



Oblates Norman and Judith Herzog renewed their wedding vows on January 21, celebrating 55 years of marriage, and then made their oblation. They received the sign of peace from two of their sons.

Opening the doors of real presence



Fr. Gueric DeBona

As I write this, the last vestiges of the Christmas season are quietly burning away. The evergreen wreaths and trees, once full of festive lights, are now headed for the landfill or ground into pulp for spring mulch. Children

have returned to school, many of them now tired of their once-shiny Christmas toys.

Adults flee to winter getaways in the Florida Keys or the Caribbean; those who can't afford an exotic hot spot anxiously wait for Super Bowl Sunday or Valentine's Day. Those of us who have lived through many holiday seasons know that the longer we live, the faster another season of light slips by us.

But we should not confuse the celebration with the mystery. It is probably one of the great paradoxes of Christianity that we remain nostalgic for what is right in front of our eyes: real presence, God's presence in the mystery of the Incarnation. No fleeting

season, God endures in Word, present among us, living and active, abiding in the people of God and proclaimed among them.

The Risen Christ remains visible in sacrament and in the hidden Christ of the poor. We live each day inside Emmanuel, God is with us. Christ is the Father's love letter to all humanity, to be kept, treasured and proclaimed.

No wonder St. Benedict made stability a unique vow for monks. Real presence means abiding together forever, living with one another's frailties, accepting the talents as well as the limitations that all of us bring to community.

Benedictine Oblates are perfectly positioned to understand God as the sacredness of stability in the world by simply being present to the moment God is unfolding before them, whatever that might be – the family, the co-worker, the friend, the stranger.

Indeed, the cultivation of stability as a manifestation of real presence discloses yet

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A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

“Above all else we urge that if anyone finds this distribution of the psalms to be unsatisfactory, he should arrange whatever he judges better, provided that the full complement of one hundred and fifty psalms is by all means carefully maintained every week, and that the series begins anew each Sunday at Vigils.”

Rule of St. Benedict Chapter 18:22-23

Early monks prayed all 150 psalms in one day. Even St. Benedict realized that this was a formidable task for his monks to do. It was decided by a council of abbots in Rome to change and rearrange the psalms, so that fewer of them were to be prayed daily.

Like present-day oblates, the monks also were confronted with a specific timeframe in which to pray the psalms. It was decided to pray less in order to pray better. How can we pray better with the timeframe we have available to us? We need to slow down, like the early monks. When we do this, we find that we can effectively pray with the psalms.

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Editor: Mary Jeanne Schumacher

Designer: Tammy Schuetter

Oblate Directors: Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB and Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB

Send changes of address and comments to The Editor, Development Office, Saint Meinrad Archabbey, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad, IN 47577, (812) 357-6817, fax (812) 357-6325 or email oblates@saintmeinrad.org www.saintmeinrad.org

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another virtue important to monks: hospitality. We receive the guest because we value the real presence of God in whomever we meet.

That attitude of welcome is not always easy, and we can see that there are some current voices in our society that are hostile to our brothers and sisters eager to take refuge in our homeland. But real presence does otherwise: it is not cozy familiarity, but grace, to see the God who dwells in the people made in his image.

When monks come to reflect on the *Rule* or other topics for the Benedictine Oblates, this occasions an opportunity for what Pope Francis has called “dialogue” through “encounter.”

Learning together in the little vineyard of the conference, the visiting monk and the oblates experience the presence of Christ through a common mission of making the Gospel present in the world.

I call that real presence, a recollection of the rainbow God set in the sky as a covenant forever. I learned divine presence very early as a young child in the Benedictine parish I belonged to, St. Kilian’s in Farmingdale, New York. I was a member of the famous boys’ choir that sang liturgically and professionally, not only in our own parish but in places like St. John the Divine and Lincoln Center in New York City.

I sensed that music brought with it a sense of the sacred, no matter the occasion – a funeral for a soldier killed in Vietnam, or Mahler’s Eighth Symphony, even singing Christmas sacred songs for nightly television news. I did not know it then, but my long rehearsals and performances were encounters with real presence.

God’s encounter with his people may have been more palatable when it came to singing at the Christmas Midnight Mass or the Easter Vigil, but the notes that danced around our heads for those

five or six years in the choir were dialogues with God’s handiwork, an encounter with real presence.

These encounters with sacred presence, in so many ways throughout our lives, rely on the give and take of questioning and, above all, listening. I hope that when I come to do a talk for the Benedictine Oblates I do more than just talk! Every presentation is an opportunity to “re-present” the space of Saint Meinrad in mutual dialogue and sharing with one another.

That means that these conferences are not just an end in themselves; no, they are opportunities to see disclosed among us the presence of the Holy working in fellow brothers and sisters of good will and to listen and respond. This dynamic of openness remains, at its core, the foundation of community.

