

# Oblate Benedictine



Saint Meinrad



*Eunice Taylor, left, congratulates Joanna Harris after the oblation and investiture rites in March. Joanna became an oblate novice.*

## Joy: A gift of the Holy Spirit

Joy is a gift imparted to us by God. It is not merely happiness that is dependent upon events or circumstances of well-being. We do not create joy by ourselves, but we receive it as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Joy is predominant as a characteristic of the righteous in the Psalms. There are more references to joy in the Psalms than in any other book of the Bible. Whether we are singing for joy, rejoicing in the presence of God, turning our mourning into dancing with joy, or worshipping with sacrifices of joy, the Psalms remind us it is our connection with God that is the true source of joy.

St. Paul reminds us that joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit and that you cannot fake it. You either have it or you don't. He tells us that if we walk in the way of the Lord, we will experience joy.

While Paul was incarcerated, he wrote to the Philippians of his joy that his imprisonment was for Christ, and that it was helping to spread and defend the Gospel and "and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice..." (Phil. 1:18). Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica that "in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit..."

So joy goes beyond simply a feeling of happiness, but is something we can know even in our deepest despair. Nehemiah reminds us that "the joy of the Lord is your strength."

With this issue of the oblate newsletter, we proceed to "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord" Ps. 66:1.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate  
New Salisbury, IN*

# A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

“The love of Christ must come before all else.”

*Rule of St. Benedict, 4:21*

God’s love endures long and is patient and kind. It is never envious or boiled over with jealousy. It is not boastful, egotistical or overbearing. The love of God is not conceited, arrogant, prideful or rude.

God’s love does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking. God’s love is not irritable, whiny or resentful.

Best of all, this love contains no account of the wrong done to it, but rejoices when truth and right prevail within the person God has created. It is a joy that God’s love never fails us!

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# Thank You,

## Abbot Kurt, for the JOY you bring the oblates of Saint Meinrad!



## From the desk of the director: Fixing our sights on a joy that is eternal



*Janis Dopp*

There is a fundamental difference between “joy” and “happiness.” I am generally a happy person, enjoying what each day brings and reveling in the little nuances surrounding what would otherwise be ordinary.

Joy signals a deeper emotion that accompanies the life of faith in which we abide from one day to the next. It does not fade with trials and the difficulties

that present themselves throughout life. It is the rich, round, warm and soothing resting place where we experience our hope that there is so much more than the eye can see.

We practice our life of faith within the context of the Gospels and the *Rule of St. Benedict*. The tensions of life are encountered and worked through by practicing our spiritual disciplines in the light of a much greater promise.

Benedict says, “As we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight

of love” (Prologue, 49). It is discipline that leads to true joy.

There is nothing about giddiness in joy. There is nothing momentary about joy. It is, instead, the abiding experience that is at the heart of assurance. It is the faith that what we choose to do today will “profit us forever” (Prologue, 44).

We take up the “tools of the spiritual craft” (RB 4:75) for a reason – because “When we have used them without ceasing day and night and have returned them on judgment day, our wages will

be the reward the Lord has promised: *What the eye has not seen nor the ear heard, God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9)”* RB 4:76-77.

We practice our craft in the midst of a culture that sells the momentary and all that glitters. The enticements that are set before us, however, are all passing away, and we keep our eyes fixed on the promise of a joy that is eternal.

*Janis Dopp  
Oblate Director*

## OBLATES

*In their own words*



*Oblate Pete Manninen  
Brownsburg, IN*

“The greatest blessing is the joy that I experience when we come together to pray and worship as a community.

Everybody is always very friendly. We have God and Christ in common and it strengthens my faith.”

## Musings from the Chaplain



*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB*

Joy is enduring. Joy is not like happiness, which is based on happenings or whether things are going well or not. Rather, joy remains even amidst suffering.

Joy is an emotion that’s acquired by the anticipation, acquisition or even the expectation of something great or wonderful. It could be described as exhilaration, delight or sheer gladness, and it can result from a beautiful or wonderful experience, especially as an experience of God.

Pope Francis said, “The Gospels, radiant with the glory of Christ’s cross, constantly invite us to rejoice.” He continues, “Why should we not also enter into this great stream of joy?”

St. Paul, in his Letter to the Philippians (4:4), said, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” In whom are we to rejoice? The Lord.

In the first chapter of St. Luke’s Gospel, Mary begins her song of praise, the Magnificat, with, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my whole being

rejoices in God my Savior.” Who does she rejoice in? God.

There is the start. Our joy rooted in the Lord surges up so that we do not want to keep it to ourselves, but rather share it with others.

Joy accompanies the message of Jesus Christ. Along with our love, we also need to show to our family, community, coworkers, and the world our joy. It springs from our effort to put aside personal worries and enter into friendship with God.

Joy is essential to our mission to bring others to God. Who will be attracted by a sad and negative critic, or a gloomy complainer? St. Francis de Sales said, “A sad saint is a sorry saint.” St. Francis of Assisi said, “It is not fitting when one is in God’s service to have a gloomy face or chilling look.” May our lives reflect our joy, and so lead the world to the Lord.

