

OBLATES

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SUMMER 2011

Greetings from Sr. Charlotte Lee and Kathy Frick, Oblate Co-Directors

This summer has been intense. It seemed as if every day we heard about a new natural or manmade disaster. The heat has been overwhelming, even life-threatening. In the Middle East abusive regimes have been under attack and many have fallen. Here at home politicians have been at impasse and financial disaster seemed imminent. In many ways, St. Benedict would have seen parallels to his own times. Faced with such challenges, Benedict realized that he could not solve all the problems of the world. Instead, he made the decision to create a place of stability in a world filled with chaos. He created a place where hope and faith were touchstones for those who followed his Rule.

Recently, we attended the North American Association of Oblate Directors at Saint Meinrad Archabbey . There the speakers spoke of our duty to be stewards of creation. We are responsible for that patch of God’s earth that we call home. We were reminded that although we should think globally, our work was to be done locally. As one speaker put it, “Benedictines don’t live in optimism; they live in hope.”



For us to live in hope, we must also live in faith. We proclaim our faith by how we live each day. We are faithful in the little things: spending time with God in prayer, caring for our families and living attentively in our use of our resources. None of these things are particularly exciting or noteworthy, but they are life-building and world-saving. In doing them, we have faith that they are pleasing to God. We offer hope and faith to others by our example. We have no idea how we may be touching other lives, but we believe that our actions will help to build up the Kingdom of God.

This year we return to a closer examination of the Rule, seeking a better understanding of how to live out our lives faithfully and with hope for the future. In February, Esther de Waal will guide our retreat with her reflections on stewardship and Benedict’s belief of the sacredness of all creation.

Like Benedict we find ourselves in a chaotic world, like Benedict we look to affirmation of the Gospel promises and the sensible guidance of the Rule as our path in not just surviving but creating sacred space and sacred lives.

Prayer Intentions:

We want to pray for all our Oblates and their family and friends who have passed away or are suffering during this time, that they experience God’s love and healing in a special way.

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Norbertine Priory

Desert Retreats in the Monastery by Ana Santorini

Greetings to my friends at the Benedictine Monastery of Virginia. Coming to the Oblate meetings with you has been a great experience of community and Benedictine formation, and I am truly grateful to Sr. Charlotte and Kathy who have so warmly welcomed me. I am actually a Camaldolese oblate associated with the New Camaldoli Hermitage south of Big Sur on the California coast. The Camaldolese are one of the reform movements in the Benedictine family, thanks to St Romuald (950—1025/27) of Italy who envisioned a community with the option to be a hermit or a cenobite. As a Camaldolese I crave solitary prayer and seek out places of great silence and solitude for my retreats. This year I spent just under a week each at the Norbertine Priory near Albuquerque, New Mexico (www.norbertinecommunity.org/) and at Christ in the Desert Benedictine Abbey (www.christdesert.org/) in a remote canyon north of Santa Fe, New Mexico.



Blessed Sacrament Chapel

This is my second visit to the Norbertines (Augustinian Rule). Last year I was there for ten days. I chose their retreat because it was the least expensive (\$40.00 a day) and they offered hermitages for silence and solitude. The retreaters buy and prepares his/her own food, but each tiny hermitage includes a small stove/sink combination, refrigerator, toaster oven, coffee maker, and pans, cutlery, and dishes, so preparing simple meals is easy. The hermitages comfortably meet one's needs. There are air conditioning wall units, fans, and heaters. Each hermitage also has a tiny enclosed "garden," but since this is seriously "deserty" desert only a tree and a bush are growing there. But there are curious road runners, ambivalent cotton tails, and skittish jack rabbits, and plenty of interesting (and not so interesting) bugs. They are relatively close to the airport, so for \$10.00 each way Br. Angelo will get you there and back.

Now for the beauty. The atmosphere is truly quiet. The library and chapel are quite new and amazingly beautiful in architecture, color, with magnificent life-size sculptures of Our Lady, John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, St. Norbert, and St. Augustine. They also have lovely icons. Their Blessed Sacrament Chapel has a huge window overlooking the desert and the Sandia Mountains. All of this has central air conditioning which is a blessing in the summer. I would spend an hour or more in the heat of the day taking advantage of the view and the coolness of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel.