It is no accident that the early Church was built on the Spirit’s work at Pentecost, when God transformed the Tower of Babel, a discordant din of strange voices closed in on themselves, into dialogue partners engaged in mission.

When we call someone “holy,” I think we should consider how wonderful it is to be in the presence of someone who is open to encountering the Other in their midst, to receive the stranger as a blessing, to have the capacity for change, conversion and dialogue. These attributes can be strengthened in oblate meetings because they are, in a sense, small but significant encounters with the listening Church, which opens itself up to God’s Word. “Listen!” is the first word in the *Rule of St. Benedict*.

That saving Word comes more and more to mind in this Extraordinary Year of Mercy. The doors of countless cathedrals and pilgrim centers have been flung open to receive anyone who passes through. These doors of mercy are not enclaves of the rich and the famous; nor are they special neighborhoods for the privileged who seek to shield themselves from the poor and the homeless.

Rather, the Church opens up the doors of mercy to reveal the forgiveness of God in love – unconditional love – which carries hope on its shoulders. The Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln has been designated by Archbishop Joseph Tobin of Indianapolis as one of the portals of mercy this Holy Year, together with the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul in Indianapolis.

The monks and oblates are honored to have such a site to welcome students, guests, pilgrims or anyone who just feels the need to pass through the gates of God's tender compassion and kindness. The Door of Mercy is a special invitation to monasteries, in particular, because

monks and nuns have always been the shelter of the poor and the needy and, in a special way, for those men and women looking for mercy and reconciliation. Monasteries stand at the margins of society offering something that culture cannot give: a place of refuge where all are loved as sons and daughters of the one God.

This year in particular, we might think of ourselves as ambassadors of reconciliation, vessels of God's mercy, as we meet one another at oblate conferences and take that grace to the rainbow of God's creation.

*Fr. Subprior Guerric DeBona, OSB, monk
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*

A look back: 71 years ago

This article is taken from the June 1945 issue of the Oblate Letter.



On May 1, we celebrated the diamond jubilee of our Monte Cassino, the shrine to Our Blessed Mother here in southern Indiana, about a mile north of the abbey. The entire community here at Saint Meinrad – monks, seminarians and town folks – were joined by delegates from nearby and distant parishes. Some 1,200 persons participated in the ceremony group gathered in a well-planned formation in front of the abbey church.

At 10:45 a.m. sharp, the brass section of our abbey concert band played a brief introduction and then all joined in singing the Monte Cassino pilgrimage

hymn, "To Monte Cassino." The procession began, during which hymns to Our Lady were sung, the rosary was recited, and the Vespers Psalms of Our Lady's Office were chanted alternately by seminarians and monks, and intermittently the band played a spirited religious piece.

On arriving at Monte Cassino Chapel, Father Abbot Ignatius Esser, OSB, with assistant ministers, incensed the statue of Our Lady and the interior and exterior of the shrine as a rededication of the chapel to God's glory and Our Lady's honor. Solemn Mass was offered. The festive sermon was preached by Very Rev. Monsignor Paul Deery, pastor of the Old Cathedral at Vincennes, Indiana.

At the consecration, a salute was fired from a small cannon and trumpets played. By 12:45 p.m., all were back at the Abbey and Seminary, except the visiting delegates, who enjoyed a box lunch on Monte Cassino hilltop. May Our Lady of Monte Cassino, Queen of Peace, intercede with her Divine Son that peace may again be restored among all nations. ♦

OBLATES *In their own words*



*Oblate Clayton Cook
Columbus, OH*

"There is nothing on any page in the Rule that doesn't come directly from the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments. These quotes fulfill us in an inspiring way and make it easy to embrace the teaching of the Rule."



Four tips for discerning a vocation as an oblate

(This is the second part of an article on a conference given by Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, at chapter meetings during 2015-16 on the topic, "An Oblate's Vocation.")

1. **Start from a faithful foundation.** If you're considering a vocation as an oblate, start with the basics by living your faith as well as you can. Start by doing what we know is the will of God, which is being a person of prayer, taking advantage of the gifts of the sacraments that the Church offers or your faith tradition offers, and a having a prayer and a concern for the needy. If we live our lives centered on the things that we know God is asking us to do, from that will flow inspirations and desires that come from God to accept His call to be an oblate.

2. **Spend time in silence.** Take some time away from technology and the media to reflect on God's will for your life. It's in the silence that the voice of God is heard. During a quiet retreat by Jesuits in my freshman year at Xavier University, I realized that I truly wanted to be a monk and so I wrote to Father Abbot Ignatius. He told me to come right now for if I wait until the next year, I may not have a vocation to the monastic life.

3. **Find a support system.** Many people are afraid to pursue a vocation as an oblate because of unsupportive friends or family members. But an oblate chapter is a great place, because it's one of the few places where people are genuinely excited for you and you can get a lot of support in being an oblate.