*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB  
Oblate Chaplain*



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# Notes from Novices: *The joy of Holy Week*



*Joanna Harris*

Holy Week is the holiest of times in Christianity. What is your Holy Week like? Mine is usually a bit hectic. Planning around my job (is time

off on Good Friday to attend the 3 p.m. services possible?) along with preparations for Easter guests and meals means my thoughts swirl with lists, shopping, cleaning, etc. I'm present in body for the Easter Triduum, but admittedly distracted with my "to do" list.

This Easter was wonderfully different. I spent this Holy Week at Saint Meinrad. Yes, the entire week – starting with Palm Sunday! What an awesome blessing! What joy! A few remembrances....

On Palm Sunday, the solemn procession was brilliant and glorious! It was as if we were in the crowd that day. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, we were spreading our garments on the road, crying out: "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Mark 11:9-10). And we were in Gethsemane when Jesus was taken away!

The Psalms and the readings during Morning Prayer and Vespers for Monday through Wednesday of Holy Week prepared us for what was to come. The readings from Lamentations and Isaiah were particularly poignant, given the events they foretold.

At the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, Archabbot Kurt Stasiak washed the feet of several people, thus modeling humility for us, as Jesus did for his disciples. In his

Gospel, John tells of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, saying to them: "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (John 13:15).

Good Friday, the cantors sang the Passion of Jesus Christ – incredible and beautiful! Again, it felt like we were there, in the crowd. We heard Peter deny knowing Jesus, we heard the crowd cry out, "Take him away! Crucify him!" Would we have been shouting, too? When Jesus said, "It is finished," we were at Golgotha that dark afternoon in the quietness that comes after death.

The dawn of Holy Saturday felt so bare. He is in the tomb. He is gone from us. I miss him. Being at Saint Meinrad, I was blessed to spend the day in prayerful reflection, remaining in quiet stillness with the grief and emptiness I felt.

The Easter Vigil celebration began at the bottom of the Archabbey Church steps with the fire roaring, the paschal candle was lit, the words spoken: "May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds." We entered a totally dark Archabbey Church, our individual candles the sole source of light.

At the Easter Proclamation, the Archabbot declared, "This is the night when Christ broke the prison-bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld." The Gospel reading from Luke told of the women finding the tomb empty, and angels asking them, "Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised" (Luke 24:5).

Hallelujah! He is risen, indeed!

*Joanna Harris, oblate novice  
Lexington, KY*

## Notes for Novices: *Finding joy in the monastery*



*Br. Stanley Rother Wagner*

I am humble enough to admit when I am wrong.

When I entered Saint Meinrad as a candidate in October 2016, I hardly considered the

monastic life filled with joy. With the grace of obedience, stability and fidelity, I have come to see where joy abounds in each moment of our common life. The key is to be aware of that joy.

Benedict teaches us that we must keep "the fear of God" before our eyes at all

times (see: RB 7:10-13). This is not "fear" in the worldly sense of the term, but rather the awesome and eternal presence of God that permeates all things throughout time and place.

When we rely on God, his grace reminds us of the Divine Presence in the present moment. We are then able to remember God's love and goodness in our pasts and how, with every wrong step, He still brought us to this Hill to love us abundantly so we may love Him joyfully in those whom He sends to us.

I was wrong. There is an abundance of joy in monastic living.

*Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB  
Oblate Novice Mentor*

# Workers in the Vineyard

## Obedience to a task can lead to joy



Donna Hardy

Several years ago, our pastor at St. Thomas More Catholic Church in Chapel Hill, NC, told his Eucharistic ministers that, instead of talking amongst ourselves before Sunday Mass, we should be greeting parishioners and visitors at the front doors of the church.



Curt Hardy

My husband Curt and I had a whole week to ponder Fr. Scott's request. How could we, shy people that we were, say "Good morning" and mean it, to hundreds of people each Sunday morning? Obedience was calling us to do a task we really didn't want to serve.

For the next Sunday and nearly every Sunday since (with the exception of a year off due to illness), we have positioned ourselves by the doors to cheerfully greet parishioners and non-parishioners alike before Mass. Truthfully, it did seem a trifle odd at first, but the more we did it, the more comfortable it became and the more we came to enjoy it.

We started learning people's names and faces. We learned what parishioners wanted to talk about: the weather, their families, vacation trips, illnesses, concerns, and prayers for specific intentions. We learned to anticipate what assistance we could provide, like giving directions and

information about the church and its activities, and offering to bring Communion to physically challenged parishioners in their pews.

This welcoming by Eucharistic ministers was such a success that a St. Benedict Hospitality Ministry, open to all, was created to serve at each of our Sunday Masses. Curt and I, who had considered ourselves to be the least likely people to be St. Benedict ministers, have discovered great joy in greeting people at the door.

After attending a small funeral for an elderly parishioner that we often had greeted on Sunday mornings, we asked ourselves if we should offer hospitality at funerals. We started out opening doors, greeting people,

passing out programs and giving directions.

Soon we found other ways to help: accepting florist deliveries, opening and closing doors for the funeral procession, welcoming and guiding latecomers quietly into the church, getting more programs printed, and carrying an ossuary to the foot of the altar if there were no pallbearers.

