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THE SAINT VINCENT OBLATE NEWS

Saint Vincent Archabbey

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Please note forms on fliers for renewal of Oblation, for celebration on April 5, & for C.D.'s & D.V.D.'s.

SAINT BENEDICT AND LAUGHTER: NURTURING MINDFULNESS BUT NOT DIMINISHING JOY

Dear Oblates, Oblate Novices, and Friends,

Humor in life and in Scripture

Life is full of humor, though we may not always perceive it. I was especially aware of the mysterious and gifted nature of daily life on the day when I began this essay. In the morning while I was searching for a lost page from a reprint desired by an Oblate, I came upon a folder with information about our Oblate-novice survey from the fall of 2014. That folder had been "lost" (really just misplaced by me in a location where I would be unlikely to look for it) for about a year, and upon finding it I felt like telling the whole world, "I have found my lost folder!" (cf. Luke 15:6, 9, 24). I laughed inwardly over the unexpected nature of the discovery. I had not found what I wanted to find, but I found something significant for which I had not even been looking. I still have not found the page for which I was searching. Is not life strange? Surely, as the prophet Isaiah tells us and as Our Lord often proclaims, God's plans for us are certainly not our plans! Of course, His are far, far better. Is not this truth a cause for rejoicing and laughter (whether outward or just inward)?

I also perceived humor in the Gospel passage for that morning, which concerned the healing of a paralytic and the forgiveness of his sins (Mark 2: 1-12). The four friends of the paralyzed man certainly did something clever and amazing by poking a hole in the roof to bring him to Jesus amid a large, smothering crowd. Perhaps some people were upset at the damage to the roof, but it seems likely that others in the crowd laughed when they saw the man being lowered on his mat in front of Our Lord. The man, too, must have been surprised that Jesus insisted first on forgiving his sins - and then healing him. This whole incident surely involves much healthy humor and grace-filled joy. Perhaps the paralytic himself was not expecting anything good to happen, but his creative friends saw the potential in him and in the circumstances, and they had an admirable faith in Christ's ability to help him. God gave the sick man far more than he could have expected. Should not we, like the crowd, be "awestruck" and "give praise to God" (Mark 2:12) - and be filled with joy over God's superabundant goodness? Furthermore, it seems that such joy can open us to recognize and receive even

more gracious gifts.

Reasons not to laugh

On the other hand, in our very troubled world, there are many reasons not to laugh. The news is replete with disasters. Cruel acts of terrorism abound; there are actual wars; Christians are being persecuted and killed in Iraq, Syria, and parts of Africa. Countries in Europe are being flooded with refugees, who in many cases are not receiving hospitable treatment. In our own country we have seen in recent years ruthless shootings, acts of suicide by young people, violence in cities by police and against police, and government leaders and political candidates who have little or no regard for God's moral law. Despite hearty Christian opposition, the evils of legalized abortion, legalized euthanasia, and the redefinition of marriage (as if man could redefine what God has so beautifully established!) seem to be entrenched, and there has been no clear victory over the government's actions to restrict religious freedom and force institutions to pay exorbitant fines for upholding God's law. (May we keep struggling!) Furthermore, we all know people (and perhaps we ourselves are among them) who suffer from severe financial woes, diagnoses with terminal illnesses, the loss of loved ones, or the abandonment of Christian faith by family members. How could we ever laugh or find joy amid such a litany of miseries? Furthermore, in St. Luke's version of the Beatitudes, Our Lord warns us, "Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep" (Lk 6:26). (Christ is undoubtedly referring to an attitude of self-satisfied contentment that is insensitive to the sufferings of others and to the tragedies of life.)

St. Benedict and his apparent opposition to laughter

At first glance, St. Benedict also seemed to believe that there was not much reason for laughter in monastic life. In Chapter 4 he admonishes his monks, "Prefer moderation in speech and speak no foolish chatter, nothing to provoke laughter; do not love immoderate or boisterous laughter" (4: 52-54). In treating the practice of silence in Chapter 6, he closes with the firm statement, "We absolutely condemn in all places any vulgarity and gossip and talk leading to laughter, and we do not permit a disciple to engage in words of that kind" (6:8). The tenth and eleventh steps of humility in Chapter 7 also reflect a negative view of laughter. The tenth step

prescribes that a monk “not [be] given to ready laughter, for it is written: ‘Only a fool raises his voice in laughter’ (Sir 21:23)” (*RB* 7:59). The eleventh step requires that a monk speak “gently and without laughter, seriously and with becoming modesty, briefly and reasonably” (7:60). Finally, in his chapter on Lent, St. Benedict recommends that each monk “deny himself some food, drink, sleep, needless talking and idle jesting, and look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing” (49:7).

Why is St. Benedict so opposed to laughter, at least from a first glance at these texts? In his time laughter was often associated with “vulgarity and gossip” (6:8). (That connection sometimes applies today as well.) Also, people of all times have used laughter to exalt themselves and put down other people and opposing opinions. Such derision and scorn go against Christian charity. When people talk in such a way as to cause others to laugh, it is often from self-centered motives; the speaker may wish to display his cleverness, perhaps with indecent language, and to receive unhealthy affirmation for behavior that is essentially evil.