4. **Let go of your plans.** Many people are afraid of the oblate life because they don't want to give up control or they feel unworthy or they fear it will become just another

obligation to follow. The only way to overcome this fear is to pursue a closer relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer.

People have this vision and dream for what they want their life to be and they're afraid to give that up, but once you give it up and give it to God, God will make it so much more beautiful than you could imagine. Once you get to know God on a personal level, you will learn to trust God with every aspect of your life and you will know how to open yourself up to what God has planned for you.

Closing

Pope Paul VI once wrote, "Whoever is happy, is not bitter, is not harsh, and does not feel the need to nitpick everything all the time. People who are happy know how to keep things in perspective, because they know something that is so much greater than human limitations." Namely, they know and love God. They know that God is totally committed to us.

Today the idea of commitment perhaps seems unwise or just too risky.

Commitment can be very positive, very dynamic and very life-giving. Commitment is not dependent on the imagined perfection of community life, oblate life, work life, family life, or the perfect church. Pope Francis says: "We are all sinners!"

Commitment is grounded on the unchanging fidelity of God in the middle of it all – even in, or especially in, the messiness. It is our trust in God's faithfulness, God's commitment to us, that enables us to keep our faith, to live the faith, and to live and move and have our being in God.

"With so many witnesses like a great cloud on every side" (Hebrews 12:1), let us now place ourselves in the company of these oblates and fix our eyes on Jesus. Together let us pray that God will strengthen us in our vocation as oblates so that many others will be attracted to Saint Meinrad Archabbey and join us in the witness of being oblates.

*Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB
Director of Benedictine Oblates*



Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, and oblate Sandra Duffee greeted oblates and gave name tags and programs to oblates who attended the St. Meinrad Feast Day celebration on January 21, 2016.

Skills of the spiritual life must be practiced

This is the third report on the biennial conference of the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors at Subiaco Abbey in Arkansas.

On Monday of the NAABOD conference, July 13, 2015, the oblate directors and oblate delegates heard two additional speakers, toured a winery and visited one of the earliest parish churches in the area.

The first speaker was Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr of St. Scholastica Monastery in Fort Smith, AR. Sr. Macrina is a spiritual guide, retreat director and devotional author. Among her titles are *Abide: Keeping Vigil with the Word of God* and *Seven Sacred Pauses: Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day*.

She began by inviting the participants to imagine themselves within St. Benedict's *Sacra Speco*. After some moments of silence, she read excerpts from the "Instruments of Good

Works" (RB 4), such as: "not to give way to anger," "not to return evil for evil" and "to do no wrong to anyone, and to bear patiently wrongs done to oneself."

Sister suggested that if we can live with these words, we are moving from the theory of the Benedictine life to its practice. Like any other skill, she said, the skills of the spiritual life must be practiced.

Among the skills that we must practice is the skill of mindfulness, according to Sr. Macrina. When we wake up, she said, we must really *wake up!* and become aware of the world around us, especially the world of nature. Each morning might begin with the question, "What beautiful task am I called to today?"

In addition, she said that we must practice the skill of living simply, which might include removing the clutter from our physical spaces. Another skill that needs practice is *lectio divina*. Every day, we must practice entering our own *sacra speco* to immerse ourselves in the sacred texts.

Finally, Sister suggested that we practice the skill of work. We must learn to think of our work as service to the world. She mused that perhaps what was lost in Eden was the ability to work with joy! She concluded with a quote from Kahlil Gibran: "When you work you are a flute through whose heart the whispering of the hours turns to music."

*Jennie Latta, oblate
Memphis, TN*

Necrology – list of deceased oblates compiled



Helping compile the oblate necrology were, from left, Br. Jean Fish, OSB, Novice Tony Wolniakowski, OSB, and Novice Joshua Leeuw, OSB.

In 2014, work began to compile an oblate necrology list. We have created a list of over 4,000 names of oblates going back to the 1890s. The original document includes the names of all individuals for whom there is a record

of oblation. The necrology includes only the names of those for whom we have a date of death or we presume are deceased. Currently, 1,900 names are contained in the oblate necrology.

The necrology will be kept in the Saint Meinrad Archives, the Oblate Office and the Archabbey Church. The list will be updated regularly, as we remember these names and all oblates of Saint Meinrad in our prayers.

This work was created by Novice Tony Wolniakowski, OSB, Novice Joshua Leeuw, OSB, and Br. Jean Fish, OSB. These young monks combed through files and old publications to integrate dates of death with the corresponding oblates' names. Many hours were spent on creating this necrology. We are most grateful to them for this good work.

If you can assist in completing this list or can offer any corrections that are needed, please contact the Oblate Office. ♦

'A twitch upon the thread'



George Hubbard

Evelyn Waugh used this phrase as the subtitle for a section of *Brideshead Revisited*. Maybe that's what it was for him, but for me it was more like a kick in the

backside.