Always open is a small John the Baptist Chapel, very lovely but without air conditioning. There are places to walk across the desert which are best in the summer during the magnificent sunrises and sunsets. My routine included an extended meditation starting before sunrise and another after sunset in this chapel with an evening walk.

The friars are extremely welcoming and invite the retreaters to morning prayer, followed by Mass, and evening prayer. They work in parishes during the day, so there is no midday prayer in community. The retreat and library director, Meg Ashcroft, is a gifted spiritual director. The extensive library is available to all retreaters.



Christ in the Desert Benedictine Monastery was, in my case this time, quite a different experience, but also very rich. The monastery is in a breath-taking beautiful canyon at the end of a narrow, 13-mile, dirt and gravel road that departs a 2-lane highway north of Abiquiu where Georgia O’Keefe lived and painted. The road becomes impassable if it rains enough, and is challenging anyway as it sometimes hugs a cliff overhanging the Chamas River. You must have a car to get there, but my tiny rental made it just fine, thank God. While the desert near Albuquerque is flat, dry, and white or brown, the desert at the Benedictines is red, white, yellow, brown, black, and green with imposing cliffs and dramatic views. The retreat house is very simple but quite adequate. Each retreator gets a battery-powered lantern which is the only lighting in the rooms and a common bathroom. Of course there is no air conditioning, but there are heaters for winter, but I cannot tell you how they are powered (they used to have wood stoves). They have kerosene-powered appliances in the retreat house common room. The church and the monks’ quarters are about a quarter of a mile down the canyon. The church and the relatively new refectory/gift shop/gathering area are full of light, thanks to huge windows that bring in the incredible scenery, and there is mainly solar-powered electricity there. The refectory has a full-wall icon mural that is beautiful. The acoustics are magnificent so when the monks chant at meals the sound is truly heavenly. The suggested donation at Christ in the Desert is \$60.00 a night, including all three meals.



Christ in the Desert Benedictine Monastery



The monks are extremely welcoming. One has the opportunity to talk with them and other retreaters, over refreshments after Mass on Sundays and the Feast of St. Benedict (which fell during my sojourn there!). A spirit of silence, rather than a rule of silence, holds sway, and retreaters are encouraged not to talk to the monks under ordinary circumstances (or to each other), but one is invited to volunteer some labor in the mornings (ora et labora) and your “boss” may turn out to be a lively conversationalist. Retreaters are welcomed to all seven liturgical Hours, Mass, lunch, and dinner (music during one meal; reading during the other). The Office is in Gregorian chant, sometimes in Latin; office books are provided. The guest master, Br. James, is very helpful.

My experience this time at Christ in the Desert was powerful but not because of silence and solitude. My first morning was Sunday, the second the Feast of St. Benedict, so after those Masses the conversation over refreshments set something of a precedence for sharing with other retreaters. Each retreat room comes with a medallion that you can wear if you want people not to talk with you at all, but this time, I was reluctant to wear it. Somehow the sharing of stories seemed to need to happen. Only on my last full day did I declare a hermit day, which was glorious. Nevertheless, God was very present and active in all aspects of this retreat in this incomparable setting.

I began and ended my retreat at the Norbertines and my retreat at Christ in the Desert with a ritual that sort of suggested itself and evolved according to the inner and outer circumstances. I was glad I did that. Now I am savoring the experiences as I reread my journal and ponder, hoping to be present to the more that God is waiting to reveal.

The silence and solitude work their deepening power in these places.





National Basilica, DC

Pilgrimage by Kathy Adams

Someone recently asked me if I had been on any pilgrimages. To the devout young lady asking the question, clearly pilgrimages were extremely important, and a large part of her spiritual life. I had always thought of pilgrimages as long trips, to Israel or Ephesus, to Fatima, or Lourdes. My first and obvious answer to her was to say no, that I had not been on any pilgrimages.

As I pondered her question, I realized that I, just as you, have been on many pilgrimages. I had made a trip to the National Basilica in Washington, DC. When I was in Prague, I had made a point to pray at the chapel in the city square and was blessed with the most peaceful Christ I have ever seen, in a church with baby blue walls and serene figures painted all around. I have stopped at Emmitsburg to visit the Elizabeth Seton memorial. And so I went on, realizing that indeed I had made many pilgrimages. Sometimes I come to the monastery to walk the labyrinth, go to the seashore to ponder the miracle of God's creation, or to my quiet room to sit with the Lord and wait for Him to speak to me.



Basilica at Emmitsburg

"A trip with a great spiritual or moral purpose," is one definition of a pilgrimage. Our life is a journey with great spiritual purpose. St. Benedict gives us the gift of starting each day anew on this precious life journey. Lest you feel that you haven't been on a pilgrimage, as I felt, I invite you to start each day as a new step on our life pilgrimage, to apply the rule of Benedict more consciously as we give ourselves anew each day to the Lord. Yes, we are all pilgrims in our journey. Let us support one another as we travel the road of life on a pilgrimage to our Lord.

Bedford Deanery's Summer by Becky Holdenbach

The Bedford Oblate group met three times over the summer. Two were social occasions full of good food and good conversation in the homes of Oblates who generously offered us hospitality. Our other gathering was our annual summer retreat graciously presented by Sr. Cecilia.

We started out summer retreat with coffee and catching up then shared Morning Prayer. After satisfying our bodies with a light breakfast together, we settled in for a day of feeding our minds and souls. Our topic was the good zeal of the monastic. We began by looking at good zeal as contrasted with bitter zeal. This really touched on some of my recent experiences with following several blogs. In these blogs I found comments full of venom from people who were desperate to keep others from falling off the path of righteousness, even if they had to destroy them to do so. We followed this with the story from Wangari Maathai about having to not be so full of ourselves that we cannot listen to wisdom. Once emptied of pride and bitter zeal, we considered conversations which had changed our life and to whom we should be listening more carefully. We then took a break and shared a salad potluck. We ended with a reflection on broken relationships using the story Seed-folks. We reflected by asking who we were in the story and how could we mend our community and family ties. We are looking forward to our first fall meeting in less than 2 weeks.

"On behalf of the Bedford Oblates I would like to thank Sister Cecelia for visiting and speaking at our Annual Summer Retreat. It was such a blessing for us to have her in our midst and all to ourselves for a few hours. We hope this will be the beginning of many more visits to us in the future. Blessings & Peace, Rita Zimmermann"

Around The Monastery

On June 24 Sister Cecilia Dwyer was installed as prioress for her sixth term. Sister Cecilia was first elected as prioress in 1987 and went on to serve three consecutive four-year terms. She was canonically ineligible to serve as prioress after 12 years of service and took a year's sabbatical. During that year she attended St. John's School of Theology and Seminary in Collegeville, Minnesota. Upon her return to Bristow she served for three years as Vocation Director until her reelection in 2003.



On June 4 five sisters celebrated their jubilees. They are:

Sister Anita Sherwood (75 years). Born one of seven children in Vienna, VA, Sister Anita is a graduate of St. Gertrude High School in Richmond, holds a bachelor's degree in French, and a master's degree in English. She made her profession on April 12, 1936. During her active ministry days, she taught in Richmond and served as a principal. She also spent many years as pastoral assistant at five parishes. Sister Anita is now retired and living full time at the monastery.

Sister Henry Marie Zimmermann (60 years). Born in Richmond on March 25, 1931, Sister Henry Marie is a graduate of St. Gertrude High School. She holds a master's degree from Villanova University in PA. She made her profession on April 8, 1951, and spent more than 30 years in teaching and administration at the elementary and high school levels in the Richmond and Arlington dioceses. She served as Treasurer at the monastery for many years.

Sister Mary Patricia Herrity (50 years). Sister Mary Patricia was born June 30, 1940, in Washington, DC. She holds a master's degree in library science from Rosary College (now Dominion University) in Chicago. She made her professions on March 25, 1961. She taught at several schools and currently serves as librarian at Linton Hall School on the monastery grounds.

Sister Anne Marie Lange (50 years). Sister Anne Marie was born November 20, 1938, in Richmond and graduated from St. Gertrude High School in Richmond. She holds a nursing degree from Prince William School of Nursing. She made her profession Sept. 12, 1961. Sister Anne Marie has served at Linton Hall Military School in Bristow, St. Paul School in Richmond and as the infirmarian for the Benedictine Monastery in Bristow. Currently she does pastoral care at All Saints Church in Manassas.

Sister Mikki Planter-Bromell (25 years). Sister Mikki is a mainstay at Linton Hall School. Usually surrounded by a cluster of children, she conducts the before and after care program at the school.



News from the Nevada Deanery by Sharon Hennessy-Bonas

The Nevada deanery met for their annual St. Benedict's Day celebration on July 10th for prayer, a mid-summer meeting, and a feast day celebration of food. I, as the new dean, led my first meeting. A new year has begun with different people assuming existing positions of responsibility, while others stepped into new positions.

We have new people as treasurer-Val Nunes, social correspondent-Carolyn Swift, and prayer coordinator-Mary Johnson. As prayer coordinator, Mary will select a monthly prayer leader for morning prayer and someone different for our monthly evening prayer. New positions established are environment/sharing where Joan Hall will contact someone each month to create a prayer or environmental center on the table with a candle. If prayer items are used, the person mentions its significance. Joan Hall will also do publicity, submitting information to the parish bulletin on a monthly basis with the purpose of gaining additional exposure for our Oblate community. Hospitality/social will be headed by Lorraine Diedricksen and Gisele Davis. Many of us only see each other at our monthly meeting. Two different people will set up a beverage and treats for 20 minutes of social after evening prayer at our monthly meeting.

A new area added to our monthly meetings will focus on books currently being read by our Oblates. A brief sharing will take place offering opportunities for new personal reading.

The Nevada deanery has a practice of selecting a word from a sealed envelope containing words from "The Rule". We silently live with that word for six months. Some of the old words, very similar to each other, were removed. The new words or phrases, all from "The Rule", are:

- Practice good zeal. Ch. 72.
 - Control my mouth. Ch. 4, vs. 51-54.
 - Fast. Ch. 39.
 - Behave in the presence of God and His angels. Ch. 19, vs.6.
 - First be holy, that you may be truly called so. Ch. 4, vs. 62.
 - Daily confess to God in prayer your past sins with tears and sighs, and amend them for the future. Ch. 4, vs. 57-58.
 - They praise the Lord working in them, and say with the Prophet: not to us, Lord, not to us give the glory, but to your name alone. Psalm 113:9, Prologue 30.
- Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.Ch.7, vs.1.

Our first meeting of the fall season is on September 7th. This year, our deanery will be reading and discussing monthly the same chapters as those being read and discussed in Bristow, VA.

We eagerly anticipate the arrival of Sr. Charlotte and Kathy Frick for our retreat on September 24th. Mary Johnson and Val Nunes will make their oblation at that time with Kim Shrum and Sharon Maloney becoming novices. Our new Oblates are a welcomed addition to our group bringing humility, strength of spirituality, and hearts centered on our Lord.

The Nevada deanery wishes each of you blessings of good health, stability in and from prayer, and comfort through the peace of our minds knowing that God is always with us on our journey

A Life-Changing Adventure in Hospitality by Rita Lombardo

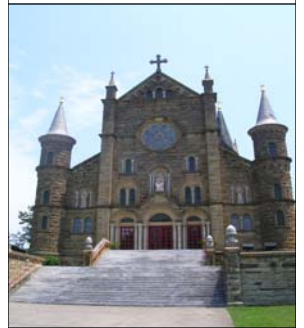
I had no idea what to expect when I set out for Indiana as one of the attendees of the North American Association of Oblate Directors (NAABOD) biennial meeting. I prayed that I wouldn't be in over my head and not grasp what the meeting was all about. But nothing could have been further from the truth. Instead, I found accomplished, gifted, and sophisticated speakers and participants, each one a star in their own right. Each one dedicated to sharing their story of making this world a better place for others through their work and life as Benedictines.

This year's theme "Embracing Creation with Reverence and Hospitality: Listening to Scripture and the Rule Speak" had wonderful speakers from St. Meinrad and Immaculate Conception Monasteries. Not only were the speakers authentic and passionate about their work, but the attendees I spoke to were too. No one took his or her role as a Benedictine lightly. Not the monk who sang like an angel in the concert they gave, and then later demonstrated his skill as a potter: or the monk, a gospel scholar and teacher, who so changed himself into a bent and subdued reader of Psalms that I did not recognize him at the social after the show: or any of the powerful Benedictine sisters of the Immaculate Conception Monastery who welcomed us and hosted an extraordinary dinner and tour of their "home."

They all had a sense of humor! They all had a sense of fun. There was no shortage of smiles. No shortage of laughter. No shortage of generosity and thoughtfulness. No shortage of hospitality. I guess that was the point, they all knew about hospitality. They knew it deeply and on many levels. Every effort they made to create an exceptional meeting was heartfelt. Everything they offered came from their hearts – their beautiful Benedictine hearts.



St. Meinrad Archabbey. IN



Chapter room at St. Meinrad Monastery



Monastery gardens at St. Meinrad



OBLATION CEREMONY 2011

On the lovely morning of May 14, the Sisters and oblates celebrated the annual Oblation Ceremony by welcoming 12 women and men as oblates and another 11 as novices. They were 23 individuals with 23 unique stories of their journey leading to that May morning. For some it was a relatively short journey of two or three years. For others, it was the culmination of a lifetime of inquiry. Yet, each one was responding to the question Sister Cecilia asked at the ceremony, “What is it that you seek?” Their ultimate reply is contained in the Act of Oblation the 12 new oblates read aloud, signed and placed on the altar:

I promise to dedicate myself
To the service of God and humanity
According to the Gospel of Jesus Christ
And the Rule of Benedict,

The Oblation Ceremony is always a very moving one. The Sisters, novices and candidates lined up in the Gathering Space and processed, two by two, into the Chapel where the oblates, friends and families waited.

After Sister Cecilia greeted those in attendance, the assembly celebrated mid-day prayer. Rita Zimmerman (Bedford deanery) read from Chapter 4 of the Rule, *The Tools for Good Works*, followed by Annie McEntee (Richmond deanery) who proclaimed from Chapter 5 of the Gospel of St. Matthew, “*You are the light of the world . . .*” Diane McGuire (Bedford deanery) shared her reflection on what oblation meant to her.

The candidates were the first to be questioned by Sister Cecilia when she asked “What is it that you seek?” Their replies were firm, although some were quietly spoken. They were then received as novices and presented with a copy of the Rule, as a mark of their formal commitment. Next, came the novices, who in turn read out their Act of Oblation. After their proclamation of intent, they moved to the ambo, where they signed their Oblation. Sister Cecilia signed on behalf of the Community, affixed the monastery seal, and handed it back to the new oblate to place on the altar. Next Sister Charlotte Lee and Kathy Frick fastened an oblate pin on each new oblate.

At the end of the ceremony a small stack of Oblations lay on the white altar cloth, representative of twelve new Benedictines, who joined all those Benedictines, vowed and laypeople, who have gone before as part of the Community of the Benedictine Sisters of Virginia. Henceforth, the 12 new oblates are entitled to use the designation, *Obl.S.B. (Oblate of St. Benedict)* after their name.

After processing out, the new novices and oblates were quickly gathered back up and brought back in the chapel for a set of pictures, which can be seen on the OSBVA.org website, under the Oblate section.

The celebration then turned from the solemn to the festive, with a luncheon in the community dining room. Two cakes decorated with congratulations and frosting roses were speedily devoured. Too soon, it was time for everyone to leave. “Good-by” and “See you in the fall,” filled the air.

By mid-afternoon, the monastery had returned to its usual routine. But in the quiet air of the Chapel hung the question,

What is it that you seek?



**Come and
join us
where there
is peace and
hospitality**



Bristow Oblate Meeting Schedule 2011-2012

September 10	Porter of the Monastery (Chapter 66)	Kathy Frick
October 8	Silence and restraint of speech (Chapter 6)	Sister Cecilia
November 5	Obedience (Chapter 5)	Sister Charlotte Lee
December 10	Humility (Chapter 7 part 1)	Sister Trinidad
January 14	Humility (Chapter 7 part 2)	Sister Mary Clark
February 11	Oblate Retreat on stewardship	Esther DeWaal
March 10	Tools of Good Works (Chapter 4 part 1)	Sister Vicki
April 21	Tools of Good Works (Chapter 4 part 2)	Sister Kathy
May 12	Oblation Ceremony	

Richmond Oblate Meeting Schedule 2011-2012

September 17	Porter of the Monastery (Chapter 66)	Kathy Frick
October 15	Silence and restraint of speech (Chapter 6)	Sister Cecilia
November 19	Obedience (Chapter 5)	Sister Charlotte Lee
December 17	Humility (Chapter 7 part 1)	Sister Trinidad
January 21	Humility (Chapter 7 part 2)	Sister Mary Clark
February 11	Oblate Retreat on stewardship	Esther DeWaal
March 17	Tools of Good Works (Chapter 4 part 1)	Sister Vicki
April 21	Tools of Good Works (Chapter 4 part 2)	
May 12	Oblation Ceremony	