

# Benedictine Oblate



Saint Meinrad



*Christus in the Saint Meinrad Archabbey Church – artwork depicting the Risen Christ by Fr. Gregory de Wit.*

## The transforming power of God

As the beauty of spring begins to be felt, so, too, are we feeling the effects of God's transforming power. We have journeyed through Lent, fasting and praying and performing works of charity. We have participated in the Passover, and we have despaired at the foot of the Cross.

We have kept silence, and we have been taken unawares by the Risen Christ, the spotless victim who offered himself for us to God the Father. In this way, God has offered us the opportunity to be transformed, because "When anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him and he in God" (1 John 4:15).

Truly, "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Every day, as we oblates struggle to listen carefully to

Benedict's instructions and to attend to them with the ear of our heart, we are transformed. Our goal is not perfection. Rather, it is to recognize God's presence in our lives and, through that presence, to be renewed (RB 4).

In this issue of the newsletter, we look at transformation and, recognizing that it is God who gives to all life and breath and everything else (Acts 18:25), we look not only at those people and things who are included in this issue of the newsletter, but we look outward at those people and things around each of us that are transformative.

And we look inward and see how each of us continues to be transformed by our choices and decisions, and by how we allow God to influence our lives.

# A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

“What is not possible to us by nature, let us ask the Lord to supply by the help of his grace.”

*Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue 41*

One of the monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey lived an ordinary life and died an ordinary death. But he did both well. He lived the daily monastic life with grace and gentleness.

He understood that God supplied the help of grace, especially at times when life was filled with problems and weaknesses, as it was during his suffering prior to death. What was not possible by nature, God's grace supplied him in patience and courage.

St. Benedict encourages us to ask God for the help of his grace. We are not alone; the Lord Jesus is always near us with the gift of his grace. We have only to speak in the midst of our heavy cross.

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## Insights from the Abbot

### The transforming power of Christ: The difference between night and day



*Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB*

Think about what happened to many of us on Holy Saturday night. We were transformed. Remember?

We gathered outside in the dark. It wasn't quite as black as the

darkness of the tomb, but it was getting close to that. And if Satan had had it his way, it would have been a darkness that would never end.

But that night, Satan lost. God said again at the beginning of all history: “Let there be light!” And so we built a fire. And from that fire, we lit the Christ candle. The candle led us into the church, a church gradually swelling with new light.

Then we listened to some great stories. Stories about the creation of the world, about Abraham's obedience, about the Israelites being delivered from the Egyptians. Great stories – stories about the transforming power of God.

Remember what else happened that night? Many of us renewed our baptismal promises. We professed our faith. And we approached the altar, thanking God for the gift of bread and wine transformed into his Body and Blood, a gift that transforms us every time we receive it.

If we attended the Vigil, it seemed to still be dark when we left the church. But it really wasn't. We had been transformed. We had been enlightened. And we were walking toward the rising sun, walking with the rising sun, because we were walking with the Risen Son of God.

May the holy light of that night enlighten us. May the fire inflame us so that we may burn with good zeal. May the waters of baptism refresh us. May our communion with the Risen Lord empower us to go out into the whole world and sing his praises.

From Good Friday to Easter Sunday. What a difference. It's the difference between night and day.

*Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*



*The super moon rises behind the Archabbey Church on January 31.*

# From the Desk of the Director

## Obedience: Saying what we will do



Janis Dopp

It has been a cold and snowy winter, and we are more than ready for spring to make itself apparent. Our eyes search the garden for the first signs of perennials to peek through the hard soil with the promise that life will be renewed once again. We will walk in the sunshine and smell the good earth after a spring shower.

Spring is filled with promise and hope, and we feel renewed. It happens each year, and yet we are always surprised and delighted.