Many years ago, during my college days, I failed in an attempt at the Benedictine life. "Too soon – too immature – maybe later" had been the verdict of those monks in Michigan, and doubtless they were right. And then life intervened.

But never say never, because God has a sense of humor.

On the last day of my 2014 summer stay at Saint Meinrad Archabbey – having made my oblation the previous day – I was having breakfast with Fr. Jeremy, who was lamenting the impending loss of one of his staff organists, a young layman about to be married and move away from the community.

We talked for a bit about what this person did and I asked some questions, mostly out of curiosity. I knew what the abbey worship involved, but had no clue what else might be part of the deal.

Driving away from Saint Meinrad, heading home to Charleston, I had plenty of time to think. And I felt a call. At least, I guess that's what it was – I had heard about calls from God all my life, but they were always for other people. And here was this insistent voice in my head, telling me to write to Fr. Jeremy to ask for details and "express an interest."

Was this a call? It wasn't a dramatic Charlton Heston sort of voice from above, no vision appeared, no angels in the clouds – good thing, since I was traveling about 80 miles per hour – just this persisting thought of "I can do that; I can do it well; and I would enjoy it very much."

Two days later, I wrote the fateful email.

Three months after that, I came back to the Hill for some in-depth talk about the possibilities. And more thinking and praying and listening as I drove home.

And three months later, I made the move. It wasn't easy – there was a lot of stuff to get rid of, both selling and giving away. There was a lot of stuff to pack – way too much stuff. And books! So many books that I had read once and would never open again, and many cartons given to the public library for their annual book sale.

There were friends and acquaintances who were not happy about my impending departure, and said so – they were sincere, no doubt, but I would rather they had kept their feelings to themselves and just wished me well. And it was January – "just the worst time of year."

But even so, it all felt right! As I stood with Sonja, my good friend (and strong support), watching a truck carrying away couches, chairs, an antique sideboard, an heirloom dresser, a seven-foot antique English grand piano, a stack of framed artworks, and boxes of china and crystal to auction, she said, "Does this make you feel sad?"

To which I replied, "No! I begin to understand how Francis of Assisi felt

when he took off all his clothes in the public square – a huge weight has fallen from my shoulders." Another ratification of the rightness of my decision.

St. Benedict, somewhere in the *Rule*, directs that newcomers to the monastery are not to have things too easy – even that they are to be left standing outside for some time.

And though I was not becoming a monk – that ship sailed a long time ago – that admonition in the *Rule* rose up.

My bank had said they would give me a short-term loan to cover moving expenses – but then they didn't.

My apartment was to be ready on the day I arrived – but then it wouldn't be.

The abbey guest house reserved me a room for those few days – but then because of a construction project they had to "un-reserve" it.

There was a time in my earlier life when I would have just given the whole thing up and walked away. But not this time. This time I was playing for keeps.

Some weeks later, at lunch with some guests here on retreat, one of them asked me, "How long are you staying?" My immediate answer was, "The rest of my life, I hope."

My exit – may it be long in coming – will be, God willing, feet first.

George Hubbard, oblate
St. Meinrad, IN

Voices from the Past

Editor's note: The following is from an article that appeared in the May 1942 issue of the oblate newsletter, as written by Fr. Bernadine Shine, OSB. Oblate Michael Edwards of Evanston, IN, condensed the original article.

Holy Church is prepared for the triumphal feast of Christ's ascension into heaven. When He came to us at Christmas we thought of Bethlehem; when He leaves us we must think of heaven. We are more fortunate now than we were at Christmas. We could never go to Christ at Bethlehem, but we can go to Christ in heaven.

The apostles could not stay on the Mount of Ascension. They had work to do. But they must ever remain united to their dear Master. "Master, I desire that where Thou art, I also may be."

St. Benedict calls our spiritual life "a return to God." That is just what Christ's life and, especially His ascension, really were. This idea of a journey is the key to St. Benedict's guidance. Benedictines are travelers and their Holy Father is very solicitous that all the guidance for a successful journey be given. At all crossroads, the right path that leads straight ahead must be carefully marked.

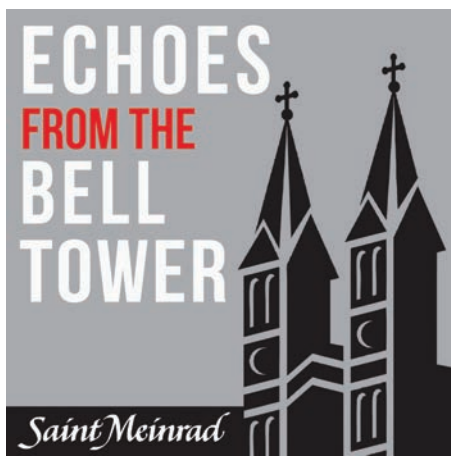
On the way, there must be no delays. This "return to God" is a journey of the soul toward heaven. And that soul needs strength and energy. Among the helps that guarantee a successful "return to God" is the advice "to desire everlasting life with all spiritual longing." To desire heaven is the surest way of getting there.

