. New Developments at St. Vincent in the 1950's and 1960's

During the 1950's Archabbot Denis Strittmatter personally received Oblates at the Archabbey, at least among summer retreatants. In St. Marys, PA, Fr. Gregory McAtee, O.S.B., pastor of Sacred Heart Church, activated an Oblate deanery, and in Erie, PA, Fr. Linus Brugger, O.S.B., pastor of St. Mary Church, did the same. By 1960 the groups of Oblates at parishes in Latrobe, Crabtree, Greensburg, and Pittsburgh were no longer meeting. Fr. Ermin Smith, O.S.B., reactivated the Latrobe Deanery in 1960. In that same year Fr. Clarence Karawsky, O.S.B., was appointed Director of

Oblates as well as Director of Vocations of the Archabbey. Within a few years, after a request by several inquirers, he started an Oblate deanery in Williamsport, PA. The publication of The Saint Vincent Oblate, after a 13-year gap, was resumed in October, 1959, as a project of the clerics of the monastery, and it continued as such until July, 1976. Records from 1962 indicate that in that year Fr. Blase Strittmatter, O.S.B., was moderating an Oblate program in the College and the Seminary, and Fr. Clair Gannon, O.S.B., was moderating an Oblate program in the Prep School. Also, Fr. Ulric Thaner, O.S.B., was moderating the group associated with St. Benedict Academy in Pittsburgh. In 1962 the Holy See issued a rescript which allowed women's Benedictine communities to receive their own Oblates. Thereafter many of the Oblates in Pittsburgh and Erie became affiliated with St. Benedict Monastery in Pittsburgh or Mt. St. Benedict Monastery in Erie, respectively.

#### E. New Developments at St. Vincent in the 1970's and 1980's

In June, 1978, Fr. Clarence began to issue an Oblate newsletter about four times a year. On retiring from parish ministry in August, 1982, Fr. Dunstan was again appointed Director of Oblates. Under Fr. Dunstan and his assistant, Br. Thomas Hart, O.S.B., the newsletter was issued somewhat more frequently, in conjunction with a community newsletter for monks serving outside the monastery. New deaneries were established in Virginia Beach, VA, about 1980; in State College, PA, by retired Archabbot Leopold Krul, O.S.B., in 1983; in Johnstown, PA, by Fr. Benjamin Walker, O.S.B., about 1985; and in Baltimore, MD, by Fr. Paschal Morlino, O.S.B., about 1986. Fr. Donald Raila, O.S.B., succeeded Fr. Dunstan as Director of Oblates in January, 1988.

Since about 1984 one of the annual summer retreats has been specifically geared to Oblates. About the same time Oblates in the area of Latrobe began to be officially invited to attend the monastic celebration of the Solemnity of the Passing of Our Holy Father Benedict, usually held on March 21; aside from the Oblates' participation in the Community Mass, the annual event has included dinner and a ceremony for the investiture of new members. Also, in 1984 or 1985 significant numbers of Oblates began to attend, in a body, the Archabbey's annual Mass for the Feast of St. Benedict on July 11, which also includes the rite for monastic solemn vows. The

celebration of an annual “Oblate Day” in early autumn began in 1989 to bring together Oblates from many locations and to offer them a formational talk, a sharing in monastic Evening Prayer, and tours of the Archabbey grounds.

#### F. State of the Oblate Program at St. Vincent as of 2002

The mailing list of some 830 entries includes about 600 Oblates and 100 Oblate novices. There are probably over 1,000 inactive Oblates no longer on the mailing list; these people have requested removal from the list or have not contacted the Archabbey in some years, or their current address is not known. There are deaneries with regular monthly meetings and with occasional special celebrations in Annville (area of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), Baltimore, Johnstown, Latrobe, Pittsburgh, St. Marys, State College, Virginia Beach, and St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. In March, 1994, a new deanery was established in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (although as of 2002 it remains quite small and does not have leadership or regular meetings), and in October, 1994, a new deanery was established in St. Catharines. These developments were both undertaken at the initiative of lay people who were already Oblates or who were keenly interested in the Oblate Program. A group of St. Vincent Oblates began to meet in Pittsburgh in October, 2000, and a group began to meet in Annville in February, 2001. During 2001 and 2002, attempts were made to establish a deanery at St. Benedict Church in Carrolltown, Pennsylvania. Other individual Oblates are scattered in the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Texas, and California.

In addition to monthly deanery meetings, current means of Oblate formation include the quarterly newsletter, the annual “Oblate retreat” in May or June, and numerous books and reprints available at the Oblate Office. Significant numbers of Oblates have served as volunteers at two newly established stores administered by the Archabbey, the Basilica Gift Shop and the Gristmill Country Store. Beginning in February, 1999, a Directory of Oblates, subsequently revised in August, 2000, was issued to enable participating Oblates to contact other Oblates by mail, phone, or e-mail. At all times Oblates are especially welcome to join the monastic community at St. Vincent for any of the three daily hours of Divine Office.

### C. Meetings of Oblate Directors since 1948

On August 30, 1948, seven Directors of Oblates met at Conception Abbey in Missouri with the hope of bringing about a common approach to Oblate life. This was to be achieved without an imposition of rigid standardization; each abbey and priory was to maintain its autonomy in making policies for Oblates. The meeting resulted in a list of 19 recommendations, largely dealing with Oblate spirituality. From August 23 to 25, 1949, the first National Conference of Directors of Oblates was held at St. John's Abbey in Minnesota. The 15 directors from the United States and Canada who attended stressed that Oblate life was to be taken seriously and that people should be invested only if they had a genuine desire to seek God according to the Benedictine way. They also devised "declarations" which were appended to the 39 statutes issued by the Holy See in 1927, and these "Declarations and Statutes" were printed in the revised Manual for Oblates published by The Liturgical Press in 1953. A second national conference held at St. Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana in August, 1952, involved 15 directors, some of whom offered papers on Oblate life. After the 1953 meeting no such national meetings were held until 1971, but directors worked together in other ways. One example of this work was the initiative to petition the Holy See to allow Benedictine women's communities to receive Oblates affiliated with their own communities.

The 1971 meeting of Directors of Oblates at St. Procopius Abbey in Illinois considered how Benedictine spirituality might be viewed in light of Vatican II. A set of "Guidelines" written by Fr. Roger Schoenbechler, O.S.B., of St. John's Abbey was reviewed at the 1972 meeting at St. Mary's Abbey in New Jersey. This summary of Oblate life was meant to reflect current spirituality in a simple way, and it did not specifically follow the statutes of 1927. At the 1971 and 1972 meetings the directors approved of three pamphlets, published by The Liturgical Press, which were to replace the former Manual. In the 1970's Abbot Martin J. Burne, President of the American Cassinese Congregation, suggested biennial meetings of Oblate directors so that they could consult one another regularly. At subsequent meetings in 1976, 1978, 1980, and 1982, the directors voted against issuing another Oblate manual. Meetings were also held in 1988, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2001, and were planned for 2003 and odd-numbered years thereafter. Although during the 1980's Oblates were urged to

pray The Liturgy of the Hours from a book of their choice, it was discerned at the 1990 meeting in Morristown, New Jersey, that many Oblates wanted some sort of “Oblate prayer book” with a simple version of the Divine Office. A committee was established to undertake the project in conjunction with The Liturgical Press, and the result was the book Work of God: Benedictine Prayer, edited by Sister Judith Sutera, O.S.B. At the biennial meeting at St. Meinrad Archabbey in 1997, work was begun on a handbook for Oblates affiliated with St. Meinrad that could also be used by Oblates of other monasteries if the proper sections were exchanged in the loose-leaf notebook. This project of St. Meinrad Archabbey includes a version of the Liturgy of the Hours. Oblates affiliated with St. Vincent Archabbey are encouraged to use a breviary suited to their particular circumstances in life.

## VI. READING LIST FOR OBLATES

Most of the books listed below are available for borrowing from the Oblate Library at the Archabbey. The following abbreviations are used to denote frequently mentioned publishers:

- AAP - Richardton, ND: Assumption Abbey Press
- AH - New York: Alba House
- AMP - Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press
- BMH - Schuyler, NE: BMH Publications
- CP - Kalamazoo, MI, or Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications
- CPC - New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company
- Cont - New York: The Continuum Publishing Company
- DB - Denville, NJ: Dimension Books
- HC - New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.
- H&R - San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers
- IB - Garden City, NY, or New York, NY: Image Books
- IP - San Francisco: Ignatius Press
- LP - Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press
- MGB - Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press (Michael Glazier Books)
- OB - Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books
- PB - Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press (Pueblo Books)
- PBM - Boston, MA: Pauline [St. Paul's] Books & Media (or The Daughters of St. Paul)
- PP - Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press
- SB - Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications
- SP - Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications (or Servant Books)
- TP - Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers
- TTP - Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications

### A. Books Specifically on the Rule and Benedictine Values

- Casey, Michael, O.C.S.O., A Guide to Living in the Truth: Saint Benedict's Teaching on Humility (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2001)
- \_\_\_\_\_, Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of 'Lectio Divina' (Liguori, MO: Triumph Books, 1995)

- \_\_\_\_\_. The Undivided Heart: The Western Monastic Approach to Contemplation (SB, 1994)
- Colombás, García M., Reading God: "lectio divina", trans., Gregory J. Roettger, O.S.B. (BMH, 1993)
- Cummings, Charles, O.C.S.O., Monastic Practices (CP, 1986)
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- \_\_\_\_\_. Steps Along the Way: The Path of Spiritual Reading (DB, 1975)
- Neuhaus, Rev. Richard John, Death on a Friday Afternoon: Meditations on the Last Words of Jesus (N.Y.: Basic Books, 2000)
- Nouwen, Henri J.M., S.J., Adam: God's Beloved (OB, 1997)
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World (CPC, 1992)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring (HC, 1994)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Walk with Jesus: Stations of the Cross (OB, 1990)
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry (N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1981)
- O'Connor, Patricia, In Search of Therese (MGB, 1987)
- Odell, Catherine M., Father Solanus: The Story of Solanus Casey, O.F.M. Cap., Updated (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1995)
- Paulsell, William O., Letters from a Hermit: With Letters from Matthew Kelty, O.C.S.O. (TP, 1978)
- Peck, M. Scott, The Different Drum: Community-Making and Peace (N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1987)