Spring and all that it brings with it are the yearly reminders that in every death there is new life. God is constantly

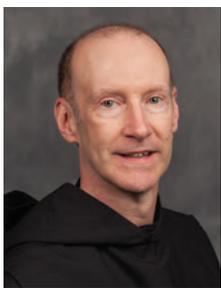
renewing the face of the earth. One of the most outrageous messages of Easter Sunday is that God can turn death into life – that God has looked death squarely in the face and defeated death for all of us.

Because we have been gifted with free will, the power of God to transform our lives waits upon our decision to let him in – to respond to God. St. Benedict says, “What, dear brothers, is more delightful than this voice of the Lord calling to us? See how the Lord in his love shows us the way of life.”

God wants to give us life. If we allow it, He is waiting to transform us into the perfect men and women that He has created us to be. It is our turn to respond to God and allow his victory to be our own.

Janis Dopp  
Oblate Director

## Musings from the Chaplain



Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB

One of the definitions found in the dictionary for “transformation” is: “A marked change, as in appearance or character, usually for the better.” As followers of St. Benedict, we are to be people who know that “transformation” means to become more like Jesus Christ.

Only the transforming power of God can help us to do this. The power of God transforming us is found especially in knowing Jesus and, to know Him, we look to the Bible. St. Benedict knew this, and we know that he knew this, because when we look at the holy *Rule*, we notice how many times St. Benedict quotes the

New Testament. This is because St. Benedict was a follower of the Lord.

One of the great saints (I can’t remember who) said, “The only mistake we make is taking our eyes off of Jesus.” Apparently St. Benedict kept his eyes on Jesus. By doing our daily *lectio*, especially from the Bible, we focus on the Lord, and we open ourselves to God’s transformative power.

Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB  
Oblate Chaplain

PRAY FOR VOCATIONS

## OBLATES

In their own words



Oblate Joe Lamont  
Mt. Gretna, PA

“Being an oblate has changed my life in a lot of subtle ways, but very significant ways. I’ve always had a curiosity about God. And being an oblate really is about building your spirituality, which really is your relationship with God.

Over the course of, I guess some 15 years, I’ve become much more aware of God because we’re always seeking God in everyday life. And that’s what I think has been the most powerful influence for me. And then from there, it builds, because it gives you a different framework for dealing with your life.”



# The transformative power of oblation in our marriage

*“Love is not one looking at the other, but looking together in the same direction.”* –Antoine de Saint-Exupery



*Andy and Bridget Kosegi*

This simple expression from the 20th-century writer of *The Little Prince* sums up nicely for us what should be the goal of a good marriage. It has been a sort of mantra for our marriage.

From the very beginning of our relationship in March 1996, while we were students at Marian College – a small Franciscan school (now a university) in Indianapolis – our relationship with God as expressed through our Catholic faith has always been at the center of our lives together. It is what we look toward together.

Our first date was attending Holy Thursday Mass at a Carmelite monastery near our college, which has since been repurposed as the Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary. Given our monastic beginning, it seems inevitable that we would end up as oblates of the venerable monastery of Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

In 1999, we were married at St. Joan of Arc in Indianapolis. Time passed, and we had our two wonderful children, Noah (16) and Aiden (14).

Through our years together, we were always seeking ways to pray together regularly, including contemplative or centering prayer, as well as occasionally praying the Liturgy of the Hours.

After Andy attended several annual retreats at Saint Meinrad, he would always come home with such wonderful things to say about his time there.

He had found a very special place and wanted to share it with Bridget.

We then decided that attending a retreat together at Saint Meinrad might be the perfect weekend getaway – a better way for us to spend our time and money than some cruise or private beach vacation. So we booked a retreat in October 2013 with Fr. Vincent Tobin, OSB, entitled “Simplicity.” It was a lovely weekend together and brought many things into focus for us as a couple, but we still yearned for more.

During that retreat weekend, Bridget read through the entire *Rule of St. Benedict*, which providentially called to her from our Guest House room. She was immediately impressed with the simple, yet profound, message St. Benedict shared and how relatable it was to our 21st-century lives.