On the road of life, people are often like children. Before mother sends the child to the grocery store, she must give explicit instructions. There will usually be a caution: "Don't forget what you want and don't lose the money." Some most engaging attraction appears on the way and the child is no longer on an errand; duty yields to pleasure – the list is forgotten and the money lost.

Mistakes in childhood are never costly, but when adults become children in the all-important errand of life, then mistakes are fatal. In life there are attractions that fascinate the hearts of us all and entice us from life's one purpose. Worldly pleasures cause us to forget our eternal goal and squander our wealth of soul on earthly trifles.

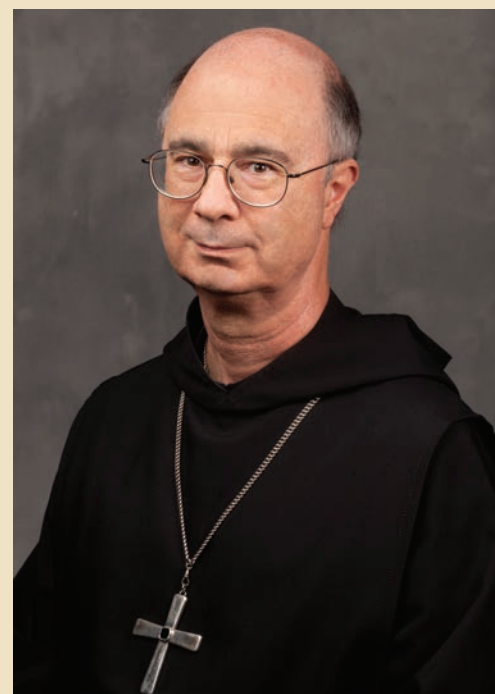
St. Benedict's guidance frees the soul from this danger. He gives us his powerful aid of desire. A desire is more than an idle wish. Desiring is the first step to doing. Wishing makes us waste time; desiring makes us use time. The desire for heaven must become a daily driving power. It is a daily food for the soul, not a special remedy in danger of sickness.

Desire grows by use and weakens by neglect. If you are going to heaven every day, then you ought to desire it every day. Each Mass, each Communion, moves you closer to heaven; that is the best place on earth to desire heaven. ♦



LISTEN TO SAINT MEINRAD'S NEW PODCAST:
www.saintmeinrad.edu/echoes

Archabbot Justin will step down as abbot June 2



Archabbot Justin DuVall

In January, Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB, announced to the monastic community that on June 2, 2016, he will step down as abbot of Saint Meinrad Archabbey. He was elected abbot on December 31, 2004. Much has been accomplished under his administration as the superior of the monastery.

Father Abbot Justin is well known by the oblates. For almost every gathering of the oblates for retreats, special events and meetings, he was there to welcome the oblates to the Hill. He also gave two retreats for the oblates during his time as abbot.

We are grateful to him for his support of and dedication to the oblates of our monastery. The election of the new abbot will take place on Thursday, June 2. We ask the prayers of the oblates as the monks discern a new abbot of the community.

Oblates return renewal cards

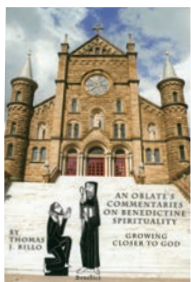
Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, was pleased with the response to the request for oblate renewals last fall. "I wish to thank the 559 oblates who returned their renewal of oblation cards. The return of your renewal card shows your continued commitment to your life of oblation," he said.

Lancaster Chapter enjoys Christmas merriment

Thirteen oblates, novices and potential novices of the Lancaster, PA, Chapter met at Sharon and Oliver Ogden's home in East Petersburg on Saturday, December 12, 2015, for a delightful potluck lunch. Delicious food, wonderful fellowship and Christmas merriment were the order of the day and the weather was gorgeous (60 degrees)!

*Sharon Ogden, oblate
East Petersburg, PA*

Oblate writes a new book



Thomas J. Rillo, an oblate from Bloomington, IN, has written a new book, *An Oblate's Commentaries on Benedictine Spirituality: Growing Closer to*

God. Tom has been a frequent contributor to material published by the Oblate Office for many years. Many of the articles in this collection of oblate commentaries were written and published in past *Benedictine Oblate* newsletters.

The book will be available at various oblate conferences held at Saint Meinrad Archabbey. In addition, oblates can contact the Oblate Office at oblates@saintmeinrad.org or (812) 357-6817. The price of the

book is \$10. Shipping will be an additional \$3.