- Pelphrey, Brant, Julian of Norwich: Christ, Our Mother (MGB, 1989)
- Quoist, Michel, The Breath of Love, trans., N.D. Smith (CPC, 1987)
- \_\_\_\_\_, I've Met Jesus Christ, trans., J.F. Bernard (IB, 1975)
- \_\_\_\_\_, The Meaning of Success, trans., Donald P. Gray (Notre Dame, IN: Fides, 1963)
- \_\_\_\_\_, New Prayers, trans., Elizabeth Lovatt-Dolan (CPC, 1990)
- \_\_\_\_\_, Prayers, trans., Agnes M. Forsythe & Anne Marie de Commaille (N.Y.: Sheed and Ward, 1963)
- Rahner, Karl, S.J., Encounters with Silence, trans., James M. Demske, S.J. (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960)
- \_\_\_\_\_, Mary, Mother of the Lord: Theological Meditations (N.Y.: Herder & Herder, 1963)
- \_\_\_\_\_, On Prayer (LP, 1993)
- Reininger, Gustave, ed., Centering Prayer in Daily Life and Ministry (Cont, 1998)
- Rohr, Richard, O.F.M., Simplicity: The Art of Living, trans., Peter Heinegg (CPC, 1992)
- Rolheiser, Ronald, The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God (CPC, 1995)
- Rupp, Joyce, O.S.M., Praying Our Goodbyes (AMP, 1988)
- Samra, Cal, The Joyful Christ: The Healing Power of Humor (H&R, 1986)
- Sanford, John A., Between People: Communicating One-to-One (PP, 1982)
- \_\_\_\_\_, Dreams and Healing (PP, 1978)
- \_\_\_\_\_, Ministry Burnout (PP, 1982)
- Savary, Louis M., & Patricia H. Berne, Kything: The Art of Spiritual Presence (PP, 1988)
- The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection, trans., Barbara Ward, S.L.G., (CP, 1975)
- Scanlan, Michael, T.O.R., Inner Healing (PP, 1974)
- Scanlan, Michael, T.O.R., with James Manney, Let the Fire Fall (SP, 1986)
- Shannon, William H., Seeking the Face of God (CPC, 1988)
- \_\_\_\_\_, Silence on Fire: The Prayer of Awareness (CPC, 1991)
- Sheldrake, Philip, S.J., Befriending Our Desires (AMP, 1994)
- Sinetar, Marsha, Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics: Lifestyles for Self-Discovery (PP, 1986)
- Spink, Kathryn, Mother Teresa: A Complete Authorized Biography (HC, 1997)
- Surprised by Truth: Eleven Converts Give the Biblical and Historical Reasons for Becoming Catholic, ed., Patrick Madrid (San Diego, CA: Basilica Press, 1994)
- Teresa of Avila, Saint, Book of the Foundations, trans. & ed., E. Allison Peers, Vol. 3 (N.Y.: Sheed & Ward, 1946)
- \_\_\_\_\_, The Interior Castle, trans., Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., & Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (PP, 1979)

- \_\_\_\_\_. The Way of Perfection, trans., a Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey (London: Burns & Oates, 1961)
- Teresa of Calcutta, Mother, The Love of Christ: Spiritual Counsels, ed., Georges Gorée & Jean Barbier (H&R, 1982)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Total Surrender, ed., Br. Angelo Devananda (SP, 1985)
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- Van, Gerald, O.P., The Divine Pity (IB, 1961)
- Vanier, Jean, Be Not Afraid: Community & Growth: Our Pilgrimage Together (PP, 1979)
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Broken Body: Journey to Wholeness (PP, 1988)
- van Kaam, Adrian, C.S.Sp., The Music of Eternity: Everyday Sounds of Fidelity (AMP, 1990)
- \_\_\_\_\_. On Being Involved: The Rhythm of Involvement in Christian Life (DB, 1970)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Spirituality and the Gentle Life (DB, 1974)
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Woman at the Well (DB, 1976)
- van Kaam, Adrian, C.S.Sp., and Susan Muto, Aging Gracefully (PBM, 1992)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Am I Living a Spiritual Life?: Questions and Answers on Formative Spirituality (DB, 1974)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Practicing the Prayer of Presence (DB, 1980)
- Vann, Gerald, O.P., The Divine Pity (IB, 1961)
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs, Christian Meditation, trans., Sr. Mary Theresilde Skerry (IP, 1989)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Engagement with God, trans., John Halliburton (London: SPCK, 1975)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Prayer, trans., A.V. Littledale (N.Y.: Sheed & Ward, 1961)
- The Way of a Pilgrim & The Pilgrim Continues His Way, trans., Helen Bacovin (IB, 1978)
- Weigel, George, Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II (HC, 1999)
- Wicks, Robert J., Living Simply in an Anxious World: An Invitation to Perspective (PP, 1988)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Touching the Holy: Ordinariness, Self-Esteem, and Friendship (AMP, 1992)

#### D. Historical and Literary Books on the Rule, St. Benedict, Benedictine Life, and St. Vincent Archabbey

- Barry, Coleman J., O.S.B., Worship and Work: Saint John's Abbey and University, 1856-1980 (LP, 1980)
- Baumstein, Dom Paschal, O.S.B., My Lord of Belmont: A Biography of Leo Haid (Belmont, NC: Herald House, 1985)
- Beckman, Peter, O.S.B., Kansas Monks: A History of St. Benedict's Abbey (Atchison, KS: Abbey Student Press, 1957)
- Benedict in the World: Portraits of Monastic Oblates, ed., Linda Kulzer, O.S.B., & Roberta Bondi (LP, 2002)
- Berthier, René, & Marie-Hélène Sigaut, Saint Benedict and His Monks (with cartoon drawings), trans., Cronan R. Tyms, O.S.B. (Campomorone, Italy: Univers Media, 1983)
- Fry, Timothy, O.S.B., ed., RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict 1980: In Latin and English with Notes (LP, 1981)
- Gregory the Great, Pope Saint, Life and Miracles of St. Benedict, trans., Odo J. Zimmerman, O.S.B., & Benedict R. Avery, O.S.B. (LP)
- \_\_\_\_\_, The Life of St. Benedict, trans., Hilary Costello & Eoin de Bhaldraithe, commentary by Adalbert de Vogüé, O.S.B. (SB, 1993)
- Grün, Anselm, Benedict of Norcia, trans., Gregory J. Roettger, O.S.B. (BMH, 1992)
- Guiver, George, C.R., Company of Voices: Daily Prayer and the People of God (PB, 1988)
- Hughes, Kathleen, R.S.C.J., The Monk's Tale: A Biography of Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B. (LP, 1991)
- Kline, Omer U., O.S.B., The Sportsman's Hall Parish, Later Named Saint Vincent, 1790-1846 (Latrobe, PA: Saint Vincent Archabbey Press, 1990)
- Leclercq, Jean, O.S.B., The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture, trans., Catherine Misrahi (N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 1961)
- McCann, Justin, O.S.B., Saint Benedict (London: Sheed and Ward, 1986)
- Oetgen, Jerome, An American Abbot: Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B. (1809-1887) (Latrobe, PA: The Archabbey Press, 1976)
- \_\_\_\_\_, An American Abbot: Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., 1809-1887 (revised edition) (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997)
- \_\_\_\_\_, Mission to America: A History of St. Vincent Archabbey (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000)
- Raymond, M., O.C.S.O., The Family That Overtook Christ (PBM, 1986)
- Rippinger, Joel, O.S.B., The Benedictine Order in the United States (LP, 1990)

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The Rule of the Master, trans., Luke Eberle, O.S.B. (CP, 1977)

Saint Vincent: A Benedictine Place, ed., Campion P. Gavalier, O.S.B. (Latrobe, PA: Saint Vincent Archabbey, 1995)

Stewart, Columba, O.S.B., Cassian the Monk (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Tierney, Mark, O.S.B., Dom Columba Marmion: A Biography (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1994)

## VII. APPENDICES

### A. List of Breviaries

The following list of breviaries, along with brief descriptions, is given generally in order of increasing complexity. Thus the complete, official Liturgy of the Hours, or the “Roman Office,” is listed last.

1. Morning and Evening Prayer: Selections from the Liturgy of the Hours, ed. by Rev. D. Joseph Finnerty & Rev. George J. Ryan (N.Y.: Regina Press, 1994), 307 pp.
  - 1 volume, hardback (paperback version out of print)
  - simplified 1-week cycle of psalms, with special psalms for seasons of the Church year
  - \$8.95 in 2001.
2. A Shorter Morning and Evening Prayer: The Psalter of the Liturgy of the Hours (San Francisco: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1987), 562 pp.; also available from The Liturgical Press.
  - 1 volume, very thin paper
  - also includes Night Prayer, Proper of the Seasons, Feasts of the Lord in Ordinary Time
  - \$11.95 in 1993.
3. Daytime Prayer - from the Liturgy of the Hours (Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1978), 521 pp.
  - 1 volume
  - Midmorning, Midday, & Midafternoon Prayer, with Proper of Seasons, Solemnities of the Lord, Proper of the Saints
  - \$6.95 in 1991.
4. Shorter Christian Prayer (N.Y.: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1988), 670 pp., 4 1/2" x 7"
  - 1 volume, soft cover, thin paper, 4-week cycle of psalms