At that time, we also read about the oblate community and became intrigued, realizing that we had already been performing many of the duties expected of oblates. Could this be what God was calling us to

consider? Oblation was indeed the answer, and although it took some time to formalize our commitment, we have continued progressing on this faith journey together. We were both invested on October 10, 2015, and made our final oblation on November 12, 2016.

We now see clearly that our prayer lives were always leading us toward oblation at Saint Meinrad. And what a transformation oblation has continued to bring to our marriage: requiring us to truly “listen with the ear of the heart” (RB, Prologue).

This listening is not just for the voice of God either; it is also to each other, to our children, and to those we encounter through our work and in our parish. It is through these daily encounters that we oblates see God’s work firsthand. There are, of course, ongoing challenges. Even so, we continue to “support with the greatest patience one another’s weakness of body or behavior” (RB, Ch. 72).

Although the transformation is not yet complete, what had remained unseen and hidden was what we had been looking toward all along.

*Bridget and Andy Kosegi, oblates  
Indianapolis, IN*

## Smugmug

*For more photos of  
Saint Meinrad events, visit:*

<http://saint-meinrad.smugmug.com>

# The ‘February’ of the Soul

When psalms surprise me with their music  
And antiphons turn to rum  
The Spirit sings ...<sup>1</sup>



George Hubbard plays the organ in the Archabbey Church.

So Thomas Merton begins his poem, “A Psalm.” And haven’t you experienced that sudden elation – in the middle of your daily Office, perhaps – when the universe seems to swim about your head and you are among the stars? But then, there are those other moments when the deep sorrow of the psalm digs right into your heart.

Transforming moments, both of these extremes.

Then there are those “February” times. Times when the psalms seem dull, dry and brittle, devoid of all meaning and relevance. Times when you just want to close the book and quit. Just toss the book out the window and forget it!

So what to do? This worried me a great deal in my early years of struggling with saying the Office. I

was a very scrupulous young man, trying to do everything exactly right, to make my prayers sincere and fervent, to participate fully in the drama of Mass and Office.

Of course, that was doomed to failure! And so at last I spoke about it with my spiritual director, a wise and gentle priest with much experience in listening to college-age parishioners just beginning to deal with the realities of the spiritual life.

He wasn’t shocked – he wasn’t even surprised. His advice was very much to the point: “Just do it!” I had included saying the Office in my rule of life. (My first!) So the priest’s advice was really to keep the promise I had made. And he told me something I could hardly imagine – that if I kept that promise, said the Office faithfully every day; in short, didn’t give up, the

initial transforming energy would come back.

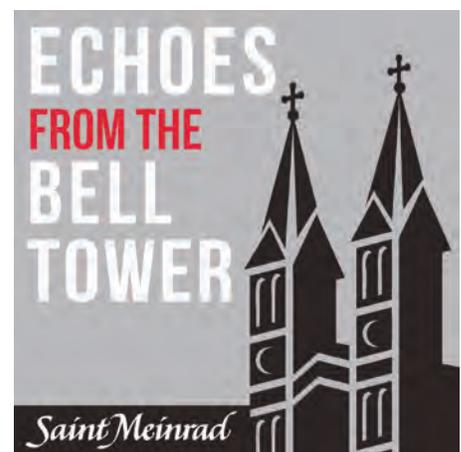
I really didn’t believe him, but I did it and he was right!

There have been many times in the more than 50 years since that conversation that I have fallen away from the Office, sometimes for quite lengthy periods, but that rule, yes, and the Office itself have always drawn me back, drawn me once more into the great cosmic dance.

And from the center of my cellar,  
Love, louder than thunder  
Opens a heaven of naked air.<sup>1</sup>

*George Hubbard,  
Saint Meinrad organist and oblate  
St. Meinrad, IN*

<sup>1</sup> “A Psalm,” Thomas Merton and Mark Van Doren, *Selected poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 84.



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# Transformation! The Alcuin Library

At the December retreat, many people asked questions about the Alcuin Oblate Library. Here are some of those questions, with answers.

**Q.** *What is a popular collection?*

“Popular Collection” is librarian-speak for a particular type of library. Yes, there are many different kinds of libraries: research libraries, music libraries, science libraries, there is even a dust library. (I kid you not. The dust library keeps samples of dust from all over the world, and the moon.)

A good way to describe a popular collection would be to call it a browsing collection. Come into the library and browse the shelves. Find something interesting and borrow it. Borrow it for the weekend, or take it home for a month.

**Q.** *What happened to all the books you removed from the collection?*

Some books, those of particular interest to oblates, were sold at the oblate book sale. Other books were sent to the Benedictine Sisters at AIM, and they send them to Africa where they are used to teach English.

A library is like a garden. It must be weeded constantly so the flowers have room to grow. Likewise, library collections must be weeded constantly so there is room on the shelves for new books.

**Q.** *What if I want to donate some of my books?*

Wonderful! And thank you. Bring them to the Alcuin Oblate Library and we will look at them. If we can't use them in the collection, we will sell them at the next oblate book sale.

**Q.** *What happens to the money from the book sale?*

All the money from the book sale is used to purchase new books for the

library. At the December book sale, we made almost \$600. We have a list of titles we want to purchase. For instance, we want to replace old, worn-out copies of some of Thomas Merton's books.

We want to add more fiction and also new biographies. In December, we created a fiction section that is currently in its infancy. However, like all beloved children, it will grow into something beautiful. This year we want to create a biography section.

**Q.** *What if I want to suggest a book for the library to purchase?*

One of our goals is to have a suggestion box. However, you can email your suggestion to me at [anniesmithinohio@gmail.com](mailto:anniesmithinohio@gmail.com) or Mary Campanelli at

[mcampanelli22@gmail.com](mailto:mcampanelli22@gmail.com). We take requests seriously. One of the books on the To Be Purchased list is a new biography of Dorothy Day written by her granddaughter, which was suggested to me by an oblate at the December retreat.

**Q.** *The space is so beautiful! May I come in and just read?*

Absolutely! Mary and I did the book part, but Oblate Director Janis Dopp and Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, created a beautiful space for the library. So please, the next time you're at the monastery, come into the library, browse the shelves, find a book, sit down and read.

*Ann Smith  
Gabanna, OH*



*Oblate John Pelletier peruses a book in the Alcuin Oblate Library.*

# The Busy Benedictine: From donor to disciple

*The Busy Benedictine is an occasional column about trying to be like a monk when you're working and taking care of kids.*



*Edward Castronova*

I got the bad room, the first floor room on the even-numbered side. It's the room in the Saint Meinrad Guest House that I like the least. It

looks out directly onto the main door, so that people coming and going can see right into the room at all times. If you want sunshine in that room, you also have to accept a lot of publicity. Being a private person, I don't like it. Arrogant thoughts came into my mind. "I come here so often. They all know me. I'm a regular around here, a big supporter. I'm not one of these innocent newbies just wandering in for the first time. They are the ones who should get the bad room. Not me. I'll just go down to the desk and have them move people around."

What kind of thoughts are those? I've come to label them "Donor Ted." This fellow is smug when he's on the grounds. He feels a sense of ownership. He thinks he has given a lot and finds it natural that he would be treated well.

He is a Busy Benedictine, in the midst of working and raising a family. Time is the most precious thing he has. And when he spends that precious time to visit Saint Meinrad, he naturally wants some special respect in return. He expects the monks and the staff to make the place pleasant for him.

I call this fellow Donor Ted because he acts like a typical donor to the university where I work. When a donor comes around, he gets the best room, the best food, a special tour, lots of gracious conversations. The university bends over backwards to

make sure the donor has a pleasant stay.

I wish it was because we like the donor, but we all know the truth: The donor has money and we're hoping he'll keep spending it on us. The donor knows this, too, and naturally expects good treatment. He's paying for it, after all.

The *Rule* does talk about treating guests well. When a guest arrives, "Let the head be bowed or the whole body prostrated on the ground in adoration of Christ, who indeed is received in their persons" (RB 53).

Now that's what I'm talking about! I'm the guest; you're the hosts – so all you people lie on the ground before me. It's natural, especially if I have a lot of money.

"As far as the rich are concerned, the very fear which they inspire wins respect for them" (RB 53). Yes: Guests are to be treated like lords. Guests.

When you go to Saint Meinrad, are you going as a guest? An oblate is not a guest of the monastery. Oblates are disciples of Jesus living under the *Rule of St. Benedict*. One theme of the *Rule* is to accept arrangements as they are, without grumbling.

In this time of transformation, may I move from donor to disciple. May I accept with joy even the bad room at the Guest House. It is, after all, an especially blessed resting place on the journey to heaven.

*Edward (Ted) Castronova, oblate  
Bloomington, IN*



*Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, and Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB, at an anointing service for the oblates.*

## Fr. Justin speaks on 'To Flee or Not to Flee'



*Carney Strange*

Seventy oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey joined former abbot Fr. Justin DuVall, OSB, on the Hill for a weekend of prayer and reflection on the

life and miracles of St. Benedict, as presented in the Dialogues of St. Gregory.

An annual getaway for oblates, the Benedictine Oblate Retreat on December 8-10, 2017, was focused appropriately on the experience of "fleeing," away from and toward, as a metaphor for illuminating our own spiritual dynamic while anticipating the coming of Christmas.

The days were organized around three conferences, each drawing on an incident of flight and personal transformation in the life of Benedict. First was his flight from Rome toward the solitude of Subiaco, where Benedict pursued an asceticism disconnected from the world and isolated from "a life in common."

This first vignette raised questions about how God might be revealed to us through others. What are the benefits of community life in forming our own vision?

The second conference detailed Benedict's flight away from Vicavaro, a community of monks at odds with him over his rules and guidance, even to the point of a failed attempt to poison him.

Benedict's response to this event was twofold: forgiveness and a peaceful heart, reminding us of the importance

of reconciliation, letting go of disappointments, and coming to terms with rancor and anger.

The third conference drew from the example of Benedict's thwarted flight back to the cloister of Monte Cassino. Recounting that prayerful evening and meal shared with Scholastica, his sister, in a nearby house, Benedict's desire to "return to the good order of his community" was pitted against sibling love, as storms delayed his departure just a few days prior to her unforeseen death.

Once again, the story underscored the power of hospitality in the reception of guests as Christ himself.

In the final conference, Fr. Justin reminded oblates of the virtue of hope, that is, making sense of things regardless of how they turn out. This becomes our foundation for happiness, itself but a fleeting moment: "Nothing is everlasting, but everything is precious."

While resting in the heart, we Advent people remember the birth of Christ, anticipating once again that "God is making all things new."

A special feature of the weekend was the investiture by Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB, of 22 oblates and oblate novices in a ceremony in the Archabbey Church. These new members joined the monks in the choir stalls that afternoon for Vespers and their introduction to the monastic community. As

usual, food was plentiful, Br. Maurus' drink and appetizer cart accessible, and hospitality honed to perfection for the event.

*Carney Strange, oblate  
Bloomington, IN*

## Fr. Jeremy speaks on hospitality at feast-day conferences



*Lynn Hansen*

Approximately 75-80 oblates traveled to Saint Meinrad Archabbey to celebrate the feast day of St. Meinrad. We gathered for Mass in the

Archabbey Church and attended conferences presented by Fr. Jeremy King, OSB. There was plenty of food and conversation as the day progressed.

Fr. Jeremy began by explaining that the word "expert" combines "x," the unknown, and "spurt," a drip under pressure, and continued by sharing some of his experiences and



*Dorothyann Strange, oblate from Bloomington, IN, was a lector at Mass in the Archabbey Church on January 21, the feast of St. Meinrad.*

opportunities at the monastery. Most recently, on Epiphany 2018, Fr. Jeremy turned over his position as choirmaster to Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB.

In 2016, Janis Dopp asked Fr. Jeremy if he was interested in being involved with the liturgical planning committee of the World Oblate Conference. Accepting this opportunity, he met with the planning committee at Sant' Anselmo in 2016, and again in 2017.

Fr. Jeremy collected and organized the printing of the liturgies in all the languages of the conference participants so that all could pray in their own language. In doing so, Fr. Jeremy fulfilled the understanding of Pope Francis that "the experience of liturgy is something one experiences in his/her own language."

Fr. Jeremy then discussed the Benedictine charism of hospitality. Hospitality, he said, is not just welcoming someone into your home, but also a matter of outreach. The monks of Saint Meinrad model this by reaching out to parishes and ministering to them, teaching students from all over the world and helping with the food pantry in nearby Siberia.

Fr. Jeremy himself was Saint Meinrad's first almoner (distributor of alms) and director of outreach. He is now involved in prison ministry.

Fr. Jeremy said all of the things that he has done are representative of Chapter 4 of the *Rule's* "Tools of Good Works," in which we are called to heed Benedict's instruction not only to pray and keep the commandments, but also to keep the corporal works of mercy. We must keep death before our eyes daily, recognizing that we have a limited

time to accomplish what God has set before us.

We must not only be aware of those around us who may need food, water and clothing, but we must not be wasteful of food, water and money. If we are fortunate enough to have extra food and water, they can be donated to those in need. And there are always research groups to whom extra money can be donated.

As for helping prisoners, we can look into the ministry of helping those released from prison to re-enter everyday life. The Archdiocese of Indianapolis has started a new commission to do exactly that, and Fr. Jeremy sits on this commission.

We can help the homeless, perhaps donating time or money to organizations like Habitat for Humanity, which builds homes. We can offer to help caregivers; visit the elderly who have no one to visit them; or donate a service such as reading, singing, painting, bringing Communion or cleaning.

We can participate in the funeral services of people who do not have anyone or send a card to someone who has recently lost a loved one. Clearly, prayer is the one thing that everyone can do for others.

As Fr. Jeremy said, there are many ways to be hospitable and to honor St. Meinrad. How we do it does not matter; it only matters that we share the love of Christ.

*Lynn Hansen, oblate  
Bloomington, IN*

## INSTITUTES & OBLATIONS

June 9, 2018, will be the next date for institutes and oblations in the oblate community. ♦

## DEATHS

December 22, 2016 – **Louise Rachel Luisana**, White Plains, NY

January 16, 2018 – **Margaret Miriam Nelson**, Indianapolis, IN

February 6, 2018 – **Ron Clark** of Georgetown, OH

February 15, 2018 – **Joan Rillo** of Bloomington, IN

February 15, 2018 – **Marche Peter Zimicki III**, formerly of Longview, TX ♦

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**April 14, 2018** – Louisville Day of Recollection, with Fr. Noël Mueller, OSB

**April 21, 2018** – Dayton, OH, Day of Recollection

**April 27-28, 2018** – Meeting of the Finance Council and the Oblate Advisory Council

**May 19, 2018** – Day of Recollection for oblate chapters in Memphis, TN; Bronx, NY; Farmingdale, NY; and Dayton, OH

**June 9, 2018** – Investitures and Oblations Ceremony at Saint Meinrad Archabbey

**June 11-14, 2018** – Oblate Study Days at Saint Meinrad Archabbey, with Fr. Thomas Gricoski, OSB

**July 7, 2018** – Meeting of Oblate Advisory Council

**July 11, 2018** – Archabbey Day of Recollection

**September 22, 2018** – Investitures and Oblations Ceremony at Saint Meinrad Archabbey

**December 14-16, 2018** – Oblate Advent Retreat at Saint Meinrad Archabbey

**December 15, 2018** - Investitures and Oblations Ceremony at Saint Meinrad Archabbey ♦

# Sharing food with others can be labor of love

My Mom and Dad lived on the farm in the town of St. Meinrad in the early '50s. Dad worked on the farm planting and harvesting crops. During this time, they had four children, and my Mom was pregnant with me. I was born in October 1953 and lived at St. Meinrad for the rest of the year. After that winter, Dad gave up his farming job to pursue a new career.

In 1971, my senior year of high school, I was able to make a retreat at Saint Meinrad, and it was then that I fell in love with the Archabbey and wanted to incorporate it into my life. In the following years, I pursued my career, got married and started a family.

Saint Meinrad got put on the back burner until 2007 when I went back for a visit, and I started making yearly retreats. I decided to become an oblate in 2016 and, with the help and guidance of Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, I started the process and made my final oblation this past year. It has been a faith-filled journey, and I hope and pray it lasts for years to come.

In my family, we are blessed to have three priest-uncles who went to high school and college at Saint Meinrad Seminary. They are beloved by all the family and the Diocese of Owensboro. As of April 2017, they have a combined total of 192 years of priestly ordination.

Fr. Aloysius is 96 and lives at the Carmel Home in Owensboro. Fr. Bernard, 91, lives at St. Elizabeth rectory and still helps with daily Mass. He also counsels and gives retreats. Fr. Richard, 85, lives at his cabin in St. Joseph, KY, and fills in for priests on vacation or those who are ill.

Several years ago, after a big Sunday dinner, I noticed a lot left over and mentioned that we should take the uncles a plate, and we have continued to provide Sunday dinner ever since. We have also had dinners for the uncles' priest friends, and even Bishop Medley has attended. The weekly dinners are a labor of love, and we enjoy doing it.

## Oblate life: Annual personal evaluation

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

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

I think one of the greatest ways to care for people is to feed them. It is also one of the greatest works of mercy. "If a brother or sister is naked or lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what good is that? So faith by itself has no works. It's dead." (James 2:15-17).

*Bernie Powers, oblate  
Owensboro, KY*

## VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Sandra Duffee, Br. Stanley Wagner, OSB, Ann Smith, Mary Campanelli, Novice Noel Zamora, OSB, Catherine Russell and Ted Castronova. ♦



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# The transforming gift of music: Sharing God-given talents with others

As a classical pianist, I have been the recipient of God's great goodness to me through being given the gift of music. Since the age of 6, I have developed this gift, and increasingly it gives a deeper aspect to my soul's understanding.

Just a few years ago, my spiritual director and I remarked on the fact that music can "take me out of myself." What is meant by that phrase? For me it means, whether listening or performing, I can be carried beyond my self-consciousness and the cares of my worldly life into the realm of truth, beauty and God.

When I am performing in a concert, one of my greatest delights is self-forgetfulness, if only for a few seconds at a time, when I am engrossed in the sounds whirling around my physical body. For some years, I have called this "being inside the music."

Many times people have said to me, "I am not musical," to which I reply, "We need listeners." Music is to be shared. Like the psalms, music captures the whole gamut of human emotions: anguish, rage, uncertainty, tranquility, joy.

As listeners, those emotions can be released in us and be transformed. Music is that powerful an agent. The music may be Mozart, a pop ballad, ragtime or chant, and release may happen, if we allow it.

Besides decades of preparing solo recitals and teaching students, for the past 24 years I have been the pianist in a duo with a cellist. In the past seven years, we have begun a series of chamber music recitals in my home, inviting friends and other music lovers to join us. We pray before playing,

asking God to help us and to bless those attending.

When St. Paul writes to the Corinthians about "gifts of the Spirit," he does not list music. But he does write, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (I Cor 2:7). Sharing music, I believe, can be "for the common good."

I cannot know whether God considers our musical talent a spiritual gift, but I think our great desire to share music with others may be such a gift. Certainly that desire and willingness did not come from ourselves: they were planted in us, along with an aptitude for music, by God. We are merely answering the call to service by sharing the gift of music.

Some years ago, I began noticing more and more the many times in the Liturgy of the Hours we are called to praise God with music, as in this responsory: "It is my joy, O God, to

praise you with song. To sing as I ponder your goodness, to praise you with song."

It has been a dream come true for me to study and perform the great music of Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin, Brahms and other masters. I have come to see that music can be a kind of spiritual food that nourishes and supports us. Performing musicians are the transmitters of the composer's heart and genius to the audience; it is a great responsibility to be those transmitters. The ideal, for a musician, would be to become a reed that the music flows through, unobstructed. God then can use the music to touch, heal or invigorate.

My hope as a Christian musician and oblate is expressed by Hesychius, a fifth-century defender of the faith: "Let mind and heart be in your song: this is to glorify God with your whole self."

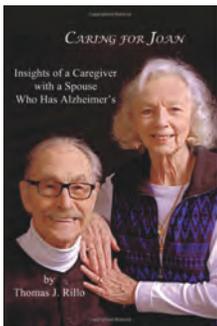
*Diane Rivera, oblate  
Bloomington, IN*



*Oblate Diane Rivera is a musician who teaches, performs and shares her talent with others.*

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## Reading Room



Do you know the feeling? It's like when a bird mistakenly flies into your home or garage, and then they're caught. They fly frantically here and there, trying to escape, trying to get back to where they belong – to be free.

I felt much like that bird, frantic, when I learned of my father's

Alzheimer's diagnosis one year ago. My mind was all jumbled. I flew frantically here and there, trying to get back to where we once had been. Frantic. A feeling absent of stability. And then, God works in the way God does.

At our January oblate chapter meeting, the coordinator mentioned a book written by a very dear oblate, a longtime member of our chapter and friend to Saint Meinrad, Thomas "Doc" Rillo. I first met Doc so many years ago at the YMCA. I was running on the treadmill and he came up to me complimenting me on my running form.

I appreciated the compliment. I never ran competitively and used running mostly as an outlet for the frustrations I encountered in life. I saw him periodically over the years, but didn't know that he attended the same parish I did or that he was an oblate. Truth be told, if you had asked me about Benedictine Oblates three years ago I would have replied, "Huh?"

After the chapter meeting, I immediately went home and ordered the book, *Caring for Joan: Insights of a Caregiver*

*with a Spouse Who Has Alzheimer's* (Thomas J. Rillo, 2017). When it arrived, I read it cover to cover in less than 24 hours – it is that engaging.

Doc's story begins, and ends, with his absolute love of God. In this story, he gently leads the reader through his relationship with his wife, Joan, and the journey they travel. He describes with such joy his love for Joan and their early years as a young couple and he, ever so gently, takes you down the more rugged path of their post-Alzheimer's diagnosis.

Within his description, the reader will also find suggestions for caregivers and explanations of available resources. Doc Rillo is a gifted writer. He includes a selection of poems he's written, which brings the reader to a place of calm as well as prayer. The artwork and illustrations were drawn by Saint Meinrad's Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB. The illustrations are both intricate and simple and help provide a sense of peace for the reader.

After reading *Caring for Joan*, this little bird feels much less frantic. I will, on occasion, continue to flit and fly here and there. But through Doc's writing, I know my heart and my spirit are alighting by God's grace to a place of stability.

It is here in this place of stability where I can begin to see God more fully in my father and his situation. It is here in this place of stability where I can be who God created me to be for my father and his situation.

*Rebecah F. Boyle, oblate  
Bloomington, IN*