Oblate celebrates Christmas at Saint Meinrad



Lois Palau

The notion appeared rather daunting at first. Everyone I knew already had plans for their holiday celebrations and I had none.

I decided to telephone the Guest House to see if they would be open to accommodate visitors. To my delight, they were receiving guests. I eagerly booked my room and then started contemplating what I would actually do while there. No official retreats were scheduled. I was on my own. Little did I know how special this time would be for me!

Since Pope Francis announced an Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy, I was interested in finding a way to make this year extra special. Only after arriving did I discover that the Archbishop of Indianapolis had designated the Archabbey Church as the second church in the archdiocese for Catholics to visit to receive a plenary indulgence established by the Holy See. I was delighted to be able to complete the steps, which, among other things, included passing through the special mercy door located at the front entrance of the Church.

It was wonderful to participate in the Liturgy of the Hours with the monastic community. I also went to

daily Mass and even added Eucharistic Adoration to the mix. The highlight of my visit was attending the beautiful Christmas Masses. How glorious!

Because my life has been at a crossroads of sorts as of late, I decided to seek spiritual direction from our Lord while at the monastery. Interestingly, I heard a one-word reply, interiorly. That word was "simplify." Upon my return, I have taken those words to heart.

*Lois Palau, oblate
Delaware, OH*

Vocation is focus of December retreat

Continuing the year-long theme of "Oblation as a Vocation," 85 participants (oblates, oblate novices and guests) gathered for the annual Advent Benedictine Oblate Retreat (December 11-13). Participants joined together on Friday afternoon for Mass celebrated by Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, oblate director. The invitation was extended by Fr. Meinrad in his homily: "Regularly as we pray and meditate, we come adoring the Christ Child."

Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB, shared conferences on the topic, "People Called in the Bible." He challenged each individual to examine the call narratives of the Scripture to understand how one is called to live a disciplined oblate life.

We were reminded of the importance of *lectio divina* as we meditate and contemplate the texts. As we read and meditate, we ask, "When are texts meaningful? How does it make sense? What can I get out of this text?" Fr. Harry cautioned, "Often, our questions and concerns make the text say what we want it to say. Let the text be itself so one can be drawn into the meaning. A text is meaningful when

we find the connection between the world of the text and our own.”

Fr. Harry summarized for the participants the “Rules of Catholic Interpretation”:

1. Unity of the Old and New Testament (the importance of the whole);
2. Rule of Faith (measuring through our baptismal affirmation);
3. The Living Tradition/ Magisterium (the teachings of the Church)
4. The Rule of Love (how is the interpretation in line with the great commandment – love of God and neighbor?).

Throughout the five conferences, Fr. Harry unfolded the many call narratives of people in the Bible. Through Fr. Harry’s examination, as well as discussion on the qualities and experiences of the stories, individuals were able to reflect on “the call to live the oblate life.” Here are those texts for further use in *lectio divina*:

- Call of Gideon – Judges 6:1-2, 11-24
- Call of Samuel – I Samuel 3:1-18
- Elijah and the Fiery Chariot – II Kings 2:1-15
- Isaiah of Jerusalem – Isaiah 6:1-13 and Isaiah 40:1-11
- Jeremiah – Jeremiah 1:4-10
- Joseph’s Call – Matthew 1:18-25
- Call of the Disciples – Mark 1:16-20
- Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch – Acts 8:26-40
- Call of Mary – Luke 1:26-38
- Magnificat – Luke 1:47-55
- Benedictus – Luke 1:68-79
- Wedding Feast of Cana – John 2:1-12
- Peter and Cornelius the Gentile – Acts 10:34-48
- Conversion of St. Paul – Acts 9:1-19
- Paul – Romans 1:1-7; I Corinthians 1:1-3

Concluding his conferences, Fr. Harry expressed the importance of understanding the term “covenant” through the Scriptures. A covenant is a relationship, sealed by an oath, with mutual responsibilities and mutual benefits. He emphasized the significance of covenant as “relationship.” “The vocabulary of relationship is steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness, doing good, and being whole. Our goodness is in keeping the relationship.”

He reflected on the covenant images in the servant role of Blessed Virgin Mary and the significance of mercy (original Hebrew word being “womb”). God’s mercy and our call to extend mercy is like the “no power differential” womb experience of mother and child.

Fr. Harry summarized the call narratives, and the call to live an oblate life by St. Benedict in the holy *Rule*: “Listen! Listen with the ear of the heart” and “Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God, and our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls out this charge: ‘if you hear his voice today, do not harden your hearts’” (*Rule of St. Benedict*:

Prologue 9-10). He emphasized that “the call to be an oblate is a way of manifesting the call to belong to Christ.”