It is perhaps difficult to imagine that one could find joy in a funeral ministry, but it definitely exists. Curt and I can vouch for this, because we heeded that initial call of obedience. We have found a joy in our parish that was hidden to us before.

*Donna and Curt Hardy, oblates  
Pittsboro, NC*



*Martha Gilliom receives the sign of peace from Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, after the oblation and investiture in March.*

# Considering the Psalms



*Kathleen Polansky*

With this issue of the oblate newsletter, we would like to premiere a feature dedicated to the psalms. Since our theme for this issue is joy, I would like

to focus on Psalm 107 (NRSV or NAB / 106 Grail translation used at Saint Meinrad). This is not exactly the obvious selection of psalms for this topic. Yet as we delve into it, there is definitely an underlying understanding of what true joy is.

*Quick explanation:* There are differing ways to number the Psalms. Most modern translations use numbering based on a Hebrew (Masoretic) text. Another numbering stems from the Greek (Septuagint) translation, which was used by the Latin Vulgate translation of St. Jerome. Catholic sources often use both systems for numbering. The reason for the confusion derives from the Hebrew combining some Psalms that in the Greek are separated into two.

Psalm 107 asserts that those who renounce self-sufficiency and cry to God will receive God's wonderful deed, which is his steadfast love. In this Psalm, we are reminded of the trials and difficulties of our ancestors, who faced sickness, affliction, distress, hunger, thirst. They saw their suffering as a result of their sin, their pain as a product of wickedness.

In every situation, they repeatedly turned their lives to God in trust, in praise and in sacrifice, relying on the goodness that God showered upon them to bring food, protection, success and abundance. In everything it is the goodness of God that

provides, and the reliance upon God that invites. Each of us is called to live in that goodness and find joy.

We live in a society that boasts of our individualism and ability to make it on our own. We often hear that we should "pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps." In fact, it is so often used that it is hard to question its intent and built-in bias. We are told early on that careful preparation, strong decision-making and hard work will bring success.

For some, this includes getting ahead by whatever means are available: legal or not, moral or not. The path we choose is determined by our decisions, planning and management. We are to be self-made. Our careful investments will determine our later success and happiness.

Psalm 107 challenges this autocratic life management and reminds us that it is God who has been and still is laying out a plan based on love. Our joy consists of heeding the lessons of the Psalms. Those who renounce self-

sufficiency and cry to God will be the beneficiaries of God's "wonderful works," which reveal God's enduring steadfast love (v. 43b; see vv. 1, 8, 15, 21, 31).

Such was the solitary hope for exiles, as it had been Israel's only hope throughout its history and today it is our hope as well. For oblates, this is the promise we make of obedience, our promise to be receptive to God and to how God chooses to work in our lives.

To receive God's love as a gift brings joy. Psalm 107 continuously speaks of the love found in surrendering our will to God and letting that love of God be the guide that bring direction and purpose to life and in that we will find true joy. "The upright see it and are glad; and all wickedness stops its mouth. Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love of the Lord" (Psalm 107:42-43).

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate  
New Salisbury, IN*



*Patrick Perry prays during Mass in the Archabbey Church on the Feast of St. Benedict.*

# Reflections from the Wilderness

## Benedictine spirituality without a chapter

One day at the Branchville Correctional Facility, I was attending one of the few Catholic services that this facility offers. What services we do have are mostly due to the volunteers, such as Br. Zachary Wilberding, OSB.

*“At this exact moment, I placed my Bible on my bed and said to God, ‘Thy will be done.’”*

On this particular evening, a pamphlet was being passed around that caught my attention. It contained information on becoming a Benedictine Oblate. I thought to myself: what is an oblate? I grabbed a dictionary when I returned to the dorm and looked up this obscure

word. Pamphlet in one hand, dictionary in the other, I soon discovered oblation means “offering.”

Now at this time in my life, I had been incarcerated for about 14 months. I knew then that I needed a change. I was raised Catholic; however, I knew there had to be something more. We all yearn for something more, something deeper.

I have always had an interest in the monastic way of life. In this interest, I grew quite fond of the Benedictine

approach as opposed to any other order. This fueled my increasing attraction to this whole Benedictine oblate thing.

I did as much research as possible given my limited access to information. The one thing that

became apparent to me was being a monk is a serious commitment and one I’m not ready to take, given my current position in life. However, that didn’t matter to God.

In Romans 12:1, it is titled: Sacrifice of Body and Mind. I was reading this scripture verse one night and it hit me. “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.”

At this exact moment, I placed my Bible on my bed and said to God, “Thy will be done.” I grabbed a piece of writing paper and sent my letter to the director of Benedictine oblates to take the next step to be the living sacrifice our Lord has called me to be in accordance with the *Rule of St. Benedict*.

*Robert Branson, oblate  
Branchville, IN*



*Saint Meinrad buildings are reflected in the water of the lake on a summer day.*

# The Busy Benedictine: *A license to smile*

*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*

My eldest just got his driver's license. He did his written test and his road test; then we went to the BMV to get the actual plastic. We got called up fairly fast. The lady shouted, "NUMBER 57!!" loud enough to make an airplane deaf.

I gestured for him to take a seat in front of the lady there. He stood back and looked at me with that look of "Dad, what are you *doing*?" and then he sat down in another chair off to the side. It was another of those moments where this father was completely confused about what was going on. In any case, I sat in front of the lady. He got his license.

After we departed, "Number 58!!" still ringing in our ears, he yelled at me. "Why don't you parent when I need you to parent?? And then when I don't want you to get involved, you're always sticking your nose in!!"

I guess he was afraid he might screw something up and not get his license; he wanted me front and center. OK. How should I know? I grumbled something about not letting a 16-year-old tell me how to parent. And we rode off in silence.

Now is that how it's supposed to work? He gets his license, then we're frustrated and upset? Of course not. Getting a license is supposed to be a joyful occasion – isn't it?

A license is permission. It's freedom to do something. Our world tells us that

whenever we become free to do something, we become happier. Right?

Well, wrong. God gives us license to do all kinds of things, and many of those things make us sad. Yes, as I told myself repeatedly during this Lent, ice cream can make Ted happy. It also makes Ted fat. Being fat makes Ted unhappy. So ice cream makes Ted happy and unhappy: It makes him happy for a short time and unhappy for a long time. Arg!

As tempting as it is to build a life around short bursts of happiness, we eventually learn that the best feeling is the long one: joy. And isn't it strange how the road to joy runs straight through temporary unhappiness?

Christian faith stresses this point over and over: The road to joy is to follow the laws of God, even if (especially if!) they make you frustrated right now. God gives us a license. If we use it virtuously, we will find joy.

That's how it is with anything serious. My son's driver's license made us tense because it's a serious thing, a major responsibility. With a license, you can make yourself happy for a minute and, in the same minute, rob yourself and others of a lifetime of joy.

Perhaps that's why his mother's expression, when she actually saw that he had the precious piece of plastic, changed into this odd, trance-like stare. Which she still has. We are waiting for her to snap out of it.

But for now I guess she just doesn't want to be in a world where her curly-haired baby is operating a two-ton death machine. She'll get through this unhappiness, however, and one day, God willing, experience the joy of being driven around by her very mature and reliable son.

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



*Sean Champagne receives the Rule of St. Benedict from Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB, while being invested as an oblate novice on March 23.*

# Meeting the Monks

## A visit with Fr. Sean Hoppe, OSB



*Fr. Sean Hoppe, OSB*

“Always open to surprises” is a theme that runs through the ministry and experiences of Fr. Sean Hoppe, OSB, who has been a monk of Saint Meinrad for 42 years. During that time, he has served the Church as a parish priest in the Diocese of Evansville, transportation director, vestiarius, and guest master at the monastery and Archabbey Church. Fr. Sean also served 17 years as pastor/priest to the inmates at the Branchville Correctional Facility.

Fr. Sean’s first surprise occurred in finding himself at Saint Meinrad at all. When he announced a vocation to the priesthood, his mother hoped he would pick a seminary close to their home in Findlay, Ohio. His desire was to move further away.

After learning of seminaries in Columbus (the closest), Cincinnati and Saint Meinrad (the furthest), he decided that Cincinnati would be a compromise location. As he discussed his decision with his parish priest, who was an alumnus of Saint

Meinrad, he was told that he was going to Saint Meinrad. And that was that! So off he moved to southern Indiana.

The original intent – to complete his seminary education and be ordained a priest for his home Diocese of Toledo – took a surprising twist. In 1976 Fr. Sean opted to explore a monastic vocation and asked to enter the monastery at Saint Meinrad. He made his solemn profession in 1980.

Fr. Sean was asked to travel to Togo, West Africa, for the ordination of one of our graduates, a monk of Abbaye de L’Incarnation near Agbang, and to visit the other Benedictine monastery in Togo, Abbaye de L’Ascension near Dzogbegan. Saint Meinrad Archabbey has hosted monks from these two monasteries for nearly 20 years.

He found himself blessed and surprised by his visit there. Togo is an extremely poor nation, but the sense of joy and community he found among the people was truly uplifting

and inspiring. The people built a community on interdependence and relationship, rather than the divisions of wealth and status that influence many wealthy nations.

Fr. Sean related a story from his ministry at the Branchville prison, “A security guard mentioned to me that I was getting to meet the cream of the crop in the men that chose to attend Mass at the prison. If you went onto the block, you would see something quite different.”

In reflecting on that, Fr. Sean commented that many oblates, retreatants and visitors may come to a place like Saint Meinrad thinking that they are witnessing the “cream of the crop” in the monks and religious who make up the community here.

To Fr. Sean, the surprise is that it is the other way around. He rejoices in the fact that those who choose to make oblation or make a retreat or visit are the “cream of the crop” that he and his fellow monks have the opportunity to meet.

The visit with Fr. Sean was filled with laughter, stories and insights into a man who has expended his life in gratitude for his calling as a monastic. He sees any trial faced along the road as a means to embrace his blessings as gifts to be cherished, rather than losses to be mourned.