“Immoderate or boisterous laughter” can disturb the peace of a gathering and interrupt a good conversation; it can also serve to draw attention to the one who is laughing recklessly. To laugh too readily and frequently may be a sign that a person is not taking life (or God) seriously or that he may be emotionally unstable. Readiness to laugh can interfere with efforts to be recollected, to be mindful of God, and to be intentionally conscious of one’s sinfulness and of the redeeming love of Christ. In his *Commentary*, Dom Paul Delatte asserts, regarding *RB* 7:59, “... the Holy Rule will not tolerate a habit of treating nothing seriously, of turning everything to jest. This infirmity of the mind is one of the most unpleasant traces of the spirit of the world. Even in the world it is irritating and in bad taste; it is considered the mark of an empty soul But for a monk it is incompatible with recollection and the sense of the presence of God” (p. 126). Regarding St. Benedict’s restriction on words that lead to laughter, Delatte comments that our holy founder is not forbidding all light-hearted conversation; rather he is aiming to restrain “buffoonery, idle words, worldly talk that has for its sole end the causing of laughter” (p. 97). Delatte adds that “it remains true that there are certain subjects, a certain coarseness, a certain worldly tone, which should never enter our conversation. These things are not such as to stir wholesome laughter (underlining mine); there are matters which we should not touch, which it is wholesome to avoid” (p. 97). In his book *Monastic Practices* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1986), Fr. Charles Cummings, O.C.S.O., reminds us that the virtue of silence involves the right use of speech. He asserts, “I need to silence the word that wounds and cuts down another in his or her presence and the word that judges or ridicules another in his or her absence” (p. 100).

Openings for laughter in the Rule

If we look more closely at the *Rule*, we can see that St. Benedict does not ban all laughter. When he forbids loving “immoderate or boisterous laughter” (4:54), we can assume that there must be some laughter that is moderate and non-boisterous; apparently, St. Benedict does not forbid that. When he prescribes that a monk should not be “given to ready laughter” (7:59), he opens the way for the possibility of laughing at appropriate times without the tendency to burst out frequently. Similarly, in his legislation for Lent, when St. Benedict recommends denying oneself some “needless talking and idle jesting” (49:7), he certainly does not forbid all talking, and he implies that not all jesting is out of place. If some humor and jesting are appropriate even during Lent, then we can conclude that there was room for healthy jesting in St. Benedict’s monasteries all year long - within proper bounds.

Also, as modern commentators assert, St. Benedict lived in an era when laughter was frowned upon in monastic (and Christian) circles because it symbolized a failure to take monastic and Christian values seriously. In his commentary on *RB* 4:54, Fr. Terrence Kardong, O.S.B. (in *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996]), translates the verse as “Don’t indulge in prolonged or explosive laughter.” He comments that “in ancient times comedy usually meant ribaldry. Nevertheless, Benedict follows the Master [author of the *Rule of the Master*] in avoiding any total prohibition of laughter. ... [T]he general prohibition of laughter is often a sign of an unhappy authority that wishes to make others unhappy as well” (pp. 90-91). In reflecting on *RB* 6:8, Fr. Terrence states that “laughter ... may also have a flavor of ribaldry, given the fact that much ancient comedy was obscene. This may be part of the reason why Benedict is so opposed to laughter, a thing we take for granted as a sign of a balanced and healthy personality” (p. 123). Even so, as Fr. Terrence mentions regarding *RB* 49:7, St. Benedict does not “demand that all chatter and joking be put aside. ... For his part, Benedict may be chary of imposing a grim atmosphere on the community, a thing that the Church at large has not always avoided during Lent” (p. 406). Furthermore, Fr. Terrence proposes that “the most remarkable element in this verse [49:6] is its call for joy during the Lenten season” (p. 409).

Our need to set limits on laughter

Obviously, laughter is not completely under our control. It is a normal spontaneous response to something that appears humorous or paradoxical. Furthermore, some people have a temperament that tends to frequent laughter, whereas other people’s temperaments cause them to laugh very little if at all. (I am among the latter.) However, we must be especially vigilant of bad humor in this age of disregard for holy things and sinful derision of other people, especially in the political realm. In situations of temptations to

unhealthy laughter, we need to beseech God for the grace to restrain ourselves from laughter and for the conversion of all who seek to promote sick humor. As part of our commitment to *conversatio morum*, we need to seek the purity of heart that will react quickly against occasions of perverted humor. If we nurture a consistent reverence for God and for holy things (including *all* people, for we were all created in God's image), then we shall learn to counteract any mocking or derision. If we strive daily to nurture a wholehearted love of others, even our enemies, we shall have a strong barrier against the tendency to ridicule anyone, even from a distance.