The retreat ended with participants joining the monks and other guests at the Third Sunday of Advent Mass in the Archabbey Church with the special blessing of the Holy Door for the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

*William (Bill) H. Wilson, oblate
Huntington, WV*

Epiphany celebration held by Ohio chapters

Some chapters still have the custom of celebrating the threefold Manifestation of Christ. Chapter co-coordinators Jim and Rita Merk from Lancaster, OH, sent a report on the Epiphany celebration held in Columbus, OH, where Jim and Vicki Albright are co-coordinators.

On January 7, 33 oblates and friends gathered with Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, and Msgr. Robert Noon presiding over the annual feasts of the Gifts of the Magi, the Baptism of our Lord and the Wedding Feast at Cana.



The oblates of the Tell City Chapter celebrate with an Epiphany Party. Three were chosen as kings.

The program began with Mass and hymns. During the Mass, Leisel Clark was invested as an oblate novice. Following Mass, the celebration was continued by renewing our baptismal and wedding vows, along with prayers and hymns. After Mass, a cake was cut to determine who the three kings would be. Fr. Meinrad, Monica Seimer and Rita Merk were chosen. They then distributed the prayer partner gifts to everyone present.

A festive banquet concluded the gala evening. It was a special event for all the oblates of the Columbus and Lancaster oblate chapters.

*James and Rita Merk, oblates
Lancaster, OH*

Oblates join monks for feast of St. Meinrad

Local area oblates were invited to join the monks for the celebration of the feast of St. Meinrad on January 21; 65 were able to attend. The event began with Mass in the Archabbey Church with Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB, as the main celebrant.

After Mass, the oblates returned to the Guest House for a social. They then

gathered in the Guest House Chapel for noon prayer. Afterward, Norman and Judith Herzog renewed their marriage vows, celebrating 55 years of marriage. January 21 was the actual day of their wedding. Following their renewal of vows, they made their oblations. A sign of peace was given to them by all present. Their three sons, a daughter-in-law and one young grandson were able to attend.

A festive dinner was held in the Guest House dining room. A large anniversary cake was enjoyed by the oblates and guests.

Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB, gave a talk on the "Description of the Artwork – Ambo, Altar, Font, Paschal Candle Stand and the St. Meinrad Shrine." About 35 oblates were able to stay and heard an interesting and informative presentation.

INVESTITURES

November 29, 2015 – **Elena Baleva** of Bronx, NY

December 20, 2015 – **Marjorie Busch** and **William Busch**, both of Bardstown, KY

January 6, 2016 – **Burley "Ray" Gambrel** of Centerville, OH

January 7, 2016 – **Leisel Clark** of Upper Arlington, OH; **Mary Jo Sorrells** of Bloomington, IN

January 23, 2016 – **Joel Padgett** of Evansville, IN; and **Joshua Clearwater** of Litchfield, IL

January 27, 2016 – **Deacon Michael Catalano** of Nashville, TN

February 14, 2016 – **Paul Rendine** of Wakefield, RI ♦

ANNIVERSARIES

On Saturday, July 18, 2015, oblates **James and Rita Merk** celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary at St. Bernadette Church in Lancaster, OH. They have been the coordinators of the Lancaster, OH, Oblate Chapter for many years. Congratulations to them! ♦

DEATHS

December 5, 2015 – **Mabell C. Schitter** of Jasper, IN

January 4, 2016 – **David Duffy** of Jeffersonville, IN ♦

OBLATIONS

November 29, 2015 – **Debra Ann Fiacre Joan Scott** of Bristol, IN

November 30, 2015 – **Fr. Yossi Aidan Sarid** of Las Cruces, NM

December 12, 2015 – **Martha Mary Dilger** of Evansville, IN; **Shirley Catherine Galey** of Tell City, IN; **Kathy Therese Hull** of Findlay, OH; **Karen John Paul II Maynard** of Indianapolis, IN

January 3, 2016 – **Mary Preetha Gertrude Ann Valentine** of San Francisco, CA

January 16, 2016 – **Sean Aelfheah** of Canterbury Holmes of Grand Rapids,



From left, Br. William Sprauer, OSB, Burley "Ray" Gambrel, Fr. Thomas Schmidt and Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, pose for a photo after Ray was invested as an oblate novice on January 6.

MI; Edward Augustine Lukes of
Cleves, OH

January 17, 2016 – Ryan John Paul
Walker of North Little Rock, AR

January 21, 2016 – Judith Elizabeth
Herzog and Norman Luke Herzog,
both of Cannelton, IN

February 10, 2016 – Dr. Chad
Gregory Meister of Granger, IN

February 13, 2016 – Joe Joseph
Gallion and Kerri Monica Gallion,
both of Sumner, IL ♦

RENEWAL OF OBLATION

December 12, 2015 – Catherine
Scholastica Clare Osborne of Wasilla,
AK (one year) ♦

UPCOMING EVENTS

*(Rooms will be available only in the
Guest House for the 2016 Oblate Study
Days. The monks have moved into St.
Anselm Hall while extensive repairs are
under way in the monastery. And
former guest rooms in St. Bede Hall are
being used for seminarians. We
appreciate your patience during this
project.)*

April 16, 2016: The Day of
Recollection for the Louisville, KY,
area oblates will be held, with Fr.
Jeremy King, OSB, presenting talks
on “Music and the Oblates.”