- Morning & Evening Prayer, with 1-week cycle of Night Prayer
  - special selections for propers of seasons & saints
  - available from St. Vincent Basilica Gift Shop
  - \$11.75 in 2001.
5. Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours (N.Y.: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1985), 1600 pp.
- 1 volume
  - includes 4-week cycle of Morning & Evening Prayer plus Night Prayer, selections from Daytime Prayer; with Propers of Seasons, Propers of Saints, & Commons
  - available at St. Vincent College Book Store or Basilica Gift Shop
  - regular edition: \$27.10 in 2001; large-type edition: \$34.95 in 2001.
6. Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours (Boston, MA: The Daughters of St. Paul, 1976), 1758 pp.
- 1 volume, bonded leather, thin paper
  - includes Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Daytime Prayer, Night Prayer, & selections from Office of Readings; with Propers of Seasons, Propers of Saints, Solemnities
  - \$21.95 in 2001.
7. The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite (N.Y.: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975)
- 4 volumes, 1716 to 2044 pp. each
  - complete "Roman Office"
  - \$120.00 (or \$140.00, leather-bound) in 2001
  - available from St. Vincent College Book Store.
8. addresses of some publishers:

Catholic Book Publishing Co.  
257 W. 17th St  
New York, NY 10011

Collins Liturgical Publications  
Icehouse One - 401  
151 Union St.  
San Francisco, CA 94111-1299

Pauline Books & Media  
(The Daughters of St. Paul)  
50 St. Paul's Ave.  
Boston, MA 02130-3491  
(1-800-876-4463)  
[www.pauline.org](http://www.pauline.org)

The Liturgical Press  
St. John's Abbey  
P.O. Box 7500  
Collegeville, MN 56321-7500  
(1-800-858-5450)  
[www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org)  
[sales@litpress.org](mailto:sales@litpress.org)

U.S. Catholic Conference Publishing Services  
3211 Fourth St. NE  
Washington, DC 20017-1194  
(1-800-235-8722)  
[www.nccbuscc.org](http://www.nccbuscc.org)

Benedictine Mission House  
P.O. Box 528  
Schuyler, NE 68661-0528  
(402-352-3436) or (402-352-2177)

## B. Prayers Before and After Meetings

The following brief formulas for prayer, based on those used in MBO, are included only as suggestions and because of popular request. Ideally, Oblates might use a part of the Liturgy of the Hours to open and/or close meetings, e.g., Evening Prayer (Vespers) in late afternoon or early evening or Night Prayer (Compline) later in the evening. Otherwise, Oblate moderators and lay leaders are free to choose whatever form of prayer seems appropriate to the group; this might include at least one psalm and a brief Scriptural reading.

The texts of the psalms given below are used with permission: Copyright © 1963, The Grail (England); published by Collins, London, 1963.

### 1. Sample of Prayer Before Meetings:

**Leader:** O God, come to my assistance.

**All:** O Lord, make haste to help me. Glory be ... Amen. Alleluia.  
[During Lent omit Alleluia, or substitute "Praise to You, O Lord, King of eternal glory!" ]

### PSALM III

**Leader:** I will thank the Lord with all my heart

**Side 1:** in the meeting of the just and their assembly.

**Side 2:** Great are the works of the Lord,  
to be pondered by all who love them.

**Side 1:** Majestic and glorious his work,  
his justice stands firm for ever.

**Side 2:** He makes us remember his wonders.  
The Lord is compassion and love.

**Side 1:** He gives food to those who fear him,  
keeps his covenant ever in mind.

**Side 2:** He has shown his might to his people,  
by giving them the lands of the nations.

**Side 1:** His works are justice and truth,  
his precepts are all of them sure,

**Side 2:** standing firm for ever and ever;  
they are made in uprightness and truth.

**Side 1:** He has sent deliverance to his people  
and established his covenant for ever;  
holy his name, to be feared.

**Side 2:** To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;  
all who do so prove themselves wise.  
His praise shall last for ever!

**Side 1:** Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;

**Side 2:** as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.  
Amen.

**Leader:** O Lord, hear my prayer.

**All:** And let my cry come to You.

**Leader:** Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that during this meeting our thoughts, words, and actions be prompted by Your inspiration and furthered by Your help. May every prayer and work of ours begin from You and be brought to fulfillment by You. Help us to put on the heart and mind of Christ, Your Son. We ask this through the same Christ our Lord.

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**All:** Amen.

**Leader:** Let us bless the Lord.

**All:** Thanks be to God.

2. Sample of Prayer After Meetings

**Leader:** O God, come to my assistance.

**All:** O Lord, make haste to help me. Glory be ... Amen. Alleluia.  
[During Lent omit Alleluia, or substitute "Praise to You, O Lord, King  
of eternal glory!"]

**PSALM 100**

**Leader:** Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.

**Side 1:** Serve the Lord with gladness  
come before him, singing for joy.

**Side 2:** Know that he, the Lord is God.  
He made us; we belong to him;  
we are his people, the sheep of his flock.

**Side 1:** Go within his gates, giving thanks,  
enter his courts with songs of praise.  
Give thanks to him, and bless his name.

**Side 2:** Indeed, how good is the Lord,  
eternal his merciful love.  
He is faithful from age to age.

**Side 1:** Glory be ... Holy Spirit;

**Side 2:** as it was in the beginning, ... Amen.

**Leader:** O Lord, hear my prayer.

**All:** And let my cry come to You.

**Leader:** Let us pray. Almighty and merciful God, You who have given the human race the means of salvation and the gift of everlasting life, look graciously on us, Your servants. Comfort the souls of those whom You have created. May our gathering to ponder the truths of Your Gospel and the Holy Rule open us more fully to walk in the way of Your Son and to give witness to the values in which we have been instructed. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

**All:** Amen.

**Leader:** Let us bless the Lord.

**All:** Thanks be to God.

(The prayer might then conclude with the singing of an appropriate Marian hymn, such as the “Ultima,” given in C.3 below.)

### C. Benedictine Devotions and Hymns

1. Litany to St. Benedict:

Lord, have mercy on us.

**Christ, have mercy on us.**

**Lord, have mercy on us.**

Christ, hear us. **Christ, graciously hear us.**

God, the Father of heaven, **have mercy on us.**

God, the Son, Redeemer of the world, **have mercy on us.**

God, the Holy Spirit, **have mercy on us.**

Holy Trinity, one God, **have mercy on us.**  
Holy Mary, **pray for us.**

Holy Mother of God, **pray for us.**  
Holy Virgin of Virgins, **pray for us.**  
Holy Father St. Benedict, **pray for us.**  
Father most renowned, ...  
Father most affectionate, ...  
Father most patient, ...  
Flower of piety, ...  
Flower of sanctity, ...  
Flower of chastity, ...  
Bright light of the world, ...  
Star of religion, ...  
Mirror of perfection, ...  
Teacher of silence, ...  
Example of poverty, ...  
Master of obedience, ...  
Model of abstinence, ...  
Kind instructor of monks, ...  
Firm in faith, ...  
Strong in hope, ...  
Fervent in charity, ...  
Pure in mind, ...  
Chaste in body, ...  
Free from passions, ...  
Foreknowing the future, ...  
Adorned with the grace of God, ...  
Filled with the Holy Spirit, ...  
Raised to the height of angelic glory, ...  
Rapt in the ardor of contemplation, ...  
Joined to the choirs of angels, ...  
Exalted among the Patriarchs, ...  
Made companion among the Prophets, ...

Associated to the college of Apostles, ...  
Adorned with the roses of Martyrs, ...  
Decorated with the labors of Confessors, ...  
Placed over the choir of Monks, ...  
Crowned with the lilies of Virgins, ...  
Patriarch of Western Monasticism, ...  
Patron of a happy death, ...  
United to the company of all the Saints, ....  
Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, **spare us, O Lord.**  
Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world,  
**graciously hear us, O Lord.**  
Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, **have mercy on us.**

V. Intercede for us, O Holy Father, St. Benedict.

R. **That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.**

Let us pray. O most holy Abbot Benedict, the father and guide of monks, intercede for our salvation and the salvation of all humanity. Raise up, O Lord, in Your Church the spirit which animated our blessed Father Benedict, and being filled with the same spirit, may we seek to love what he loved and to practice what he taught. Grant us, we ask You, O Lord, perseverance in doing Your will, that in our days the people serving You may increase both in number and in zeal for the Gospel. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

2. Novena to St. Benedict:

See the booklet Novena to St. Benedict (LP, 1987).

3. The Benedictine "Ultima":

The

**BENEDICTINE ULTIMA**

Simplified and  
arranged for four  
male voices by  
FATHER RAYMOND BALBO

U - ti - ma in mor - tis ho - ra,  
 Wenn wir mit dem to - de rin - sen,  
 When the last dread hour is o'er us,

Fi - li - um pro no - bis o - ra, Do - nam  
 Wollst, Ma - ri - a, uns bei - sprin - gen, Dass wir  
 Pray, thy Son may fash - ion for us Death, a -

mor - tem im - pe - tra, Vir - go, Ma - ter, Do - mi - na.  
 se - lig schen - den hin, Jung - frau, Mut - ter, Koe - nig - in.  
 noint - ed and se - rene, Vir - gin Ma - ry, Moth - er, Queen.

4. Hymn to St. Benedict (Taken from the Booklet Novena to St. Benedict, p. 39):

The golden sun lights up the east,  
Recalls, by solemn yearly feast,  
When Benedict ascended high  
To heaven's mansions in the sky.

O gracious father, on this day  
With humble hearts and words we pray,  
That, taught by you to live aright,  
We may enjoy God's vision bright.

All praise to God the Father be,  
And to His Son, eternally,  
With equal glory, as is meet,  
To God the holy Paraclete.

**D. Form for Those Seeking Novice Oblation**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Parish (name, city, state) \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Baptism (as accurately as possible) \_\_\_\_\_

Date of First Communion (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Confirmation (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Spouse (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

- a. If desired, please mention any other significant moments in your journey of faith up to the present time. (Use additional sheets if required.)

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- b. Please state in one paragraph or more why you seek to become an Oblate novice. How has God touched you in your journey of faith to lead you to Benedictine spirituality and/or to the Benedictine monks of St. Vincent Archabbey? (Use additional sheets if required. If necessary, another person may put your reflections into writing.)

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E. Form for Oblate Novices Seeking Full Oblation

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address & Phone (if changed since novice Oblation) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Choice of Oblate name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

a. Please review II.D and E of the *Oblate Formation* Booklet and describe in at least one paragraph: (1) how you have read the *Rule* of St. Benedict and reflected on it, (2) how you have undertaken at least one of the other practices expected of Oblate novices, e.g., praying the Divine Office regularly or doing *lectio divina* regularly, and (3) how you have grown in your Christian faith as an Oblate novice. (Feel free to use additional sheets of paper. If necessary, another person may put your thoughts into writing.)

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b. Please describe in at least one paragraph how you hope to continue to grow closer to Christ and the Church as an Oblate. (As above, additional sheets and the help of another person may be utilized.)

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## F. A Note about the Rule of the Master (Abbreviated as RM)

The following summary is drawn largely from RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict: In Latin and English with Notes, ed. by Timothy Fry, O.S.B. (LP, 1981) (abbreviated as RB+), and the pages mentioned refer to the section of RB+ dealing with RM.

The Regula Magistri, or Rule of the Master (RM), “was a Latin monastic rule of unknown authorship, about three times the length of the RB” (pp. 70-71), that contains many passages similar to those in RB. In fact, “large sections of the texts of the two rules are identical, or nearly so” (p. 71). For centuries it was explained that RM had borrowed large sections from RB and made rather long-winded additions to it. It was considered unthinkable that the renowned St. Benedict would have borrowed large portions of his rule from an earlier source, and especially from such an unoriginal, impractical rule as RM.

However, in the late 1930’s the hypothesis was proposed that RM was earlier than RB and that RB had borrowed considerably from RM. Initially, Benedictines reacted with shock to such a suggestion. However, over the next several decades the scholarly evidence was built up that RM really did come first, and today “there is no longer any prominent expert in the field who holds that the RB is earlier than its sister rule” (p. 72). At the same time, we now realize that the likelihood that St. Benedict borrowed extensively from RM does not at all diminish his stature. In fact, one can see the practical wisdom of our patron precisely in the ways that he eliminated long passages from RM and carefully edited other passages. Thus St. Benedict preserved what was best in the monastic traditions that preceded him and, from the wisdom of his experience, contributed elements to that tradition that would render his monasteries more vibrant Christian communities — houses of disciples being built up in love and reflecting the values of Christ’s Kingdom.

Those Oblates having a more scholarly bent might wish to read a recent edition of RM (see listing in VI above) and to read about its relationship to RB in RB+, pp. 79-90. Also TU makes many comparisons between RB and RM in discussing the

various chapters of RB. Another interesting and brief study of RB in relation to RM occurs in Chapter 2 of The Benedictines, by Fr. Terrence Kardong, O.S.B.

## G. Benedictine Calendar and Partial List of Saints

### 1. Benedictine Calendar for St. Vincent Archabbey

The following calendar consists of feasts of Benedictine saints and other saints related to monastic life, as well as other celebrations special to the American Cassinese Congregation, to which St. Vincent Archabbey belongs, or special to the Archabbey itself. The rank given to each celebration is that currently indicated in the Ordo of the American Cassinese Congregation. The notation used for rank is as follows:

S - solemnity	F - feast
M - memorial	OM - optional memorial

2 Jan - Basil the Great & Gregory Nazianzen, Bishops & Doctors (M)  
 10 Jan - Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop (OM)  
 15 Jan - Maur & Placid, Disciples of our Holy Father Benedict (M)  
 17 Jan - Anthony of the Desert, Abbot (M)  
 26 Jan - Robert of Molesmes, Alberic, & Stephen Harding, Abbots of Citeaux (OM)  
 10 Feb- Scholastica, Virgin (F)  
 11 Feb - Benedict of Aniane, Abbot (OM)  
 14 Feb - Cyril, Monk, & Methodius, Bishop (M)  
 9 Mar - Frances of Rome, Oblate (OM)  
 21 Mar - Passing of our Holy Father Benedict, Abbot (S)  
 21 Apr - Anselm, Bishop & Doctor (M)  
 23 Apr - Adalbert, Bishop & Martyr (OM)  
 11 May - Odo, Maiolus, Odilo, Hugh, & Peter the Venerable, Abbots of Cluny (M)  
 15 May - Pacomius, Abbot (M)  
 19 May - Celestine V, Pope & Hermit (OM)  
 25 May - The Venerable Bede, Priest & Doctor (M)  
 27 May - Augustine of Canterbury, Bishop (OM)  
 5 Jun - Boniface, Bishop & Martyr (M)  
 19 Jun - Romuald, Abbot (M)

- 11 Jul - Benedict, Patriarch of Western Monasticism (F)
- 12 Jul - John Gualbert, Abbot (OM)
- 13 Jul - Henry, Oblate (OM)
- 29 Jul - Martha, Mary, & Lazarus, Hosts of the Lord (M)
- 19 Aug - Bernard Tolomei, Abbot (OM)
- 20 Aug - Bernard, Abbot & Doctor (M)
- 24 Aug - Anniversary of Dedication of St. Vincent Archabbey Basilica  
(S, at Archabbey only)
- 3 Sep - Gregory the Great, Pope & Doctor (F)
- 17 Sep - Hildegard, Virgin (OM)
- 2 Oct - Guardian Angels, Patron of the Congregation (F)
- 6 Oct - Bruno, Hermit (M)
- 7 Nov - Willibrord, Bishop (OM)
- 11 Nov - Martin of Tours, Bishop (F)
- 12 Nov - Theodore of Studis, Abbot (OM)
- 16 Nov - Gertrude, Virgin (M)
- 19 Nov - Mechtild, Virgin (OM)
- 23 Nov - Columban, Abbot (OM)
- 26 Nov - Silvester, Abbot (OM)
- 5 Dec - Saba, Abbot (OM)

## 2. Partial Listing of Benedictine Saints

St. Meinrad Archabbey, which belongs to the Swiss-American Congregation of Benedictines, has published an Oblate manual that includes a 10-page calendar of Benedictine saints. [See The Benedictine Oblate Companion (St. Meinrad, IN: St. Meinrad Archabbey, 1981), pp. 110-119.] In that calendar some of the dates do not correspond with those in the current Ordo of the American Cassinese Congregation. Some of the names of Benedictines listed in that calendar, other than those in the calendar above, are given below.

Adela	Cecilia	Gall
Adelaide	Clarus	Gaudentius
Adelard	Conrad	Gerard
Adrian	Cunegundis	Germanus
Aemelian	Cuthberga	Gilbert
Agnellus	Cuthbert	Godfrey
Aldhelm	Digna	Harlindis
Alexander	Donatus	Herbert
Alfric	Ebba	Herman
Alto	Edburga	Hilda
Amadeus	Ediltrude	Hildeburg
Anastasius	Edith	Ida
Angelo	Egbert	Ildephonse
Ansgar	Elfleda	Jane Marie
Ascelina	Erhard	Jerome
Aurea	Eric	Joachim
Beatrice	Ermin	Joanna
Benedicta	Ethelburga	Juliana
Benno	Eugene	Justus
Berno	Eusebia	Jutta
Bertha	Eusebius	Lanfranc
Bertilla	Fara	Leander
Bertin	Fintan	Lioba
Bertrand	Frederic	Ludger

Madelberta	Rembert	Urban
Malachy	Rietrudis	Viola
Malchus	Rigobert	Virgil
Mathildis	Roman	Walburga
Mellitius	Rudolph	Walter
Mildred	Rupert	Wendelin
Notberga	Salaberga	Werner
Odilia	Salome	Willibald
Orlandus	Sergius	Windfrid
Ositha	Severin	Wunibald
Oswald	Simeon	
Paschal	Sperandea	
Ralph	Tetta	
Raymond	Thecla	

#### H. Responsibilities of St. Vincent Archabbey towards Oblates

The following are responsibilities of the monks of St. Vincent Archabbey to pray for members of the Oblate Community:

1. Each month the Director of Oblates, or a Benedictine priest delegated by him, is to offer a Mass for the intentions of all Oblates.
2. During the month of November of each year, the Director, or a priest delegated by him, is to offer a Mass for all the deceased Oblates affiliated with the Archabbey.
3. When the Director of Oblates receives notification of the death of an Oblate or Oblate novice, he or a Benedictine priest delegated by him is to offer a Mass for the deceased person within one month. Also, the deceased is mentioned in prayer on one day at the monastic community's Divine Office after the mentioning of recently deceased monks.

4. All living and deceased Oblates are to be included in the prayers of the monastic community at each daily Conventual Mass.

#### 1. Revised Decree on Indulgences for Oblates

On May 5, 1975, the Sacred Penitentiary issued the following decree in response to a request that the norms of the Apostolic Constitution Indulgentiarum Doctrina be applied to indulgences available to Oblates of Saint Benedict:

The Sacred Penitentiary, by special and express Apostolic Authority, graciously grants a plenary indulgence, to be gained by the Oblates of Saint Benedict, provided that, fulfilling the usual conditions (i.e., confession, communion, and prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father), they pronounce or renew, at least privately, the promise of faithfully observing the statutes of their way of life:

1. On the days of enrollment and Oblation;
2. On the feast days of: Saint Benedict (March 21 or July 11), Saints Maurus and Placid, Saint Scholastica, Saint Frances of Rome, and on two additional feast days to be designated by the superior of the monastery .... [At Saint Vincent Archabbey, August 24 and December 8 have been chosen. August 24 is the anniversary of the dedication of the Archabbey Basilica in 1905, and December 8 is the date of the death of Archabbot Boniface Wimmer, our founding abbot, in 1887, as well as the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, who is the patroness of the nation.]
3. On the twenty-fifth and fiftieth anniversaries of the first Oblation.

These are to be in force *in perpetuum* without the dispatching of an apostolic brief. Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.