People who tend to be very ready to laugh might examine the attitude that underlies this tendency. We might ask ourselves: "Do I take serious things too lightly? Am I trying to escape the reality of the Cross? Am I forgetful of the truth that God will judge us for every thought, word, and action? Am I failing to nurture a deep mindfulness of God in daily life? Am I respecting others' need for silence and recollection?"

Freedom to laugh appropriately

Despite the need to restrain unhealthy laughter, a world without healthy laughter would be missing something that God wishes. To laugh is something uniquely human that animals lack. Christian life is to be joyful, even during Lent, and to have joy means that we should accept laughter (if only interiorly) as a gift when we experience the overwhelming graciousness of God and His marvelous interventions in our lives. Pope Francis has often warned priests and religious against becoming "sourpusses." This warning might apply to all of us who tend spontaneously to have a gloomy, critical attitude toward life and the world. Yes, there is much evil, but the Gospel, which is *good* news, assures us that just as Christ's Resurrection followed His gruesome death, so also the victory of the Resurrection is a guarantee today that God's power of love will ultimately overcome the forces of sin and death in our world. Therefore, although Christians may indeed weep and lament over the evils of the world and their own sins, they must also "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil 4:4) since following Christ leads us to a final victory over all the powers of wickedness. That joy, at times, may overflow into laughter that reminds us and others of the heavenly inheritance in store for us and of the "first installment" of that inheritance that we already have in the Holy Spirit.

Summary: weeping and laughing: both essential

Life on this earth offers opportunities both to weep and to laugh. Wonderful events like Israel's return from exile can cause people to laugh. Psalm 126 expresses both

the sorrow of exile and the joy of the return to Jerusalem. "They go out, they go out, full of tears. ... they come back, they come back, full of song" (verse 6). The psalmist also describes the response to the Lord's deliverance from bondage in terms of laughter: "Then was our mouth filled with laughter, on our lips there were songs" (verse 2). In the New Testament the phenomena of laughing and weeping take on a new dimension because of Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Because of His ultimate victory over sin and death, St. Paul can command us to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil 4:4) and to "rejoice always. Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes 5: 16-17). At the same time, humility demands that we weep over our sins, and charity demands that we "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Rom 12:16). St. Benedict tells us that true disciples when asked to obey "under difficult, unfavorable, or even unjust conditions" (*RB* 7:35) "continue joyfully ... because of Him who so greatly loved us" (7:39). To live in Christ and to proclaim Christ must be our deepest motive, whether we weep or laugh!

No one can command us to laugh. However, the Scriptures do command us to rejoice and to rejoice *always*, even under the most miserable circumstances. We can and must rejoice because of the love shown to us by Christ in His Passion and Death. This joy may or may not overflow into laughter, but we need to strive to make this joy ever present in our hearts even when we are sorrowing or weeping. As we enter into the season of Lent, let us realize that it should be an opportunity for a deepened commitment to ongoing conversion and, therefore, for joy in the saving work that Christ wants to perform in us. At the birth of her son Isaac, Sarah exclaimed that God had given her cause to laugh and that all who would hear of this marvelous event would laugh with her (Gn 21:6). May we be prepared for the amazing things that God may wish to do for us and for the possible laughter that can come with grace-filled amazement at His wonders. During this Lent let us strive to "look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing" (*RB* 49:7).

In the peace of Christ and Saint Benedict,

Fr. Donald S. Raila, O.S.B.,
Director of Oblates

OBLATE DAY 2016 ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25; OCTOBER DAY OF RECOLLECTION ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15

This year's Oblate Day will be Sunday, September 25; the speaker has not yet been chosen. The fall day of recollection is scheduled for Saturday, October 15. Fr. Wulfstan Clough, O.S.B., has agreed to serve as the retreat master.

SUGGESTED LENTEN PROJECTS

It is suggested that the Oblates and Oblate novices affiliated with St. Vincent Archabbey rededicate themselves to the regular praying of the Liturgy of the Hours (as much as their schedules allow) and the regular practice (ideally daily) of *lectio divina*. The undertaking of

good spiritual reading in the place of less beneficial activities is also recommended. Of course, it is also important to keep reading the *Holy Rule* on a regular basis and seeking to apply it personally to one's everyday life.

A MESSAGE FROM ARCHABBOT DOUGLAS

Lent, 2016

Dear Oblates and Friends of Saint Vincent,

In his Message for Lent, 2016, the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis asks us to live this season "as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God's mercy" (*Misericordiae Vultus* 17). He calls us to **listen attentively** to the word of God and stresses "the primacy of prayerful listening to God's word, especially his prophetic word." The Holy Father notes, "The mercy of God is a proclamation made to the world, a proclamation which each Christian is called to experience first hand."

The members of the Benedictine community of Saint Vincent are grateful that you join us in our prayer for daily conversion during these grace-filled days of Lent. During this Jubilee Year of Mercy, we are asked to practice works of mercy within the context of our daily lives, with our families or faith communities, where opportunities for works of mercy exist.

As we begin this Lenten season, let us pray that we may be open to the transforming power of God's grace at work in our lives and especially mindful of this grace as we commemorate the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord. May we become ever more fervent hearers of God's word and doers of his works of mercy.

God's blessings be with you now and always.

Sincerely in Christ,

+Archabbot Douglas

THANK YOU FOR CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Fr. Donald and Br. Joachim thank all the many Oblates and Oblate novices who sent Christmas greetings. As often happens, as of the end of January, Fr. Donald was still responding to Christmas greetings; because of various other duties, he was still only on "L" in answering the correspondence filed from A to Z. If you have not yet received a response, you should receive one soon.

RENEWAL OF OBLATION AND KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH THE ARCHABBEY

All Oblates who do not have the occasion to renew their Oblation at St. Vincent or with local deaneries are encouraged to make their renewals privately on or about the Solemnity of Saint Benedict (usually March 21 but deferred to April 5 this year because of Holy Week) and to send a completed renewal form (see the flier) to the Oblate Office. It is helpful to know of your ongoing, active interest in the Oblate Program and your personal growth in Benedictine spirituality. Those wishing to make donations may write out checks to ST. VINCENT ARCHABBEY.

Also, if you are an Oblate novice who is not involved in a deanery and have not contacted the Archabbey for several years, please use the renewal form to express your interest in the Oblate Program. In particular, if you have been an Oblate novice for over a year, please remember that you are eligible to become a full Oblate if you fulfill the requirements in II.E of the *Oblate Formation Booklet*. In any case, it would be good to know if we can help you in any way on your journey as an Oblate / Oblate novice. Also, if you are an inquirer on our temporary mailing list and are no longer interested in receiving this newsletter, please let us know.

OBLATE NOVICES: PLEASE CONSIDER READINESS FOR FINAL OBLATION

In January of 2014, Fr. Donald decided to obtain an estimate of how many Oblates and Oblate novices were on the Oblate mailing list. The result was that there were some 342 Oblate novices and some 610 Oblates. The high number of Oblate novices was somewhat amazing. In October or November of 2014 letters were sent to those who had been Oblate novices for three years or more to determine whether they were still interested in the Oblate Program and whether they wished to prepare for final Oblation. Over 200 letters were sent out, but fewer than 60 responded. If you are among those who received a letter, please respond so that the Oblate Office can meet your needs appropriately. Thank you!

THE SOLEMNITY OF ST. BENEDICT AT THE ARCHABBEY ON APRIL 5, 2016

Oblates from all locations are welcome to join Oblates of the Latrobe (St. Gregory) Deanery on **Tuesday, April 5**, to celebrate the Solemn First Vespers of the Solemnity of the Passing of Our Holy Father Benedict with the monastic community and other guests. The schedule includes a concelebrated Mass at 4:00 P.M., supper at 5:15 P.M. (in Placid B), Oblation ceremonies at 6:15 P.M. (in the basilica), Vespers with the monastic community at 7:00 P.M., and a social at 7:35 P.M. (in the Assembly Room). Members of the Oblate community and their guests who wish to attend should fill out the form on the flier and send it to the Oblate Office by March 31. The cost of the supper is \$6.50. Checks should be made out to ST. VINCENT ARCHABBEY, and reservations should be made in advance

so that we can plan for the right number of people. Those needing overnight rooms should contact Fr. Donald very soon since the number of rooms is very limited. N.B.: Bishop Edward Malesic is scheduled to be the principal celebrant and homilist.

RETREAT SCHEDULE FOR 2016:

The retreats at St. Vincent for summer, 2016, have been scheduled. The 2016 retreat on Benedictine spirituality is to be held on May 13-15, 2016, and the silent retreat is to be offered on June 24-26, 2016. The first retreat will be directed by Fr. Donald, and the silent retreat will be directed by Fr. Boniface. **If you would like to be placed on the Retreat Program's mailing list, please contact Br. Hugh at the Retreat Office at 724-805-2139 or hugh.lester@stvincent.edu. You may also wish to see the retreat website at www.saintvincentretreats.org.**

MENTORING PROGRAM: THOSE WHO DESIRE MENTORS OR WHO WISH TO MENTOR

Please contact the Oblate Office if you are an inquirer or an Oblate novice who would like to have an Oblate to help you on your journey in Benedictine spirituality. Likewise let us know if you are willing to volunteer to serve as a mentor. If you do volunteer, you will receive a packet of information to assist you in your ministry. If you already are a mentor, you should have received a copy of the revised mentoring booklet in the mail. If you have not received one, please inform the Oblate Office. **Mentors are very much needed especially for a number of prisoners who are inquirers or Oblate novices.**

PRAYER-PARTNER PROGRAM

Our Prayer-partner Program is undergoing possible revision. We hope in the next few months to announce a new arrangement. Current partnerships should continue as they have been as long as they are satisfactory to both parties..

OBLATE BOARD OF ADVISORS: Meeting on January 8, 2016

The Oblate Board of Advisors met on Friday, January 8, with nine Oblate members joining Fr. Donald. The group welcomed new members Gabriel Pellathy and Jana Gruber and discussed the new formation program for Oblate novices (still being assembled), a proposed revision of the prayer-partner program, the survey sent to all the deaneries and other Oblate groups (with very low response), and the biographical pamphlet on Oblate Nadeem Feroze being assembled by Oblate Lora Jacob. The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, April 15, at 6:30 P.M. Representatives of deaneries outside Latrobe are always welcome.