His attitude is inspiring and uplifting and we hope that all oblates take the opportunity to introduce themselves to Fr. Sean as he greets you upon entering the Archabbey Church. His faith is infectious.

*Tom Causey, oblate  
New Salisbury, IN*

# Dear Abbey:

## Have questions? We have answers!

*Do you have questions for Abbey? If so, submit them to [boylex3@hotmail.com](mailto:boylex3@hotmail.com).*

Dear Abbey,

I've received some information on Slack, and I don't get it! Is it a reminder for me to quit slacking off? Please help me understand.

Truly yours,  
#notslacking

Dear Not Slacking,

No! We are not accusing you of slacking off! Slack is a new online discussion forum for our Saint Meinrad oblates who do not have the support of belonging to a chapter, but any Saint Meinrad oblate is invited to participate in the online community.

The Slack platform has been set up specifically to allow you to connect to others in a safe, closed community – like the monastery itself. Like Facebook or other similar social media, this is a place for you to meet other oblates and share your Benedictine journey.

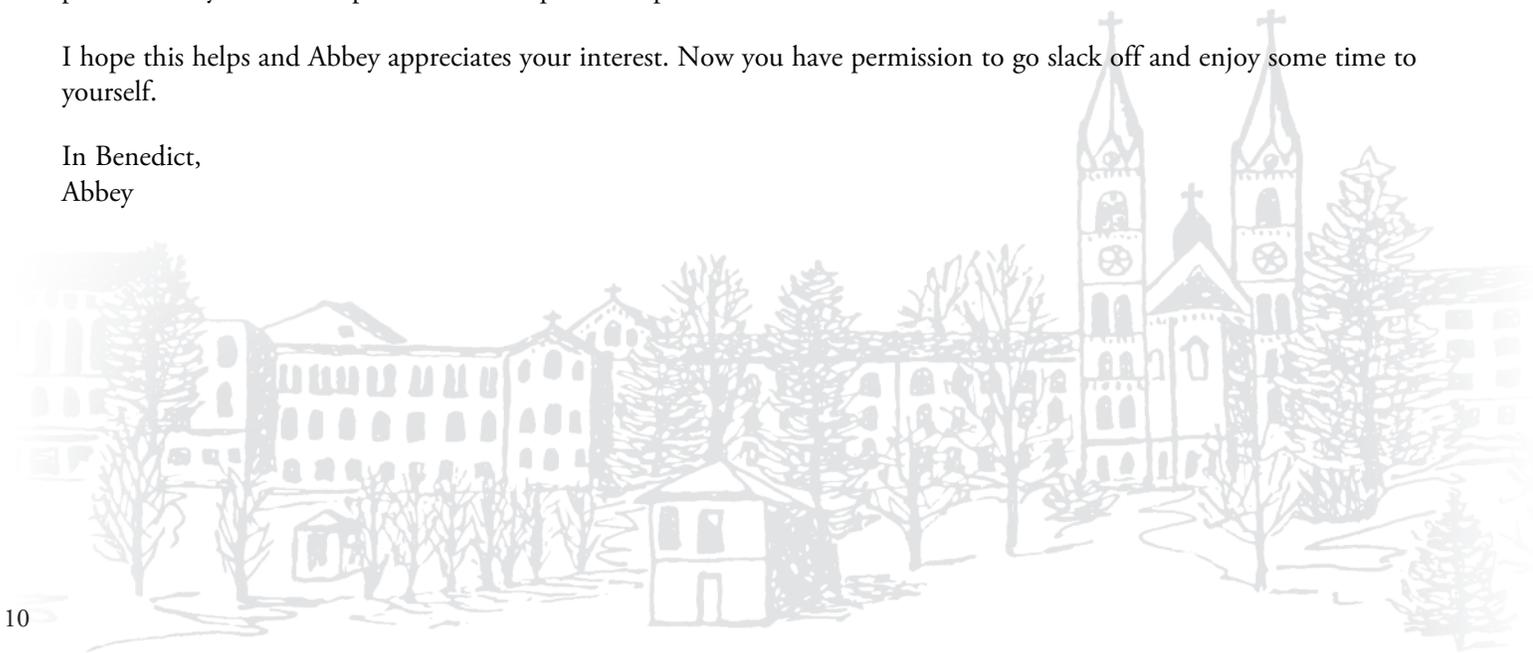
However, unlike Facebook, Slack is a private community. It does not connect to other social media outlets. Saint Meinrad's Slack community is reserved just for us.

If you are looking for others to share your journey, such as prayer life or questions you might have, then Slack is the place for you.

If you are interested in joining Slack, then send your name and email to Brenda Black in the Oblate Office, [bblack@saintmeinrad.edu](mailto:bblack@saintmeinrad.edu). You will receive an email from the Slack forum directing you to set up your account with a password. If you need help or have more questions, please send those to the Oblate Office as well.

I hope this helps and Abbey appreciates your interest. Now you have permission to go slack off and enjoy some time to yourself.

In Benedict,  
Abbey



# Oblates follow St. Benedict's path to Christ



Dan Sheets

In daily interactions with people, more frequently than not the subject of being a Benedictine oblate comes up in conversation. It usually leads

to the question of: what is a Benedictine oblate? In my experience, many people think being an oblate somehow puts us on a pedestal of being holy or on a fast track to heaven. This is not what it means at all!

We have not become holier than any other person because we are Benedictine Oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey. Rather, it is a desire to become holy that has led us to become an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey and to live our lives according to the *Rule of St Benedict*.

Becoming an oblate has opened our eyes and the ears of our hearts to following the path set forth by St. Benedict in his *Rule*. Benedict's *Rule* calls us to be as much like Christ as possible, to see Christ in everyone we encounter and to be a representation of Christ for everyone, as we struggle on our own path to holiness. It is indeed a lifelong endeavor.

Being an oblate is really rather ordinary. We are ordinary people living ordinary lives as doctors, lawyers, electricians, musicians and artists – to name a few. We live everyday lives, consecrating each moment as a gift to God as we do ordinary things each day.

This is what makes our lives as oblates extraordinary!

I remember reading about a monk who was being interviewed. The

interviewer asked, "What do you do in the monastery?" He replied, "We fall down, we get up. We fall down, we get up. We fall down, we get up." What a perfect response. We oblates can apply his response to our daily lives as well.

As we journey through life on our way back to God, we can be assured that although we have many times when we fall down, Christ, our Mother Mary, St. Benedict, and all of the saints will be there to pick us up and to hold us in their hands and allow us to begin anew.

With this assurance, let us confidently go forth on this earthly journey back to God, hoping to hear at the end of our journey the words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant!"

*Dan Sheets, oblate  
Mishawaka, IN*



Visitors walk from the Archabbey Church to the Guest House and Retreat Center.

## Lenten retreat focuses on commitment



Rick Tomsick

At our Lenten retreat in March, Fr. Bede Cisco, OSB, led the oblates of Saint Meinrad on an interactive journey to evaluate and confirm the

commitments in our lives. Using the *Rule of St. Benedict* as a guide, this weekend conference encouraged us to identify the obligations in our lives – not *just* our oblate commitments – and to mindfully consider the ways we can live out our duties in daily life.

It's not always easy to keep our commitments. For example, I often need reminders to do the things I've promised to do (volunteer commitments), as well as the things that are expected of me regardless of a promise (obligations, like paying taxes!).

Even with a printed card of the oblate promises and duties taped on my bathroom mirror, there are days I forget to consciously engage in one or more of these oblate commitments. I suppose the same holds true for some of my other commitments in life.

So, how can we better live out our commitments? One place to begin, Fr. Bede proposed, is to cut back, not add on. Moderation is the key to managing our commitments. He criticized the popular notion of keeping “balance” in our lives, which conjures the precarious image of walking a tightrope. Rather, he suggested, as Fr. Justin DuVall, OSB, has said, maintaining a sense of rhythm in our life to create space to achieve greater success.

Fr. Bede used examples from the *Rule* to illustrate the importance of commitment. For example, St. Benedict reminds us to serve one another (RB 35), to work with our hands (RB 48), and always to “let nothing be preferred to the work of God” (the daily Office) (RB 43). Benedict's formula for carrying out our commitments is practicing “good zeal,” as spelled out in the penultimate chapter of the Rule (RB 72).

The retreat was also interactive, as we split into smaller groups to discuss questions like, “What have I learned about my commitments?”, “How does being an oblate affect my commitments?” and “What one change do I plan to make so that in all things God may be glorified?”

The small groups brainstormed to define “commitment” and identify the many commitments we each have to our families, our work, to others and to ourselves. Afterward, a representative of each group shared a summary of the group's conclusions with the entire audience.

Many of these were beneficial, such as shedding commitments that are no longer vital, letting go of our need to be in control, understanding that service to family and to others is itself the work of God, and learning to change bad habits one at a time, replacing them with good habits.

Seen in this light, our oblate experience of prayer and service can be rewarding in unexpected ways in even the mundane aspects of our lives. Ask yourself, “What one change can I make today so that in all things God may be glorified?”

*Rick Tomsick, oblate  
Richmond Heights, OH*

## Cincinnati oblate enjoys Honor Flight

Cincinnati oblate Peyton Reed was invited to take an Honor Flight to Washington, D.C., on April 17. Sponsored by Honor Flight Tri-State at no cost to veterans, the trip allowed veterans to watch the Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier; see the Marine, Air Force and



Cincinnati oblate Peyton Reed locates the names of two men from his Army company during a visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Navy memorials, and visit the World War II, Korea and Vietnam veterans memorials.

The trip began at 5:15 a.m. with a rousing welcome for the veterans, and ended at 9:30 p.m. with a roaring “Welcome Home!”

This was an emotional trip for Peyton. He writes, “I am an in-country Vietnam Veteran, 1967-68. My last plane flight of this nature was on a Boeing 707 from Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon to Oakland.

“This was a whirlwind, one-day trip to the military memorials in DC and back. Being older than 65, the veterans were required to have guardians accompany them. In a reversal of roles, Peter, my son, was my guardian on the trip!

“The most emotional event for me was seeing again the Vietnam Women’s Memorial. The high point for me was finding two men, from the 4th MP Company, that I worked near for a time. I know exactly the place where they were ambushed, in April of 1968.

“Searching for their names on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial had been difficult, as I didn’t remember their names and as we lost so many men that April. Recently I found a more usefully organized site, and found them on the memorial: Panel 53E, Lines 18 and 22.”

The photo shows Reed pointing to the names of his two comrades.

### Online oblate community begins

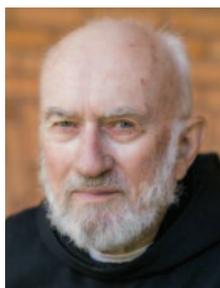
Many oblates have expressed interest in an online oblate community. We have explored the different packages and tools, looking for the best way to

help our far-flung oblate community to find togetherness despite the miles.

We have chosen to use Slack. Slack will allow you to post comments, ask questions to the larger community and share your Benedictine journey with others on the same road.

Oblates who are interested in joining the online community will need to send the following information to the Oblate Office: first name, last name and email address. Email this information to [oblates@saintmeinrad.edu](mailto:oblates@saintmeinrad.edu). The site is up and running now and we’re just waiting for you to join!

### Benedictine scholar Fr. Terrence Kardong, OSB, dies



Fr. Terrence Kardong

ND, who died peacefully in his sleep on March 24, 2019, at the abbey.

Fr. Terrence launched his career in scholarly work, writing on the *Rule of St. Benedict* and other monastic and patristic texts. He published extensively in periodicals, many of them outside the United States. His major work was *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* published in 1996.

He also published *Commentaries on Benedict’s Rule* (1986), *Together Unto Life Everlasting* (1986), *Asking Benedict: A Study Program on the Rule* (1992), *Benedictines* (Religious Order Series 1992), *Day By Day with Saint*

*Benedict* (2005), *The Life of St. Benedict by Gregory the Great: Translation and Commentary* (2009), *Pillars of Community: Four Rules of Pre-Benedictine Monastic Life* (2010), *Conversations with Saint Benedict* (2012), *Saint Columban: His Life, Rule, and Legacy* (2017) and *Benedict Backwards: Reading the Rule in the Twenty-First Century* (2017).

### We want you and your articles!

*The Benedictine Oblate* is looking for current news and happenings about you or your oblate chapter. Whether or not you are connected to a chapter, you are connected as an oblate to Saint Meinrad, and we want to hear what’s going on with you.

You are invited to submit news and information about your chapter, write an article about your Benedictine journey, submit a book review for the Reading Room column, or send in photos of you or your chapter engaged in oblate activities.

All submissions must include your name, city and state, and an explanation of how it connects to the theme. Submissions will be edited and published to fit the theme (see below) or need of the newsletter. A word limit of 500 or less is suggested. Please send all submissions to Kathleen Polansky at [kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com](mailto:kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com).

### Upcoming Themes

Fall 2019 – Mourning (submit by August 1)  
Winter 2020 – Promising (submit by November 1)  
Spring 2020 – Stability (submit by February 1)

## Oblate Council and Finance Committee meet

The Saint Meinrad Archabbey Oblate Finance Committee and Oblate Council met on April 5 and 6. The following are some highlights:

**Finance Committee:** At the six-month point of the fiscal year, oblate expenses were slightly in excess of the year-to-date budget. As of December 31, 2018, there is a good supply of oblate books and resources and the costs of production of these items were fully recovered by the end of the 2017-2018 fiscal year. The budget for fiscal year 2019-2020 has been drafted and submitted to the Business Office.

**Novice News:** The first novice retreat, "Finding Stability as an Oblate Novice," was held January 4-6, 2019, and Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB, oblate novice mentor, reported that it was a great success. He provided copies to the Council of a summary of evaluations of the retreat. The feedback can help improve future novice retreats. The next novice retreat is planned for January 2020.

**Audio CD of Liturgy of the Hours:** Jennie Latta provided an opportunity for the Council to preview and hear the completed works of several dedicated oblates and Saint Meinrad monks. This CD is an audio of the Liturgy of the Hours prayed by the Saint Meinrad monks in chant. It is a masterpiece and will, most assuredly, help direct our hearts while at home or in our cars as we pray along with the CD. More information will follow regarding release dates and purchasing options.

**Meeting of Chapter Coordinators:** The Council is preparing for the next meeting of all chapter coordinators. It will be held at Saint Meinrad on June

21-23, 2019. Breakout sessions and small group discussions are being planned on the topic of mutual obedience. The goal is to have coordinators take away concrete ideas and strategies of how they best can support their chapters as individuals and as community in carrying out mutual obedience to each other and to Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

**New Online Chapter:** Slack is the name of the web resource being used as a new online chapter for oblates, especially those who are not connected in community by a chapter, to have a space to share and discuss their oblate journey. Oblates need to send their email address to Brenda Black in the Oblate Office if they wish to join this private discussion forum.

**Expanded Newsletter:** The Oblate Office is excited to announce that the newsletter has been expanded to 16 pages, which allows for more oblate news. Oblates are commenting on how much they appreciate the work that goes into this publication and how it helps them with their oblate formation.

The Oblate Council and Finance Committee will meet again October 18-19, 2019.

## INVESTITURES

March 23, 2019 - **Karen Berenberg** and **Sanford Berenberg**, both of Louisville, KY; **Sean Champagne** of Montgomery, AL; **Joanna Harris** of Lexington, KY; **Jane Rhoda** of St. Louis, MO; **Darren Sroufe** of Newburgh, IN; **Charles Wilson** of Columbus, IN ♦

## OBLATIONS

March 23, 2019 – **Vincent Geremia** of Ashland, KY; **Martha Gilliom** of West Lafayette, IN; **Matthew Graf**, **Craig**

**Medlyn** and **Alejandra Spir-Haddad**, all of Bloomington, IN; **Brett-Catherine "Ani" Stewart** of Hope, IN; **Bryan Walck** of Lafayette, IN

April 28, 2019 – **Joshua Clearwater** of Litchfield, IL ♦

## DEATHS

**Col. Mark Smith**, of Indianapolis, IN, March 29, 2019

**Mary Agnes Rogier**, of Tell City, IN, April 7, 2019

**Joan Seipel**, of Lanesville, IN, May 2, 2019 ♦

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**July 11, 2019:** St. Benedict Day of Recollection presented by Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB

**August 30-September 1, 2019:** New York Labor Day Weekend Retreat on "Vigilance" presented by Fr. Mateo Zamora, OSB ♦

## VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were: Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB, Ann Smith, Mary Campanelli, Fr. Mateo Zamora, OSB, Novice Dennis Reyes, OSB, Kathleen Polansky, Becky Boyle, Marie Kobos, Ted Castronova and Br. Kolbe Wolniakowski, OSB. ♦

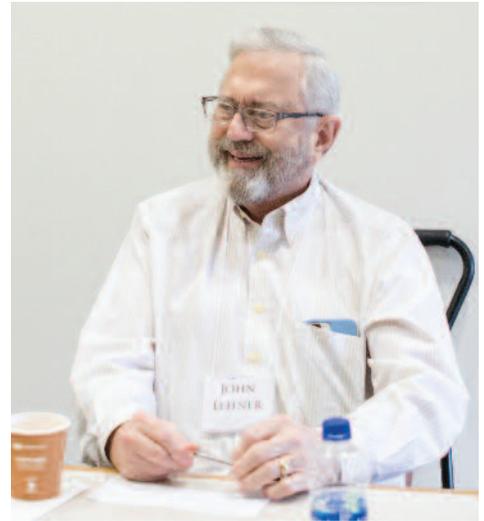
## Online Store

*Visit the Scholar Shop's  
online store*

<http://store.saintmeinrad.edu>

Shop our new website for the latest books from Saint Meinrad authors, clothing and other items.

# OBLATE PHOTOS

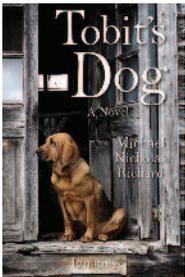


*Images from the oblations & investitures and the retreat held at Saint Meinrad in March. For more photos of Saint Meinrad events, visit <http://saintmeinrad.smugmug.com>.*

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## Reading Room

*Tobit's Dog* by Michael Nicholas Richard (2014, Ignatius Press)



In the Old Testament, the Book of Tobit takes place in Ninevah in 8th century BC, where Jews from Galilee have been living in exile for several generations. Tobit's family is one of the few families who always have been faithful to God.

It's a story about living a faithful life in a foreign land. There is deep despair, a road trip, breaking a curse, finding true love, a joyful homecoming with a healing miracle. There is also an angel, Raphael – and a companion dog.

*Tobit's Dog* is a retelling of the Book of Tobit set in North Carolina during the Jim Crow era. Tobit Messenger, his wife Anna, adult son Tobias, and dog Okra (“okra” means “soul” in the West African language spoken by Tobit’s grandfather) live a subsistence life.

“All he had was four acres, including the swampy land, a cow, and the mule. Even making the taxes was growing difficult. The assessors were harder on Negroes than they were on white folk....” And now there is a new,

inexperienced, white sheriff in town. A sheriff who seems to believe there is one law for the fine white folk, and another law for the Negroes. A sheriff who does not like Tobit and his family.

Tobit’s faith is as strong as his life is hard, and as deep as the love in his family. When bird droppings accidentally fall in his eyes and he loses his sight (evidently bird feces is so acidic it can burn one’s corneas), he falls into deep despair. He tells God he feels as though he is a stranger in his own life. Even in his dark despair, he does not lose faith in God.

As in the Biblical story, there is a road trip, meeting new friends, breaking what some call a curse, a romance, a joyful homecoming, and a seemingly miraculous cure. And yes, there is also an angel – and a well-loved dog.

*Tobit's Dog*, like its Biblical counterpart, is a story about living a life of faith in a land of oppression. Trust in God, even when He seems to be absent, is essential. Showing kindness to others is essential. Doing what is right, even when it costs you everything, is essential. Following where God leads you, even though you may not know the way, is essential. These are the things that lead you to a joyful life.

*Ann Smith, oblate  
Gahanna, OH*