May 21, 2016: The Day of
Recollection for the Ohio oblates
will be held in the Dayton, OH, area.
Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB, will be the
presenter on “Let Them Prefer
Nothing Whatever to Christ.”

June 13-16, 2016: Saint Meinrad
will host the Oblate Study Days.
Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB, will be the
presenter on “Let Them Prefer
Nothing Whatever to Christ.”

July 11, 2016: The Saint Meinrad
Day of Recollection will have Fr.
Barnabas Gillespie, OSB, as the
presenter. His topic is “Reverence in
Prayer: Should We be Concerned with
Department or Disposition, or Both?”

September 2-4, 2016: The New York
oblates will celebrate their annual
Labor Day weekend retreat with Br.
Zachary Wilberding, OSB. The title
will be “Let Silence Speak.”

September 10, 2016: The Lancaster,
PA, Day of Recollection in the Amish
country will have Fr. Barnabas
Gillespie, OSB. The title will be

“Preserving the Tradition – Enhancing
the Practice: Living the Monastic Life
with the Awareness of the Past and a
Recommitment to Spiritual Growth in
the Present.” ♦

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

The Oblate Office appreciated the
work of these recent volunteers:
Saundra Duffee, David Butzu,
Br. Simon Herrmann, Novice Joshua
Leeuw, Br. Jean Fish, Br. Joel Blaize,
Novice Tony Wolniakowski, Sean
Holms, George Thompson and
Connie Thompson, Linda Swindell. ♦

Oblate life: Annual personal evaluation

To see how well you are fulfilling your vocation as an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, reflect on the following questions. These questions are for your personal consideration and evaluation, so that you may see how you are growing as an oblate. The oblate directors are convinced that if you sincerely reflect on these questions, you can only deepen your relationship with God. And in doing so, you are truly growing in Benedictine spirituality as an oblate.

1. What have I done during the past year to continue ongoing formation as an oblate?
2. What do I plan to do during the coming year?
3. How well do I see myself living the oblate promises: (Rate yourself on a scale of 1–5, with 1 as “needing improvement” and 5 as “doing well.”)
 - Stability of heart? 1 2 3 4 5
 - Fidelity to the spirit of the monastic life? 1 2 3 4 5
 - Obedience to the will of God? 1 2 3 4 5
4. How well do I see myself fulfilling the oblate duties:
 - Praying the Liturgy of the Hours? 1 2 3 4 5
 - Reading from the *Rule of St. Benedict*? 1 2 3 4 5
 - Daily practice of *lectio divina*? 1 2 3 4 5
 - Participating in the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation or in my own faith tradition of church and prayer? 1 2 3 4 5
 - Attentiveness to God’s presence in my ordinary, daily life? 1 2 3 4 5
5. In what ways can I offer my time, talent and treasure to the services of the Oblate Community of Saint Meinrad Archabbey?
6. If I need to improve in any of these areas, what do I plan to do?



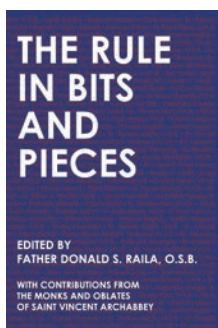
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Reading Room

Raila, Donald S. OSB, Editor. *The Rule in Bits and Pieces: With Contributions from the monks and oblates of Saint Vincent Archabbey*, St. Louis, Missouri: Sacred Winds Press, 2014.



This book is a collection of more than 140 reflections encompassing every chapter of the *Rule of St. Benedict*. Fr. Donald, the director of oblates of Saint Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, PA, served as editor for the book. An oblate suggested the idea for this book to the assistant director of oblates at Saint Vincent.

Both monks and oblates of Saint Vincent Archabbey wrote reflections based on the daily segments of the *Rule*. They particularly examine the power of the *Rule* and how it directs their lives along the path of prayer and work.

Each page of reflection includes the verse of the *Rule* on which the reflection is based. The rest of the page is the reflection of three to five paragraphs, followed by the name of the monk or oblate contributor.

Their cooperative effort makes for a readable book and will be an excellent resource for all who wish to delve more deeply into the meaning of the *Rule*. Each monk or oblate reflects on the inspiration and genius of St. Benedict in his creativity applied to writing the *Rule*.

The method of *lectio divina* can easily be applied to any of the reflections. The reflection acts as a focus on one particular aspect of the *Rule*. The book is designed to be picked up and laid down by the reader at his or her discretion.

*Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN*