

# Oblates live by the Rule of St. Benedict

Elected officials of our country swear an oath to govern according to our Constitution, a document developed by our founders. Judges and courts swear an oath to administer justice based on our Constitution and case law.

Churches live by a set of directives based on their holy writings. The Catholic Church has canon law, a set of ordinances and regulations made by ecclesiastical authority for governing.

Each of these systems amends and revises these laws to reflect the needs and issues that arise and affect the people they intend to serve.

As oblates, we make a promise to live according to a rule developed over 1,500 years ago by St. Benedict. Over the centuries, this rule has held strong. Just like our Constitution, legal system, and canon law, the *Rule of St. Benedict* has needed some reinterpretation over the years, but its truth remains solid.

The *Rule of St. Benedict* focuses us on the real-life issues that develop when people live together, whether that is in a religious community, a family, or a neighborhood. The *Rule* focuses on our day-to-day encounters and reminds us that ego, anger, and mumbling all contribute to division and are contrary to the principles of the human community.

With this issue of the *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly*, we will explore the *Rule of St. Benedict* and its application on our lives as oblates.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate  
New Salisbury, IN*



Artwork by Br. Martin Espamer, OSB



# A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

“Listen, my child. I want you to place the ear of your heart on the solid ground of the Master’s wisdom (what I received, I’m passing on to you).

This advice is from a spiritual father who loves you and gives you the sort of counsel that will shape your whole life.

Listening is hard work, but it’s the essential work. It opens you up to the God that you’ve rejected when you have only listened to yourselves. If you’re ready to give up your addiction to yourself, this message is for you: to listen is to equip yourself with the best resources available to serve the real Master, Christ the Lord.”

(Prologue 1-3)

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## Look at all these choices!



*Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB*

“So many choices, so little time.” I remember that advertisement years ago. I can’t remember exactly what was being advertised, but the phrase could easily be applied to many a familiar situation – for example, that

of a young child whose mother had dropped him off at a candy store.

“Go ahead and fill up a bag, honey, and I’ll be back to pick you up in five minutes.” Alas! “So many choices and so little time.” What child could not be ecstatic at the “so many choices” – and yet be frustrated at the “so little time”?

A monk or an oblate might feel much the same if asked to select a favorite verse or two from St. Benedict’s *Rule*. So many wonderful verses in those 73 chapters, but if you had to choose only one or two ...?

Here’s what I suggest as a few prized pieces from the *Rule* that I believe can guide us throughout the day, no matter

the time, situation or circumstance. First of all, every time you begin a good work, you must pray to him most earnestly to bring it to perfection. What Benedict writes here in verse 4 of his Prologue, he further comments upon briefly a few dozen verses later: “[They] do not become elated over their good deeds; they judge it is the Lord’s power, not their own, that brings about the good in them” (v. 29).

Remember when Catholics were encouraged to start our day with a Morning Offering? It’s still good advice and is something we can do upon awakening – or when beginning a meeting or a task of even transitioning from the morning to the afternoon to the evening hours. It reminds us that no matter what we are doing or saying, we can try to do it in a way that praises the Lord and is an occasion of grace for those we are with.

To paraphrase a “Morning Offering for every hour of the day” I was taught so many years ago: “O Lord, may what I am about to do begin with your inspiration, proceed under your guidance, and reach fulfillment according to your will.”

*Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*



*Steve Graham is invested as an oblate novice by Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB, in a ceremony in the Archabbey Church on December 3, 2022.*

# How the *Rule* governs the lives of oblates



Janis Dopp

If you are wondering how to let the *Rule of St. Benedict* guide your life from day to day, you need look no further than the third paragraph of the Prologue.

It tells us, “Let us get up then, at long last, for the Scriptures rouse us when they say: *It is high time for us to arise from sleep* (Rom 13:11). 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* (Ps 94[95]:8).

And again: “*You that have ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit says to the*

*churches* (Rev 2:7).” And what does He say? “*Come and listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord* (Ps 33[34]:12). *Run while you have the light of life, that the darkness of death may not overtake you* (John 12:35).”

And, again in paragraph six, we hear, “... the Lord shows us the way to his tent. The ones who walk without blemish and do justice; who speak truth in their hearts; who have not used their tongues for deceit nor wronged anyone nor listened to slander against a neighbor.”

If we are diligently reading the holy *Rule of St. Benedict*, we realize that all these guidelines are about everyday life. We are to be good to one another and honest about ourselves. This may sound easy, but it can also be daunting. It is so easy to slip into

criticism of another, to prop ourselves up rather than to uplift someone else.

It is far too easy to hold on to grudges rather than forgive and forget. Living a good life is as simple as practicing hospitality toward all people – not just the ones we like or love, but also those that we struggle with or don’t know. If we hear his voice today, what do we really listen to? Just what we want to hear or something that will change our hearts?

As St. Benedict tells us, we must begin today so that the “darkness of death” does not overtake us. All virtues must be practiced daily. They are not platitudes that we smile about without acting upon. They are sure directives by which we can live our lives to the fullest.

Janis Dopp  
Oblate Director

## *Rule of St. Benedict* guides us every day



Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB

The *Rule of St. Benedict* guides the lives of Benedictine oblates. The *Rule* does not guide them occasionally, or only on certain days of the week. It is not

turned on and off like a water faucet. The *Rule of St. Benedict* runs like a thread throughout a Benedictine oblate’s life. When oblates attempt to live out their duties and promises, then the *Rule* permeates their entire lives.

To be guided by the *Rule* occurs when oblates follow their oblate duties.

These include praying the Liturgy of the Hours daily; reading from the *Rule of St. Benedict* each day; the daily practice of *lectio divina*; participating frequently in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, or the traditions of one’s own denomination; and daily attentiveness to the presence of God in daily life.

To be guided by the *Rule* happens when oblates follow their oblate promises. These are stability of heart in being committed to the monastic community of Saint Meinrad; fidelity to the spirit of monastic life, which includes living a life of spirituality, piety and balance; and obedience to the will of God through growth in discernment of God’s will through prayer, spiritual direction and

faithfulness to one’s religious traditions.

Benedictine oblates are guided by the *Rule of St. Benedict* in the spiritual basics of life each day as they seek God everywhere they find themselves. In the *Rule*, St. Benedict tells us it is important to remember: “That God may be glorified in all things.”

This does not necessarily mean great and fantastic spiritual exercises. It means the “all things” of one’s everyday world. Oblates seek God in work, rest, study, recreation, friends, family, and all areas of life.

Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB  
Oblate Chaplain

# Notes for Novices:

## The Rule: A guide for beginners



Br. Gregory Morris

In writing the holy *Rule*, Benedict envisions a cruciform way of life. He took great care to ease the harsher edges endemic of earlier monastic rules, while emphasizing the virtues of moderation, discretion and flexibility.

However, regulations and warnings remain in his *Rule*, such as sleeping arrangements, a detailed daily prayer schedule, consequences for offenses in the choir, provisions against prideful and ambitious supervisors, etc. Rigidity and routine seemingly contradict the flexibility often touted in the *Rule*.

According to St. Benedict, conversion is an ongoing and recurrent, lifelong endeavor. It is not merely an intellectual

activity, where one adjusts or accommodates new information under any circumstance. For Benedict, conversion is *metanoia*, a radical change in one's way of life. This involves not only how we think, but how we perceive and act.

Change is attractive, but also quite scary. It requires a willing heart and an openness to possibilities unknown and unforeseen. There is the risk! Most of us (really, all of us) would say: forget it. Nevertheless, it is in our human nature to change.

We couldn't survive as a species without our capacity to evolve and develop. Yet, change doesn't happen overnight. If left to our own devices, we soon fall back into old habits, into absurd ways of doing things. To play on an idiomatic expression: Conversion. It's complicated!

Benedict expects those following the *Rule* to be beginners. This "little rule" unburdens our innate proclivities to expect impossible outcomes and perfection in all things. When our hearts harden, the *Rule* prescribes grace and mercy. If we become feeble or incapacitated, the *Rule* provides comfort and healing.

When our self-will runs astray, the *Rule* invites us to confess our thoughts and walk the steps of humility. In short, we are called to be perpetual beginners. The *Rule* is a framework, a signpost pointing us along the narrow road. It is a life "cruciformed" by a Love that affirms our perpetual beginnings.

Br. Gregory Morris, OSB  
Oblate Novice Mentor

# Notes from Novices:

## First Principles: How the Rule works like a Lego set



Keith Jennings

As I've reflected on how the *Rule of St. Benedict* governs my life as an oblate, I've continually returned to a philosophical and scientific concept known as "first principles."

First principles have a long history of application in philosophy, mathematics, physics and other sciences. In essence, a first principle is a

fundamental truth or axiom. Aristotle explained it as "the first basis from which a thing is known."

To understand the concept of first principles and how to apply it, imagine seeking shelter in a rickety old barn as a heavy snowstorm moves in. To make matters worse, war has broken out, your hometown has been overtaken, and you are an internally displaced person. To have a chance of surviving, you must keep moving, because the fighting will reach the barn within 24 hours.

Inside the barn there is a broken-down tractor, a bike with no wheels, and an array of farm tools and discarded scraps. How would you keep moving without freezing, starving or being captured?

First principles provide you with a powerful approach to critical and creative thinking that can increase your chances of success in any situation.

A first principle is like a Lego brick, which is the basic building block of the entire Lego ecosystem. With Lego

bricks, you can build anything you can imagine: a truck, rocket ship, mythical creature, abstract art, house, you name it.

If you approach the snowstorm/barn scenario above through the lens of Lego, then first principles thinking would have you mentally break down everything you find around you into its parts and pieces. This means you would have all the pieces of the tractor, the bike, the tools and scraps, as well as the wood and metal of the barn, to work with. You would even have the snow for hydration.

Maybe you could make a mobile shelter to protect and hide yourself while you keep moving. Maybe you could create a makeshift snowmobile or insulated cover.

The books of Genesis to Deuteronomy are filled with

commandments. I read that an artist by the name of Archie Rand has worked for five decades (and counting) on a multi-panel painting depicting the 613 commandments found in these first five books of the Torah. That's a lot of commandments!

When asked which commandment in the law is the greatest, Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Then He continued, "And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40, NRSV)

These two "great commandments" are the first principles. They are the first basis from which all other commandments are known. So how

does this concept apply to our lives as Benedictine oblates?

As the world we inhabit grows larger and more complex, St. Benedict's *Rule* provides us with the essential building blocks we need to navigate and deepen our relationships with God, our neighbors and ourselves. These building blocks equip us to 1) be a blessing where we are (stability), 2) embrace growth and change (fidelity), and 3) stay attentive (obedience) to the Divine Presence within and around us.

When applied through consistent prayer and work, these Benedictine first principles serve as the building blocks of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

*Keith Jennings, oblate novice  
Milton, GA*

## Living by the *Rule* creates a sacred trust



*Ellen Godbey*

When asked how becoming an oblate would change my life, I first thought, "It won't. I will just keep on trudging or plugging away." But actually, living the *Rule*

changes me, sometimes in imperceptible ways.

"Go gently," a friend advised. Tread softly, simply and serenely in joy and thanksgiving, my whole life praising the Lord, serving God with joy and gladness. Micah 6:8 daily reminds me to "act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly." Would I try to live that tenet without oblation? Maybe, probably, but there's a commitment, a responsibility, a sacred trust that

draws me more and more to form the pattern of my life based on the holy *Rule of St. Benedict*.

Trudging on is not burdensome because it is the grace of perseverance. All is gift. All my ordinary thoughts and activities become more extraordinary with the mindful presence of God infusing them.

Am I quicker to obey and listen within my family, my friends, my church and civic community? Maybe, probably. Am I stable, both interiorly and exteriorly? I hope so. Is my yearning and thirsting for God deeper as I struggle up that slippery ladder of humility? Yes.

Sliding down into the familiar abyss of egocentric pride is easy; patiently enduring the bumps and blisters on the tough and humble way up can be

daunting if I lose sight of the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Am I learning to be more silent, guarding my tongue? Maybe, probably. At least I'm more aware when I slip and fall. Do the daily rituals of praying the Liturgy of the Hours, reading from the *Rule*, and practicing *lectio divina* provide more balance and focus to my day? Yes.

Even though I'm still trying to "master" *lectio* (and I know "master" is neither correct nor possible, only God's gentle prodding drawing me to prayer and a deeper relationship with and sense of his presence), I will persevere through God's grace. Day by day, minute by minute, the ladder beckons.

*Ellen Godbey, oblate novice  
Yosemite, KY*

# NAABOD conference keynote talks summarized



Maureen and Paul Reichardt

This article summarizes the three keynote addresses delivered at the National American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors (NAABOD) Conference, held August 4-9, 2022.

As you may recall, in the Winter 2023 issue, the article mentioned that Sr. Kathryn Huber, OSB, delivered the keynote address prepared by Sr. Anita Lowe, OSB, as Sr. Anita was ill.

## Post-Secular Oblation by Fr. Thomas Gricoski, OSB

Fr. Thomas' keynote address, titled "Post-Secular Oblation," explored both the present and future of Benedictine oblate life and Benedictine oblate communities. We live today, he pointed out, in a secular age, an age whose dominant characteristics include separation of church and state, decline of religious faith and practice, and religious faith (where it exists) that is not only optional but fragile, based on discovering one's own personal meaning rather than following a traditional spiritual pathway.

Superimposed on the secular framework of our age is a stark reality that presents a particular challenge to Benedictine oblates living today and those who will follow us in the future. Not only is traditional religion itself in decline (as judged by church attendance and membership), but the number of professed monks and sisters

is also declining. In contrast, the number of Benedictine oblates is increasing. What do these contrasting trajectories portend for post-secular oblation?

Fr. Thomas sees in oblation and oblate communities the means to challenge secularization and to break down barriers between the self and transcendent reality (God) and between the self and the Other (community). In particular, cultivation of the Benedictine practice of *lectio divina* breaks down the barrier, isolating the self from transcendent reality.

Similarly, Benedictine hospitality dismantles barriers between the self and others. And the Benedictine cultivation of community can help promote unity within the Church at large. In the future, oblates and oblate communities should assume a larger role in promoting these Benedictine values in the secular world.

For further reading: Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*; Thomas Howard, *Chance or the Dance? A Critique of Modern Secularism*; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

## Being Benedictine by Sr. Judith Sutura, OSB

In 2018, Sr. Judith and two other Benedictines (Sr. Linda Romey, OSB, of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and Judith Valente, oblate of Mount St. Scholastica Monastery in Atchison, Kansas) came together with a shared vision of gathering a group of "Benedictine professed, oblates, and seekers to open up and cross-pollinate conversation and sharing on living the Benedictine charism into the future."

A website called "Being Benedictine" was soon launched, followed by a

virtual conference in May 2021 that attracted 220 participants from almost 50 monasteries. In her NAABOD keynote address, titled "Being Benedictine: Landing Right Side Up," Sr. Judith shared key themes and questions that emerged from the conference.

Like Fr. Thomas, Sr. Judith recognizes the challenges that monastic houses face as the number of vowed religious continues to decline, but also sees hope in the increasing number of lay people who are drawn to Benedictine spirituality. She emphasized that the Benedictine tradition has been in existence for over 1,500 years and, although many great monasteries are gone, the larger Benedictine movement remains.

She also noted that Benedictine life has always faced challenges and changes – Benedict himself lived in a time of great social and political upheaval – but that "each generation of Benedictines has survived by being what was needed at the time: a place of prayer and community."

Sr. Judith noted that, as we work to spread Benedictine spirituality into the 21st century, we must begin within the solid foundation of Benedictine tradition and a recognition that Benedictine values such as listening, community, stability, hospitality, humility and prayer are needed in our society.

In response to this need, we must ask: "How do we more fully develop monastic formation programs for oblates and other seekers?" and "How do we bring a Benedictine presence to the issues of our day and to people on the margins?"

From the roots of tradition, Benedictines must be willing to

branch out, embracing change with openness and flexibility. In response to questions such as, “What will the Benedictine charism look like in the future?” and “How will we get there?”, the significance of community, diversity and inclusivity emerged from conference conversations.

Of primary importance is the nurturing of the already-existing relationships between vowed religious and oblates. As monasteries decline or disappear, however, each group must be willing to engage in self-reflection on their changing roles within the monastic tradition.

An emerging diversity of approaches to Benedictine life must be recognized in various communities such as The Dwelling Place Monastery (mtabor.com), an ecumenical Benedictine community in Kentucky; and Nuns and Nones (nunsandnones.org), an intergenerational community of sisters and seekers.

We also recognize that the future of Benedictine spirituality rests in embracing inclusivity across religious traditions, generations, nationalities, racial identities, and persecuted or otherwise marginalized peoples.

## **Benedict’s Spirituality of the Hours by Sr. Anita Louise Lowe, OSB**

Sr. Anita Louise Lowe’s keynote address, “Benedict’s Spirituality of the Hours,” contains a vision of Benedictine life in the future that is centered in words written some 1,500 years ago in the *Rule*: “Let nothing be preferred to the Work of God” (*RB* 43.3).

The resilience of Benedictine spirituality lies in the strength of its prayer life, Sr. Anita contends. She thus proposes a deepening of Benedictine prayer life among both professed religious and oblates as the basis for sustaining and enhancing Benedictine spirituality in the future.

The deepening of Benedictine prayer life involves renewal of two of the most ancient forms of Benedictine prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours and *lectio divina*. By augmenting these ancient prayer forms, it becomes possible to recognize previously hidden spiritual dimensions.

Sr. Anita proposes, for example, recognizing and connecting “strong moments” of spiritual awareness experienced during the day into composite thoughts or visual images

that bring into clearer focus some word, passage or theme in the Liturgy of the Hours or in *lectio*.

In a similar way, certain memories, key words from scripture or spiritual reading, or artworks can enhance the experience of the Liturgy of the Hours and *lectio divina*. Sr. Anita even mentions using *lectio* / meditative reading as a creative method for celebrating Liturgy of the Hours.

Some of the “Questions for Reflection” suggest the role of oblates in renewing and enhancing ancient Benedictine prayer traditions. For example, “How does the celebration of Liturgy of the Hours feed my *lectio* and prayer throughout the day?” and “How is the Liturgy of the Hours a ‘strong moment’ in my day?”

Sr. Anita closed this keynote address by describing oblates as helping to lead the way in restoring a renewed Liturgy of the Hours to the common prayer life of the Church: “How could I help introduce the Liturgy of the Hours into my family’s prayer life and into the prayer life of my parish or church community?”

*Maureen and Paul Reichardt, oblates  
Indianapolis, IN*

## Hospitality means **welcoming every person**



*Ann Smith*

When I was young, if I had thought about hospitality at all, I would have assumed it meant inviting people over for dinner. But I didn’t think about hospitality when I was young. It was not until I was introduced to Saint Meinrad, the monastery, and learned about St. Meinrad, the saint, that I started to think about hospitality.

I was curious about St. Meinrad. How could someone become the patron saint of inviting people over for dinner? St. Meinrad was a hermit. Was he a hermit who gave great dinner parties? I realized I needed to think about the meaning of hospitality in Benedictine life.

In the 12 years that I have been thinking about the meaning of hospitality and reading the *Rule of St. Benedict* and other Benedictine books, I have come to realize that inviting people for dinner is only the most

obvious aspect of hospitality. I believe that hospitality has also, and most often, to do with the way we interact every day with every person we meet, or say hello to, or pass on the street. We are to welcome every person as Christ (*RB* 53:1).

By “every person,” I mean the grocery store clerk who scans my bread, the bored woman at the DMV where I renew my license, the customer service representative I finally speak to after being on hold for 10 minutes. These are people I don’t know, people I may

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# Rule of St. Benedict governs my life in three ways



Mark Plaiss

The *Rule of St. Benedict* governs my life in three ways. First, the schedule of the daily readings of the *Rule* provides a stability of basic reading. Three times a year, the oblate

plows through the *Rule*. Some days that reading is lofty, but some days that reading is plowing. Either way, the *Rule* is read and digested. The daily reading of the foundational text of the Benedictine life over the course of a year becomes a part of the oblate.

Second, some chapters are more welcome than others, and that contributes to the loftiness or plowing effect. For example, my favorite chapter of the *Rule* is Chapter 72. I like Benedict's emphasis on patience in that chapter. The conclusion of the chapter, though, is the hook: "Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ."

Why? Because Christ may "bring us all together to everlasting life." I like that word "together." Salvation from

eternal death is not just an action accorded to an individual. Rather, eternal life means being together with a family, both familial and otherwise, a community. Being with God is not an individual mode of being!

Third, I may be one of the few persons who actually enjoys the liturgical code, Chapters 8-20. If "the divine presence is everywhere ... we should believe this to be especially true when we celebrate the divine office" (Chapter 19). Well, if that's true (and I believe it is), then the liturgical code is more than just a dry litany of when to say what psalm. It is, rather, an outline of bringing the divine presence into our midst. And there is nothing dry or boring about that!

In addition, I like the commentaries on the *Rule* that I use. I read Holzherr's commentary for the first time through the *Rule*. For the second round, I read Kardong's commentary. Then, for the last reading of the entire RB for the year, I use the *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with notes*. These commentaries flesh out the *Rule* by putting it in the context of the time it

was written, as well as explaining the more arcane portions of the *Rule*.

I can't imagine my spiritual life without all these wonderful books!

The other chapter in the *Rule* to consider is Chapter 7 on humility. For my money, steps 1, 2 and 9 are crucial not only for the oblate, but for all Christians. You cannot control your tongue (step 9) if you love your own will (step 2) and if you don't fear God (step 1). Benedict has given us a concise summary of the entire wisdom literature of the Old Testament in these three steps!

Finally, let's not forget Chapter 48. *Lectio divina*, for the oblate and the monk, must be a priority. Note in that chapter Benedict's emphasis on reading on Sundays. Games on Sunday are fine, provided those games do not interfere with *lectio*. The oblate must take Sunday *lectio* seriously. I find the pre-dawn hours perfect for such reading.

Mark Plaiss, oblate  
Fox Lake, IL

## Rule's guidance changes throughout life



Donald W. Coffman

Having been an oblate since 1975, the *Rule* has affected my life differently at various points of my journey. After having to give up my home and live with my brother because of poor health, I

have come to appreciate and understand particularly well Chapters 6 and 42 of the *Rule*, where St. Benedict says that monks need to speak as little as possible and that after Compline "no one is to speak."

This emphasis on silence brings me back to the first word of the *Rule*, "Listen," and the great truth that one best hears the voice of God in silence. Because of my personal situation of

being confined to another's home, I have a degree of silence, along with a fair share of noise.

I get out of bed around 4 a.m. to appreciate the silence and begin the day with prayer, which for me is listening to God in silence and learning anew that I am not a finished product, but a vessel of God's creative activity!



In silence, I experience the mystery of the ground of all being, which, in the words of Scripture, “live and move and have my being” (*Acts 17:28*). I am influenced by the *Rule* with its emphasis on both stability and silence as a guide to how I approach my day, which is so different from my earlier life as a teacher.

I often think of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, in that there is both “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” Whether it’s a time to speak or a time to be quiet, one is reminded of the statement of Joan Chittister that “Benedictine

spirituality is clearly rooted in living ordinary life with extraordinary awareness and commitment.”

Through necessity, I have come to both love and value the silence of the early morning hours. When I was a teacher, I had a sign on the wall of my French classroom that said, “Silence is one of the languages spoken here!” These days I am coming to a better understanding of that sign.

I learned there is a certain liberation in silence and that one learns this again each day. Thomas Merton spoke

of silence as a form of prayer that was without distraction. In fact, he said, “My whole life becomes a prayer. My silence is full of prayer. The world of silence in which I am immersed contributes to my prayer.”

The *Rule* offers me structure and appreciation for how I approach time as I live in the mystery of God’s eternal Now! As Merton said, “In silence, God ceases to be an object and becomes an experience.”

*Donald W. Coffman, oblate  
Liberty, KY*

## What can we learn from our faults?



*Deepak Frank*

I know a few of my faults. Others may know them better and God knows all of them. Avoiding one’s faults because of bad habits or a weakness can be

a constant battle. Perfection is difficult but desirable from God, per the expectation stated in Matthew 5:48.

The attitude displayed by Jesus on the cross is the nearly impossible goal: “When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly” (*1 Peter 2:23*).

When criticized, it is tempting to react instead of respond. Instead of suffering patiently, we may want to scream. Displaying calm, walking away, or slowing down when feeling annoyed is exceedingly difficult. But how does one stop the vicious cycle and become patient?

As Fr. Joseph Cox taught in a past Lenten retreat, to learn patience, one needs to be a “patient” literally. A patient who is sick does indeed suffer. The virtue of patience cannot bypass suffering and leapfrog to a calm state. We are expected to suffer and be patient as the storm will eventually pass (*1 Peter 1:3-7, 1 Peter 5:5b-11*). With time, the pain may reduce, but enduring it effectively and not sinning in the process by hurting others is the key. The faults of others cannot be an excuse for mine.

Patience and humility can be developed by facing another’s faults and the consequences of one’s own. Admitting my faults is difficult. It’s easy for me to criticize, but difficult to face it. It is much easier to grumble and blame. The temptation to lie and cover up one’s fault is high, as the ego won’t allow, or the fear of punishment may be a deterrence.

Faults manifest through vices and sometimes are unintentional. Regardless, the recipient ends up getting hurt. How does one repair a fault? Apologizing and reconciliation

can help with the healing of oneself and others. When we get hurt physically, we look at it and try to heal it. The internal hurt is not visible, and so dealing with it is much more difficult. The pain will grow if anger and hatred are not resolved in a timely manner. Many of us may have at least one relationship or a lost friendship that needs some healing.

Adjusting expectations and learning acceptance can be difficult. I used to go to Sahaja Meditation, where instructor Rahul Kumar taught us to “observe and not participate in every thought.” That is the key to avoid getting caught up in distractions. I usually run out of time for what I am trying to do and get frustrated.

I am not disciplined enough to be in the present moment and make good choices, especially when I am tired. Slowing down, resting and sleep can help with the calm. Ignoring others’ minor faults, which may not matter much, may also help. Speaking intentionally is difficult, but will help with unintentional faults.

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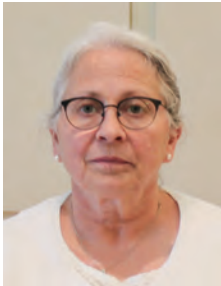
Faults are inevitable, as we are all human. The journey of life expects us to be better each day and to get up after being knocked down. St. Augustine and St. Paul reformed their

lives, and they may serve as our role models to show that redemption is possible throughout our lives even if we start late. Thankfully, God is the judge of my faults. He is lenient,

merciful and gives me many chances. What I do not know is which one will be my last.

Deepak Frank, oblate  
Columbus, IN

## Chapter 4 offers guidance for the oblate life



Teresa Lynn

I read the *Rule of St. Benedict* while an oblate at another monastery; however, I did not study the *Rule* before transferring to Saint Meinrad on June 4, 2022.

May I humbly say, I find the *Rule* a little overwhelming at times, even though these rules are incredibly valuable and easily applied to the daily life of an oblate.

I decided to focus on “The Tools of Good Works,” Chapter 4. I noticed that a few of the tools referred to the Ten Commandments, the Corporal Works of Mercy, and the Act of Contrition, which I have noted next to the corresponding rules. Some of the ways these rules govern our life:

- To put your hope in God. #41
- To attribute any good work you see in yourself to God and not yourself. #42 (humility)

- To keep death daily before our eyes. #47 (reminds me of #46)
- To desire everlasting life with all spiritual longing. #46 (We are all trying to get to heaven.)
- To devote yourself frequently to prayer. #56 (One of my favorite tools. Prayer is conversation with God, an intimate bond.) In a world filled with blatant disregard for the dignity of others, violence, human trafficking, torture, murder, child abuse, etc., knowing our prayers are joined to the prayers of others is a welcome respite.
- To confess the evil deeds of your past to God in prayer daily with tears and sighs. #57 (O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you. I detest my sins.)
- Numbers 1 through 9 focus on several evil deeds or commandments: not to kill #3, not to covet #6, not to commit adultery #4, not to bear false witness #7, to honor all people #8.

- To change these evil ways in the future. #59 (I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.)
- As for the Corporal Works of Mercy: to give new life to the poor #14, to clothe the naked #15, to visit the sick #16, to bury the dead #17, to console the sorrowing #19.
- To love chastity. #64 (or celibacy if you feel called by God to pursue a more intimate relationship with God, forsaking all others)

Finally, #21, to prefer nothing to the love of Christ. This tool is a fulfillment of all the rules.

Teresa Lynn, oblate  
St. Meinrad, IN

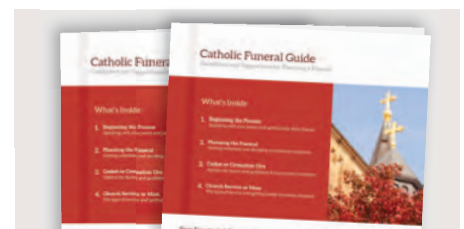
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# We take our Benedictine values into the world



Dale Edwyna Smith

“O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise! O God, come to my assistance!”

Entering the day in this way, I prepare to pray

Lauds. The discipline of the *Rule*, regular prayer, and practicing being in the presence of God throughout the day provides an important framework, an essential foundation, and a scaffold for building and growing in the spiritual life.

St. Benedict wrote in the *Rule* that he planned to establish “a school for the Lord’s service.” The text is the *Rule* itself, and I have found that the actual education is experiential, and the assignments or “tests” come as each day I try, however falteringly, to apply the *Rule* in daily life.

To begin again each morning, I make a cup of coffee to sip while I pray the Divine Office and study the day’s excerpt of the *Rule of St. Benedict* using several translations. Certain sections resonate regardless of the excerpt of the day. For instance, “Each day we begin again,” “the oratory is what it says it is,” “keep a guard over my mouth,” “God sees us everywhere,” “my way of acting should differ from the world’s way,” and “nothing should come before the love of Christ.” Each section applies in my daily life, no matter the circumstances of the day.

My “monastery” is a small apartment I share with two cats. After prayer and quiet time with God, pressing duties

include cleaning the litter boxes, preparing their food and clean water, and paying attention to their communication of the day. As an academic whose first love may have been books and learning, the idea of a school as a spiritual and physical place brought to life by active service rather than only abstract intellectual thought is further expanded by trying to apply the “tools for good works.”

Since the pandemic began, I have worked with students online. The challenge is to communicate empathy, compassion and patience in that two-dimensional environment. Language and tone (“keeping a guard on my mouth”), as well as facial expressions, body language, and gestures, seem magnified on the small screen of the computer classroom.

Remembering, as St. Benedict notes, that we are to avoid having “favorites” or giving a harsh reprimand instructs me to gently guide seekers who may be facing challenges in their own lives. Reflecting on the *Rule* inspires recollection of the constant presence of God and constructs a movable, sheltering monastery everywhere I go.

This perception or recognition of our various communities as monastic homes extends to the classrooms and students we teach. St. Benedict states that our way of being should differ from the world’s way, and I continue to ponder how the narrow way of discipleship can be walked faithfully in the often-unbending dissembling and politicization of what we call “higher education.”

Students are shocked by an authority figure who attempts to listen to them in a way different from the world’s

way (for example, to apologize publicly when I say something that might have embarrassed them within the hearing of others).

The family may be the first monastery. As the firstborn of six children, I was an “abbess” of sorts with the responsibility of looking out for my younger siblings. Although the *Rule* states there is to be no favoritism shown among the monks, I had “favorite” siblings, different ones at different times. I am now a senior citizen. A range of experiences shifts the birth order from time to time, so that younger siblings may take the lead, instruct or protect, as need arises. How Benedictine!

The *Rule* and prayer throughout each day have brought me to the understanding, as is often repeated in the New Testament, that we are, ultimately, “one body,” each with particular gifts and callings.

In the last several years, marked changes have resulted in a sudden narrowing of the path. I live on a fixed income. My Ivy League doctorate, academic teaching experience and publications seem at odds with the yawning gaps.

Truly, the answer is to expand the spiritual realm. The *Rule* nurtures, refreshes and guides me in this new phase as an aging disciple, beginning each day anew, listening intently with a grateful heart for spiritual direction.

Dale Edwyna Smith, oblate  
Brighton, MA

# Advent retreat focuses on transcending suffering



*Andy and Bridget Kosegi*

“With Healing in His Wings” – a quote we later discovered was a line from “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” inspired the theme of this year’s Advent Retreat led by Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB. The well-attended retreat was held December 9-11, 2022, and contained four conferences plus

an introductory get-to-know-him session.

Being the monastery choirmaster, Br. John Mark shared his God-given talents by opening and closing each session with a beautifully sung carol, often of the lesser-known variety, such as “Each Winter as the Year Grows Older” or “Welcome to Our World.” In doing so, he emphasized searching for the overlooked meaning in the powerful lyrics of Christmas carols – even during Advent!

The first conference began with a guiding question: What does healing look like this side of heaven for you and for others? He defined “healing” as the transcendence of suffering. It is not the denial or the curing of such suffering necessarily, but a hopeful awareness of overcoming it.

Suffering, when properly acknowledged, leads to self-awareness, compassion for others, and becoming more Christ-like. Avoidance of suffering, he said, cannot come at the

cost of living or of loving; and it is only through being vulnerable to our suffering that we can become more like Christ.

Br. John Mark then noted that healing differs from restoring. To restore is to return to what something was like before; but healing changes, even transforms, what has been broken into something new and potentially stronger. In illustrating this point, Br. John Mark directed our attention to the Japanese practice of kintsugi. This art of “golden repair” calls for transforming broken pottery by filling in the broken places with gold, elevating the object above what it was before.

The same can be said, he noted, after the fall of Adam and Eve, which now sees humanity better situated thanks to the healing brought to us by our Savior (salvator or healer), Jesus Christ. As we see it, Psalm 8 truly captures this sentiment: “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than God.”

In the second conference, Br. John Mark asked us to reflect on not only what type of mindset we need to embody before healing may occur, but what kind of “heartset” as well. Healing does not merely implicate the mind, but necessarily involves the heart.

Tapping into his experience as a clinical psychologist, Br. John Mark cited psychoanalyst Karen Horney, who identified three ways to address conflict: moving away, moving against and moving toward. When viewed in the context of a relationship, these ways translate into avoidance (moving

away), stirring the pot and bad-mouthing (moving against), and engaging honestly (moving toward).

He reminded us that true healing follows only when moving toward, which he also flagged as the most challenging choice when dealing with conflict. Part of what makes “moving toward” conflict so difficult, he pointed out, is that it requires a posture of humility and owning the role that we play in the conflict.

One must approach this situation, he said, as if the other person holds the key to unlocking the best version of yourself. He ended the second conference with this question: What is a situation in my life where I might begin “moving toward” instead of away or against, and what might I need to ask from God to do that?

The third conference focused on recognizing that often healing comes through others, which will then lead us to help others to heal. And, he noted, such healing cannot come from just any other person, but must come from someone who has a special relationship with us. This is because to be fully known is to be fully loved, which ultimately leads to self-acceptance. He asked us: Who will be Christ to each of us, and how will we each be Christ to another in need of healing?

Of note from the fourth conference, Br. John Mark distinguished between an active holiness, where we actively seek to accomplish God’s will based on our state of life, and a passive holiness, where we are called to accept our suffering out of love for whatever Divine Providence sends us. Tying this more closely to the liturgical season, Br. John Mark highlighted the

following Thomas Merton quote for our reflection: “The Advent mystery is the beginning of the end of all in us that is not yet Christ.”

Last, as a fitting coda, we were blessed to have Oblate Director Janis Dopp attending the retreat. As she has been struggling with her own health concerns, those in attendance offered

her a spiritual bouquet of prayers to help her transcend her suffering and find healing.

*Andy and Bridget Kosegi, oblates  
Indianapolis, IN*

## Persevere to amend our faults



*Edward Huff*

I have pondered the theme of “Faults” for a long time and return to Scripture: remove the “plank in your eye,” before considering the “splinter in

another’s.” Daily I find fault, even on this near-perfect crisp autumn morning in western Kentucky. The sun is out bright enough to thwart the chill. Leaves are turning colors to paint a smile on my early drive to indulge myself with a chai latte at a local coffee shop.

I am blessed. I have never been truly hungry a day in my life. Fresh water took no more effort than turning on a tap in a centrally heated house, apartment or student housing at seminary.

Funds were provided for advanced educational opportunities in four states: Indiana, Missouri, Minnesota and, most recently, in southern California, where I walked across Route 66 to get my chai latte most every morning. I have relatively good health, a near full tank of gasoline in my hybrid car, spiritual and secular friends and acquaintances, study groups, and the comfort in knowing that I will never be alone or abandoned in this life or the next.

Still, I find fault, usually before sunrise, as I rise around four each

morning. Yes, I am on my journey. Still, some days it feels I am running out of time, at age 66, to complete my earthly journey to God’s satisfaction. “Well done, good and faithful servant,” doesn’t match up well with impatience with local traffic, general daily gripes, and frustrations of aging in a fast-paced society that is outdistancing me.

I’ve had successful cataract surgery on both eyes; yet my eye surgeon never mentioned “planks,” but I know they are present, fully formed and challenging my spiritual growth.

I work and pray daily on lessening my fault-finding and, as a former hospital chaplain and an oblate, I should do better. The *Rule* is as clear as well-polished glass; and momentarily, some days, I feel I am living Benedict’s life plan in the secular world well. Where, then, does my fault-finding emanate from? I certainly am aware when I backslide. I can preach and counsel others, but I tend to be myopic with my own big wooden barriers.

When I was a full-time lay student living on the Hill, did I do better? I certainly had the resources of daily Mass and prayer, the monks in residence, an on-site spiritual director, seminarians and friends off which I could bounce ideas and concerns – spiritual armor I am most grateful for.

Was I fault-free? Far from it. If truth be told, I had enough spiritual arrogance to think I was more attuned than those not getting a graduate degree in theology at one of the most

renowned Benedictine schools in the world.

Now, some 70 miles away from the Holy Hill, it is harder for me to live and breathe the *Rule* as a lay oblate.

I believe God is out there and in me saying, “Keep fighting the good fight.” Or, as my devout Muslim friend, Ali, would put it, “Where’s your faith, man?” I smile when I think of those words, oft-repeated to me while in seminary near LA, reminding me I am blessed – and a mess.

It is easy to continue overthinking and complicating life, even though my favorite Scripture passage is, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

I’ve really had nothing but opportunities and blessings since I graduated from Saint Meinrad in May 2001. The many gifts and challenges placed before me are answers to my questions: Why am I here? What is the purpose of my earthly life?

When I placed my hands on the sanctuary altar to make my final oblation in 2000, there were no planks or splinters at that moment – only grace, palpable love, and a signpost pointing toward a richer spiritual journey that continues to this day. No-fault spiritual insurance that covers planks, rushing rapids and a host of other challenges. I am humbled and most grateful for this “wild and precious life.”

*Edward Huff, oblate  
Henderson, KY*

# Oblate Hobbies

## Learning to play the bagpipes

*How long has this been a hobby? What got you interested? How is it challenging?*

*Why do you enjoy it? Does this hobby enhance your life as an oblate?*

*Send articles to [kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com](mailto:kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com).*

It started in 1998 while our two children were away from home in college. Lee, my husband, was a new member in a local pipe band as a drummer. The band was recruiting, and Lee had played the snare drum as a child.

My allergist suggested I take up a wind instrument to help with my lungs. Lee said the band was looking

to fill the ranks. Why not come and learn to play the bagpipes? So, I went for it. Practice was every Thursday.

I was in a class with kids who were very talented. I never missed a lesson in two years of practice. Even our vacations were scheduled so I would not miss my lesson.

I am in the band playing the pipes and I love it. When I began, I was 48 years old. At 70, I still play. I offer my God-given talent for free at funerals and church functions. You never know when God gives you a gift.

*Mary Theresa Shanley, oblate  
Farmingdale, NY*



# Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord

## Rule offers guidance, support, wisdom



*John Brooks*

A young man asked the wise old abbot one day, “Why do people come to the monastery?” The wise abbot explained, “Some come seeking answers to questions that

we all ask; some seeking a direction for their lives; some to examine how they are living their lives; some hoping to find new meaning for their life; some seeking support, comfort and guidance through a tragedy or loss; some come because they have lost their way and are wandering aimlessly in the darkness.”

We are all searching for something. When you first came to the monastery, what were you trying to find? Thinking back to my first visit

to the monastery brings back a cascade of memories, to a time of living life from one moment to the next, with little purpose. A time of darkness, anger, sadness, loneliness, confusion, sadness and grief.

My wife, Pam, had passed away about two years earlier and I was angry that God had taken her away at such a young age. We were six years away from retiring when we could spend more time together and spoil the grandchildren that our four wonderful children would give us.

I was sad because God had taken away my best friend; lonely because with no children in the house, I was by myself; confused because I did not understand how or why my healthy wife, much healthier than I was, was taken away; grieving the loss of what our life was supposed to be.

I have always believed that while God doesn't have a plan for our lives, He often puts people in our lives who offer us comfort and support, teach us, or guide us. Some are transient, helping us transition through a crisis, problem or episode. Others enter our lives to facilitate a change, offering needed wisdom for our decision-making process.

Some guide us when the darkness overtakes us and show us the path. Most times, it is only in retrospect that we appreciate the comfort and support, wisdom and guidance. Occasionally, it is in the kindness of strangers that we reap the greatest benefits.

Led to Benedictine spirituality and introduced to the *Rule of St. Benedict* by a group of new friends from church, I found a wisdom and pathway that was both comforting

and supportive. I approached this new wisdom looking for answers, but what I encountered was a pathway around the unanswerable questions and through the darkness of anger, sadness, loneliness, confusion and grief.

I found a comforting and supportive simplicity that allowed me the security to open my heart to others and once again share the gifts God has blessed me with. Reading the *Rule* for the first time, it was Chapter 4, “The Tools for Good Works,” that

caught my attention. It has been verses 20-21 that guide my path of volunteering for the benefit of others. “Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of God must come before all else.”

*John Brooks, oblate  
Columbus, IN*

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*Continued from page 7*

never interact with again. I may have only a single minute to interact with them as if they are Christ.

“Every person” also means people I know, such as that person who always seems to speak too loudly, that person who continually spouts political views that are diametrically opposed to mine, and that person who always seems to look down her nose at me even though I am taller than she is.

By “every person,” I mean the people I don’t always, or ever, get along with, the people I don’t even like. These also are the people I am to find the Christ in, and to be an example of Christ. I have found this to be difficult to do. Benedictine spirituality is not an add-water-and-stir kind of life. Becoming an oblate – and we are always becoming – requires daily, hourly, minute-by-minute attention and nurturing.

In Chapter 53 of the *Rule*, Benedict seems to imply that guests in the monastery are gifts to us from God. God gives us to each other as gifts along our way. Some of these “gifts” are comfort when we are down, some are companionship on our journeys. I used to think some people were put in my path to annoy me.

Sometimes I still think that way. But in my nobler moments, I try to remember that people who are

annoying can help me grow if I let them; they act as sandpaper to help smooth down my rough and jagged edges.

This is especially true right now when so many businesses are struggling. This is a perfect time to work on our hospitality skills. We are all poor, wayfaring strangers, traveling through a world of road rage, school shootings, hate crimes, bullying, unbridled anger and senseless violence.

In Benedict’s time, monasteries were often the only place a wayfaring stranger could find a safe place to rest. I think about this often. I think about the word “place.” Does the word “place” refer only to a physical location, or can it be a metaphor for actually seeing another person, acknowledging that they are a fellow wayfarer?

Can I give someone a metaphorically safe place by holding a door open for them? Or by looking directly at someone and smiling as I thank them for holding a door open for me? I like to think so. I like to think by holding a door open for someone, I am helping them into a bit of a space where they are seen and safe, even if only for a minute.

What would happen if we all started interacting with every person as a fellow wayfarer? Even, maybe

especially, the people with whom we have disagreements, or people whose lives differ from our own.

For a look at this kind of world, try reading the following books, which can all be borrowed from the Alcuin Oblate Library. I guarantee these books will inspire you. Note: the call numbers used at the oblate library may differ from the call numbers at your local library.

*Mama Maggie: The Untold Story of One Woman’s Mission to Love the Forgotten Children of Egypt’s Garbage Slums* by Marty Makary and Evelyn Vaughn. Call number BIO G575.

*Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* by Gregory Boyle. Call number BIO B69.

*Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love* by Fr. Daniel Homan, OSB, and Lonni Collins Pratt. Call number 241.671 P73.

*The Shed that Fed a Million Children* by Magnus-MacFarlane-Barrow. Call number BIO M143.

*Ann Smith, oblate  
Gahanna, OH*

# A mathematical and spiritual journey with the Archabbey Church pavement

*Editor's note: This is the first article in a four-part series about the Archabbey Church floor.*



Maureen Reichardt

“We ... know God by beauty, by things that are beautiful and that take us really beyond this present moment and give us some sense of that which transcends”.<sup>1</sup>

— Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB

The first time I walked into the renovated Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln at Saint Meinrad Archabbey in February 2001, I immediately recognized the Sierpinski triangle-within-triangle design in the beautiful marble pavement (interior floor).<sup>2</sup> With a background as a mathematics teacher, I also had the overwhelming sense that two seemingly disparate portions of my life (i.e., the mathematical and the spiritual) were coming together in one place.

This was not the first time I had observed geometric art in a sacred setting. My interest in using geometry in traditional art and architectural decoration began when a math colleague and I received a Lilly Teacher Creativity Fellowship in 1997. For our fellowship project, we traveled to Spain to study, photograph and sketch Islamic mosaic tile designs, primarily at the Alhambra in the city of Granada.

My studies continued two years later when I was selected as a participant in the Toyota International Teacher Program. The project I pursued during our tour of Japan included the

study of geometric patterns used as architectural decoration at a variety of Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. After these experiences in other cultures, to discover sacred geometric art so close to my home and so perfectly suited to my religious tradition and mathematical background was an amazing experience!

After that first visit to Saint Meinrad, the design in the Archabbey Church pavement was never far from my thoughts. And from these thoughts, two questions arose. The first (admittedly arrogant) was: “Well, I know that the design is a Sierpinski triangle, but do the *monks* know this? Perhaps they are simply using triangles to represent the Trinity.” A second question was: “Certainly the floor is beautiful, and I am drawn to it because of my interest in geometric patterns, but what does this floor mean, if anything?”

During a chance encounter with Novice Michael Vinson, OSB, (now Fr. Anthony) after Easter Mass a few months later, he graciously offered to take me and my family on a tour. As we were concluding our time in the Archabbey Church, he turned to us and said, “By the way, are any of you interested in Sierpinski triangles, fractals, chaos theory ...?” My jaw dropped!

What I did not realize at the time is that I had landed at the center of an ever-expanding circle of discovery, adventure, friends and mentors. Foremost among those who have expanded my understanding of the floor are Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB, a

member of the Archabbey Church Renovation Committee in the 1990s; Fr. Denis Robinson, OSB, professor of the Trinity course in my master’s degree program at Saint Meinrad; and Ben Nicholson, an architectural consultant who designed the Archabbey Church pavement.

This is the first of a four-part series of my 22-year quest to find sacred meaning in the pavement of the Archabbey Church at Saint Meinrad. My journey has involved examining the pavement from historical, geometrical and theological perspectives. I hope the articles will resonate with your own personal experiences with the floor and will enable viewers of the pavement to comprehend its beauty and its meaning at a deeper level.

Let me begin with some historical background. Construction of the Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln started in the 1890s, with the first Mass in the Church taking place on the feast of St. Benedict, March 21, 1907. During the 1960s, in response to the liturgical changes prompted by the Second Vatican Council, the monks began experimenting with various configurations of their liturgical space, but they did not complete an extensive renovation of the church.

It wasn’t until the late 1990s, after other higher-priority building projects had been completed on the Archabbey campus, that the current whole-church renovation was completed. The dedication of the newly renovated Archabbey Church took place on September 30, 1997.





*Detail of Cosmatesque design in Basilica of San Clemente in Rome, Italy.*

During the planning stages of the renovation, the monks and the architects were sensitive not only to the needs of the community, but also to past traditions within the Church and the Benedictine order and to the future needs of the community. As Fr. Kurt Stasiak, OSB, chair of the Renovation Committee, stated in the preface of a booklet titled *The Renewed Heart of Saint Meinrad: The Art and Architecture of the Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln* (Saint Meinrad Archabbey, 1998):

Benedictine life is marked by a strong sense of continuity and an abiding appreciation of what has gone before. Throughout the planning of the renovation of our Archabbey Church, therefore, we considered the past as well as the future... The style of our Archabbey Church is Romanesque, the predominant architectural style of the early middle ages (700–1100 A.D.). It seemed natural, therefore, to explore medieval and Romanesque forms as inspiration for most of the elements of our Church. But we asked our designers and artists to bring their contemporary sensitivities and spirituality to these traditional forms.

In the first of several in-person conversations with Fr. Harry Hagan, I learned how this desire to honor tradition while giving it new vitality applied specifically to the church pavement. Early in the renovation project, the monks decided to replace the plain concrete floor with a new floor that would have dramatic spiritual impact.

As Fr. Harry explained, they wanted the “theology to come up through the observer’s feet.”<sup>3</sup> In notes from one of his first meetings with the renovation committee, design architect Ben Nicholson expressed his intention for the floor in this way: “Make everything beautiful and challenging.”

Therefore, Evans Woolen III, lead architect for the renovation project, suggested a design patterned after a style of medieval mosaic tiling called Cosmatesque<sup>4</sup>, which used geometric designs to convey religious symbolism. Cosmatesque artisans were influenced heavily by classical Roman geometric mosaic design and also by Byzantine and Islamic mosaics, borrowing various patterns from the three traditions as well as actually using actual marble from Roman ruins.



*A view of the Archabbey Church floor, looking west.*

Of particular interest in terms of the Saint Meinrad pavement is the geometric floor of the 11th-century church at the abbey founded by St. Benedict himself. In a book titled *Cosmatesque Ornament: Flat Polychrome Patterns in Architecture*, architect Paloma Pajares-Ayuela states: “When the time comes to identify the most immediate antecedent to the Cosmatesque pavements, no one hesitates to point to the pavement in the Church of the Abbey of Monte Cassino, consecrated in the year 1071.”

She also explains that Abbot Desiderio brought artisans to Monte Cassino from both Constantinople and Alexandria, demonstrating both Byzantine and Islamic influences on the design of the pavement.

In the second article, I will explore the history and geometry of Cosmatesque mosaics in more detail. Before then, I offer some “homework” questions for you to consider: What was your

Continued from page 17

reaction when you first encountered the floor of the Saint Meinrad Archabbey Church? What are some of the geometric shapes and designs that you noticed in the pavement? What religious symbolism – if any – is suggested to you through these designs?

Since I am now a *retired* mathematics teacher, you are not required to submit your work to me for evaluation! But I am interested in hearing how the floor of the Archabbey Church and its designs may have affected you personally. I

will respond to questions or comments you send to me as quickly as I can: mreichardt9634@comcast.net.

Maureen Reichardt, oblate  
Indianapolis, IN

1. Sean Gallagher, "The Beauty of Seeking God." The Archdiocese of Indianapolis *Criterion Online Edition* (January 11, 2008).
2. The Sierpinski triangle, named for the Polish mathematician Waclaw Sierpinski (1882-1969), is a geometric figure studied within the field of fractal geometry. Fractal geometry focuses on the study of broken, wrinkled, uneven shapes and is, mostly, a 19th- and 20th-century mathematical development.
3. This was an "aha" moment for me because it explained my increasingly strong desire to touch the floor and to take off my shoes as I walked across it!
4. The dust cover of the book *Cosmatesque Ornament: Flat Polychrome Patterns in Architecture* by architect Paloma Pajares-Ayuela explains: "Known for their remarkable mosaic work, the stoneworkers of the 12th and 13th centuries called *Cosmati* [a name that may be derived from *Cosma* (or *Cosmatus*), one of the later artisans] left a legacy of some of the most beautiful ornament in the world. Distinguished by their complex geometric patterns,... we can find *Cosmatesque* designs today in the churches of Rome and its environs... as intricate pavements and ornaments on church furniture." The second article will treat this topic in more detail.



Photos, clockwise from top left: Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, gave the Advent Oblate Retreat on the topic of healing. Br. John Mark stands alongside Oblate Director Janis Dopp during the December 9-11 retreat. Wade Eckler prays after being invested as an oblate novice. Valerie Morgan signs her vow chart on the altar to become a Benedictine Oblate of Saint Meinrad on December 3, 2022.

# OBLATE NEWS

## DEATHS

**Kenneth Baney**, of Bronx, NY, died on November 15, 2022.

**Alice Ann Marx**, of Louisville, KY, died on November 15, 2022.

**Dr. William "Bill" Bastnagel**, of Indianapolis, IN, died on November 17, 2022.

**Ramona Inkel**, of Pensacola, FL, died on April 1, 2018.

**Joseph Fehribach**, of Jasper, IN, died on November 16, 2022.

**Isidora G. Bacani**, of Farmingdale, NY, died on July 13, 2022.

**James Sullivan**, of Amityville, NY, died on July 4, 2022.

**Helene E. Klem**, of Farmingdale, NY, died on September 13, 2022.

**Carolus A. Schneider**, of Kettering, OH, died on November 1, 2022.

**Linda McCarroll**, of Williamsburg, OH, died on December 14, 2022.

**Edith Pellicano**, of West Babylon, NY, died on December 23, 2022.

**Sister Teresita Heenan**, of Evansville, IN, died on January 1, 2023.

**Sharon Ogden**, of Mount Joy, PA, died on January 30, 2023.

**Wilma Riedford**, of Haubstadt, IN, died on February 21, 2023 ♦

## INVESTITURES

The following took part in the investiture ceremony on December 3, 2022: Wade Eckler, Chattanooga, TN; Steve Graham, Ashland, KY; Molly Hardebeck, Brownsburg, IN; Steven Lane Rhodes, Whitesville, KY; Kyle Riddle, Indianapolis, IN. ♦

## FINAL OBLATION

The following took part in the oblation ceremony on December 3, 2022: Timothy Allega, South Bend, IN; Barbara Allen, Huntingburg, IN;

Mary Lowney, Columbus, IN; James Lowney, Columbus, IN; Valerie Morgan, Charlotte, NC; Nancy Owen, Bloomington, IN; Michael Pirnat, Noblesville, IN; Fr. Alan Wakefield, New Buffalo, MI. ♦

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Investiture and Oblation Rites:** June 3, 2023; September 9, 2023

**Oblate Retreats:** June 19-22, 2023 (corrected dates for Study Days); December 8-10, 2023

**Oblate Council and Finance Commission Meetings:** April 21-23, 2023; June 30-July 2, 2023 (council meeting only); October 13-15, 2023 ♦

## VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Benedictine monks Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, Br. Michael Reyes, Br. Gregory Morris, Fr. Eugene Hensell, Fr. Joseph Cox, Fr. Mateo Zamora, Fr. Meinrad Brune, Fr. Denis Quinkert, Fr. Colman Grabert, Fr. Jeremy King, Fr. Gueric DeBona, Fr. Harry Hagan,

Br. Martin Erspamer; and oblates Joanna Harris, Kathleen Polansky, Angie McDonald, Dr. Bill Wilson, Marie Kobos, Michelle Blalock, Maureen and Paul Reichardt, Ann Smith, Mary Campanelli and Teresa Lynn. ♦

**CareNotes**  
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## NEW CARENOTE

By Diane Pharo, SCN, Director of the Counseling Center at Saint Meinrad.

To learn more call 800.325.2511 or visit [www.carenotes.com](http://www.carenotes.com).



## We REALLY want you and your articles!

The *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly* invites oblates and oblate novices to submit news and information about your chapter or write an article about your Benedictine journey.

We also have a theme for each upcoming issue that we welcome you to reflect on and submit an article. Finally, please submit a book review for the Reading Room column.

All submissions must include your name, city and state. A maximum 700-word limit is suggested. If choosing to add sources, please use endnotes and not footnotes. Send all submissions to Kathleen Polansky at [kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com](mailto:kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com) and include your name, city and state.

### Upcoming themes and submission dates:

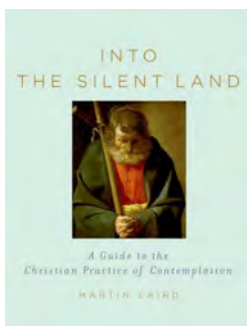
Summer – Final due date May 1, 2023 (Self Awareness)  
Fall – Final due date Aug. 1, 2023 (Distribution of Goods)  
Winter – Final due date Nov. 1, 2023 (Listening/attentiveness)



200 Hill Drive  
St. Meinrad, IN 47577

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## Reading Room



*Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation* by Martin Laird, OSA. Oxford University Press, 2006. 176 pages.

Br. Gregory Morris, OSB, gave an oblate chapter presentation during which he referred to this book. A hidden gem in his remarks!

The book is a short yet extensive text on both the technique and history of Christian contemplation (prayerful focus). Most of us can relate to mental distraction during Liturgy of the Hours, *lectio*, etc. In addition, many of us have “mental wheels spinning” as we pray, which are hard to silence. This text is an approach equally applicable to the beginning novice as to the long-experienced oblate.

How so? Fr. Laird combines a series of mental techniques and what to expect as you implement them. The core of

this technique is the development of a personal prayer focus word or phrase. The term is not as important as identifying one and learning to use it to produce the desired focus during prayer. Moreover, this is not just a how-to book. What is most helpful are the numerous examples of what to expect and how to persist as you learn the required skill(s).

Beyond this series of instructions, he shares a critical historical background for contemplation. This is the strength of the text. He weaves a review of the Eastern and Western Church traditions that are the underpinnings of this technique. Thus, there is “more” for those looking for contemplative thought.

This is the type of book that will be absorbed rather than read. You can come back to it as your prayer life matures.

*Michael Seretny, oblate  
West Lafayette, IN*