OBLATES AS GUESTS AT THE ARCHABBEY

As always, Oblates are especially welcome to come to the Archabbey as overnight guests. The number of rooms in Leander Hall is very limited; so reservations should be made as far in advance as possible. No fee is required or specified, but donations are welcome. The current break-even cost for one guest staying one overnight and taking three meals is \$55.00.

RECOMMENDED READING (*The books listed are available in the Oblate Library.*)

- Johann Christoph Arnold, *Rich in Years: Finding Peace and Purpose in a Long Life* (Walden, NY: The Plough Publishing House, 2013)

NEW (or newly discovered) BOOK ON BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY

- Sr. Aquinata Böckmann, O.S.B., *A Listening Community: A Commentary on the Prologue and Chapters 1-3 of Benedict's Rule* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015)

THE RULE IN BITS AND PIECES: REVIEW IN ABR JOURNAL; MISSING REFLECTION AVAILABLE

The book *The Rule in Bits and Pieces*, which was published in 2014, has a missing section, namely a reflection on *RB 55: 15-22*. Fr. Donald has since composed a reflection for that section of the *Rule*. If anyone who has a copy of the book would like to have this missing piece, please contact the Oblate Office.

Also, the book was reviewed favorably in the December, 2014, issue of the *American Benedictine Review*. The article includes quotes from reflections by Oblates Darran Chick and Jeffrey Fountaine. We give thanks once again to all the Oblates and monks who contributed to this rather massive project of writing and editing and assembling reflections for each of the traditional 122 sections of the *Holy Rule*.

OBLATE MEETINGS IN LATROBE

Oblates from all locations are welcome to the monthly meetings of the Latrobe Deanery of Oblates, mostly at 6:45 P.M. in seminary classroom Brownfield 202 on Sundays. The next four meetings will be on February 21, March 20, April 17, and May 15. Those wishing to come early for Evening Prayer (at 5:00) and supper before the meetings at St. Vincent should phone Fr. Donald in advance at (724) 805-2291. Classes on Benedictine spirituality will continue to be offered at 3:00 P.M. on the same dates. In February, Fr. Killian will offer a presentation on prayer; in March, Fr. Chad will offer a presentation on *conversatio morum*; and in April, Fr. Maurus will offer a presentation on St. Benedict and his *Rule*.

TALKS PRESENTED TO LATROBE DEANERY AVAILABLE ON C.D.'s AND D.V.D.'s

Thanks to Fr. Andrew, Br. Pio, and Br. David Klecker, talks given at Oblate meetings in Latrobe (when the presenter is willing and when someone is able to do the recording) are being made available to those who desire to have copies for a small cost. Those who attend meetings in Latrobe may purchase the D.V.D.'s at \$3.50 each and the C.D.'s at \$2.50 each. Others may purchase the presentations from the College Book Store at \$6.00 or \$3.50 (plus tax & postage). **Please see the order form on the flier attached to this newsletter.** Note that if you order by mail, you need to pay a sales tax only if you are a resident of Pennsylvania.

ADORATION FOR VOCATIONS

The Blessed Sacrament is exposed every Sunday from 1:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M. (and on Fridays from 8:30 A.M. to 3:45 P.M.) in St. Gregory Chapel. Oblates are encouraged to use these times for Eucharistic adoration, if possible, especially on the Sundays of Oblate classes and meetings, to pray for vocations, and particularly for vocations to the Archabbey.

OBLATE GROUP IN TENNESSEE COLONY, TX

Oblate Alejandro Torres reported on November 29 and December 29. The group gathered for an unofficial meeting on November 10 after Mass. They prayed Evening Prayer and discussed the importance of developing harmony when the Liturgy of the Hours is prayed in community.

All seven Oblate novices gathered for a 15-minute meeting on December 10. The meeting began and ended with the Lord's Prayer and involved a discussion about the need to eliminate gossip and an exchanging of the sign of peace. There was a hope of viewing D.V.D.'s from the Archabbey at future meetings.

On November 24, at the chapel in Tennessee Colony, TX, Msgr. Zacharias Kunnakkattuthara of Sacred Heart Church in Palestine, TX, invested as an Oblate novice **Gerald V. Campbell** of Tennessee Colony, TX.

OBLATE GROUP IN CAMBRIDGE, ONTARIO, CANADA

Oblate Cathy Mayled reported by e-mail on December 5. Four of the group met on November 26 and began with an opening prayer. Then they entered into a study of Chapter 6 of the *Rule*. They ended the meeting with the praying of Compline. It was decided not to meet in December since the normal meeting date would be Christmas Eve. Also, the meeting scheduled for January was cancelled because of bad weather and slippery roads.

OBLATE GROUP IN PHILADELPHIA, PA

Fr. Vincent de Paul Crosby, O.S.B., reported on December 19. The meeting on November 14 began with Morning Prayer according to the Roman Rite. The topic for discussion was Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Copies of the introduction to the encyclical had been e-mailed to the group in advance of the meeting. The group read through the document together by use of a model of communal *lectio divina*. The participants offered many thoughtful insights. At the close of the meeting Fr. Vincent de Paul invested

Valerie James of Philadelphia, PA,

as an Oblate novice. Valerie was the first member of the original group to request investiture. The celebration continued over a lunch prepared by the devoted hosts, Sharon Fischer and her daughter JoAnn. The next meeting was scheduled for January 9 at 10:00 A.M. at Saint Mary's Church, 630 E. Cathedral Rd., Philadelphia, PA 19128. (That meeting had to be canceled.)

OBLATES RECEIVE 10% DISCOUNT AT BASILICA GIFT SHOP

If you are shopping at the Basilica Gift Shop and are an Oblate or an Oblate novice, mention your affiliation with the Oblate community to the volunteers at the shop, and you will receive a 10% discount on your purchases.

NEWS FROM OBLATE DEANERIES

Albion, PA (St. Paul Deanery) -- *monthly meetings at chapel in Albion*

There was no report.

Annville, PA (St. Placid Deanery) -- *meetings at 3 P.M. on 4th Sunday of each month, St. Paul the Apostle Church, Annville*

Secretary/lay leader Mary Ann Bingeman reported by phone on February 8. There were no meetings in November or December. The meeting on January 24 began with Vespers prayed in the church and then a social. Fr. Job, moderator, led the meeting, which involved plans to have the Oblates sponsor an orphan in Honduras. The group also planned to re-start their study of *The Joy of the Gospel*, beginning with Chapters 1 to 3 for February. The deanery intends to meet on the fourth Sundays of February and March.

Baltimore, MD (St. Walburga Deanery) -- *meetings at 3:00-4:30 on 3rd Sun. of month, parish house, St. Benedict Church*

Secretary Jay Wells sent reports by e-mail on November 16 and January 19. Fr. Paschal, moderator, and eight others were in attendance at the meeting on November 15. Fr. Paschal began by reading two articles, with commentary, regarding the season of Advent and the theme of patient waiting, with reference to parts of the *Rule*. The group began to read and discuss the book *Saint Benedict and Saint Thérèse: The Little Rule and the Little Way*, by Fr. Dwight Longenecker. To help to prepare the group for Advent, Fr. Paschal then gave each attendee a copy of two articles. It was announced that on November 22, the Solemnity of Christ the King, there would be adoration of the Blessed Sacrament along with readings from the "Advent Stations," with several Oblates participating in the readings. As usual, the meeting ended about 4:45 so that the group could pray Vespers in the church at 5:00. Vespers for the dead was prayed, with special remembrance of those who had been buried from St. Benedict Church during the past year.

The meeting on January 17 was attended by six people in addition to Fr. Paschal. It began soon after some snow showers ended. Fr. Paschal first led a discussion about the Solemnity of Epiphany, and then the group continued a discussion based on the text begun in November and ended at page 23. It was hoped that in February one of Oblates would lead a discussion based on the same book. In response to a question, there was some discussion about Purgatory and the "refiner's fire"; the discussion was to continue at the next meeting, with the suggestion that attendees look into those Scriptural passages that hint at Purgatory. When the meeting ended at 4:15, the group went to the rectory to enjoy some food and the Christmas decorations that were still on display. Then, as usual, they proceeded to the church for Vespers.

Butler, PA (St. Hildegard Deanery) -- monthly meetings at St. Fidelis Parish Hall, 4th Thurs. of each month

Lay leader Ethel Galli wrote on December 28. The Oblates gathered on October 22 at the new monastery of the Sisters of St. Benedict in Bakerstown, PA. The evening began with Vespers in the sisters' chapel and continued with a served dinner. Then they viewed a video of a woman from North Side, Pittsburgh, who evangelizes by doing art work in her front yard and giving free art lessons to the poor children in the neighborhood.

The meeting for November and December consisted of a pre-Christmas party at St. Fidelis Church on December 10. Every attendee brought a treat for the event. The D.V.D. *The Rule* (about the prep school of Newark Abbey) was shown and discussed. The film demonstrated how the monks following and sharing the *Rule* could assist pupils from the inner city to achieve academic success. The meeting ended with a closing prayer and with the voicing of intentions for members who were ill.

Cyber Deanery

Lay leader David Hicks reported by phone on February 5. As of that date, there were 53 members. Co-leader Theresa George was leading the group through Dom Paul Delatte's *Commentary* on the *Rule*. There has been ample discussion.

Johnstown, PA (St. John Gualbert Deanery) -- meetings on 2nd Monday of each month, 6:30 P.M., St. Benedict Church

Lay leader Carl Motter wrote on January 19. The meetings scheduled for November and December had to be canceled because both Carl and Deacon Michael, moderator, had to be out of town. The meeting scheduled for January had to be canceled because of bad weather.

Latrobe, PA (St. Gregory the Great Deanery) -- meetings usually on 3rd Sunday of month, 6:45 P.M., Brownfield 202

On November 4, some of the Oblate community gathered at a funeral home in Latrobe to pray a wake service for deceased Oblate Jean Mastrorocco. Some Oblates also attended the funeral Mass the next day in the Archabbey Basilica.

Some sixteen people attended the meeting on November 18, during which the group continued to discuss the *Rule* with reference to the commentary by Dom Paul Delatte, O.S.B. The group continued to reflect on Chapter 4, "The Instruments of Good Works," and considered the themes self-denial and fasting, the true meaning of "chastise," the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and the call to be opposed to the "world" in order to follow Christ with ever greater zeal. As usual, the attendees closed the meeting by gathering in the basilica for the praying of Compline. (*continued*)

Some 25 people attended the meeting on December 20. It was held at 5:45 P.M. because the monastic Vespers had been changed to 7:00. Fr. Donald continued to lead a discussion on the Instruments of Good Works, with emphasis on the need for humility and giving glory to God, the importance of remembering death and eternal life (which a number of Christmas carols mention), and the value of striving for continual recollection, that is, an ongoing awareness of Christ's presence.

After the 3:00 presentation on December 20, the group proceeded to the Archabbey Basilica, where

Vincent Thomas of Munhall, PA,

made his final Oblation in the presence of Fr. Donald and the other 30-or-so people who were present.

On January 17 ten or eleven attendees continued the discussion on the instruments of good works, with emphasis on guarding against evil thoughts, learning to have a taste for God's word, seeking to "love chastity," and striving to avoid argumentation. It was hoped that at the next meeting, on February 21, the group could finish the discussion on *RB* 4 and then go on to the consideration of obedience in *RB* 5. Also, holy cards from glass artist Nick Parrendo were made available.

Oblates of the area were invited to pray a wake service for deceased Oblate Marguerite Bigley on January 27 at a funeral home in Latrobe. At least one Oblate joined Fr. Donald and Marge's family for the service. Some of the Oblate community also attended the funeral the following day.

Lessons in Latrobe at 3:00 P.M. before regular Oblate meetings at 6:45 P.M.

On November 18 Fr. Boniface Hicks gave a presentation on "Work in Benedictine Spirituality" to some 30 people in classroom Brownfield 202. He began by asserting that in our culture we need to emphasize the "ora" part of the Benedictine motto "ora et labora"; it is the "prayer" part of the motto that comes first! In any case, we as Benedictines do need to find a proper balance among prayer, work, and study/*lectio divina* during our day. Regarding work, we need to avoid the unhealthy extremes of seeing work as something unpleasant so that we are ever eager for it to be ended and, on the other hand, of thinking of work as "real life" and thus "living to work." In the Christian and monastic traditions, work is done to earn one's food, but there is a deeper level of the spiritual value of work. The *Rule* tells us that "the divine presence is everywhere," and that saying applies to work, too. The Scriptures tell us that as a people made in the image of God, we prolong God's work in history. Work is not just for gaining profits; that kind of attitude, according to Pope Francis, fosters our "culture of waste." Man, the subject of work, is more important than the work itself. Work, said St. John Paul II, fulfills a person's humanity and is part of each person's self-realization. The intentionality of the worker is of greater importance of what is produced. When God gave man "dominion" over creation, it was a matter of dealing with creation as God Himself does - with care and reverence. Toil is a reality, but it is not mere punishment for sin; in Christ even the drudgery becomes a redemptive share in the Cross of Christ. Work also is a matter of showing charity to those who benefit from our work (or from the money that we earn). Also, rest and the Sabbath are an essential part of Christian work. In rest we enjoy our being; practice of the Sabbath enables our work to be truly meaningful, and our work enables our rest to be appreciated. A proper balance is required - something which our culture is lacking. Many questions and comments followed Fr. Boniface's presentation.

On December 20 Fr. Donald gave a presentation on the Liturgy of the Hours to some 30 people. After a description of some resources and some historical background, he spoke about the theology of the Hours, mostly from the *General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours*. He also added some reflections from chapters on the Divine Office in books by Blessed Columba Marmion, O.S.B., *Christ - the Ideal of the Priest* and *Christ - the Ideal of the Monk*. Quite a few questions were raised.

On January 17 Br. Rafael Dos Santos, a monk of São Bento Abbey in São Paulo, Brazil, gave a presentation on "Holiness and Benedictine Spirituality" to an audience of some 20 people. Br. Rafael professed his solemn vows in 2008 and was sent to St. Vincent Archabbey in 2010 to study theology in preparation for ordination to the priesthood. His abbot, Abbot Matias, also happened to be present since he was on a month-long visit to the Archabbey. Br. Rafael first spoke about his previous life, the good influence of his father in his Catholic formation, and a powerful conversion experience that he had in 2000 which led him to discern a call to monastic life. He emphasized that we cannot make progress in holiness except with God's grace and that it takes time. Holiness grows, he said, from purity of heart and from ongoing surrender of one's own will to God's will, especially in the realm of loving others. The three Benedictine vows and the twelve steps of humility also assist us in this growth. Another great aid is the practice of interior silence, as St. Benedict specifies in *RB 6*. After earlier doubts about his vocation, Br. Rafael said that he is now able to surrender his life to God without reservation. His presentation was followed by a number of questions about his monastery (a member of the Brazilian Congregation), its apostolates, and the Catholic Church in Brazil.

Niagara Area, Ontario, Canada (St. Henry/St. Gertrude Deanery) -- meetings on last Monday of each month, meeting room of St. Thomas Aquinas Church, St. Catharines, Ont.

Lay leader Brian Chisholm reported by phone on December 9, January 8, and February 8. Although there have not been monthly meetings, the Oblates continue to sponsor a weekly holy hour at St. Thomas Church, and the pastor has decided to use that holy hour as an official part of the Year of Mercy. Brian has been in phone contact with all the members and continues to search for a moderator for the deanery.

An especially large group of some 50 people attended the holy hour on January 7. Two of the attendees expressed interest in the Oblate Program. The program for the prayer service includes information about the Oblates.

Brian mentioned on February that 30 to 50 people attend the weekly holy hour. The hour ends with Night Prayer as prayed by Oblates at the Archabbey. The pastor of St. Thomas Church asked that the Oblates lead the Stations of the Cross on February 26.

Palmyra, PA (Holy Spirit Deanery) – monthly meetings on Sundays at Holy Spirit Catholic Church, Palmyra

Secretary Gabriele Terrill reported by e-mail on November 15 and January 16. The meeting on November 15 was attended by Fr. James Podlesny, moderator, and nine others. The meeting began with Evening Prayer. Then there was a time for refreshments. Next the group entered into a discussion about the Divine Office. Fr. Jim explained its roots in Jewish prayer and in the early Christian monasteries, in which the monks recited 150 psalms each day. (continued)

Some of the practices of the early monks (particularly in Egypt) are described in the writings of John Cassian (ca. 360-435 A.D.). Early monks generally woke up in the middle of the night to pray Vigils, which interrupted their sleep. St. Benedict calls for the praying of Vigils after a full night's sleep. These days active monasteries (like St. Vincent) generally pray the Divine Office in community only three times. Oblates are asked to do their best to pray Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer and, if possible, others Hours. One attendee asked about the existence of Satan, and Fr. Jim's reply was that there certainly is Satan and the reality of evil, but God's power is always greater. We need to focus on what is God's plan and cooperate with it as the way to counteract Satan.

The meeting on January 10 drew only three people, partly because of some confusion over the date. The attendees began with Evening Prayer and then proceeded to read and discuss Chapter 1 of the *Rule*, on the kinds of monks. The group reflected on the meaning of Oblate life in terms of following the *Rule* in a secular environment, heeding the three promises, seeking to glorify God in all things, and bringing the light of Christ into the world through good conduct, prayers, and service to Church and community. They also discussed their experiences of the Advent and Christmas seasons. There was a sharp contrast between a prayerful experience assisted by inspirational talks and an experience in a very secular environment without mention of Christ and a consumeristic atmosphere. The sharing highlighted the importance of prayer and the Oblate's need to embrace the world in order to forgive, heal, and give others the courage to turn to Christ. The next meeting was scheduled for February 14.

Pendleton, IN (St. Celestine Deanery) – monthly meetings in the chapel in Pendleton

Secretary Frederick Laux reported on October 23, November 15, December 6, and January 30. The meeting on September 24 was attended by three Oblates, seven inquirers, moderator Deacon John Etter, and a volunteer. Deacon John opened with "A prayer for our earth" from *Laudato Si'*. Then Fred gave a presentation on Chapter 6 ("On Restraint of Speech") of the *Rule*. Referring to the commentary by Fr. Terrence Kardong, Fred said that the chapter was mostly about the "avoidance of bad speech." Too much speech is detrimental to our relationships with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth. Just as it is shallow to approach God with a soliloquy of demands on Him, so it is disrespectful to talk to others without listening. We need to enter into our neighbors' needs and concerns. Likewise, as recommended by Pope Francis, we need to work together to make this earth a common home.

The meeting on November 5 was attended by fourteen people, including three Oblates and Deacon John, who opened the meeting with the Angelus. Then Oblate Curtis Kennedy gave a presentation on Chapter 29 of the *Rule* - "Readmission of Brothers Who Leave the Monastery" - with the help of a meditation from *The Rule in Bits and Pieces*. Curt spoke of the importance of mutual forgiveness, the abbot's responsibility for the excommunicated, and Pope Francis' call (in *Laudato Si'*) to make the world better through the small-scale practice of forgiveness and mercy. Curt asked, "Have we not done something to excommunicate ourselves from the world?" The session ended with a Glory Be and a blessing by Deacon John.

The meeting on December 3 was attended by Deacon John, three Oblates, and ten inquirers. Deacon John began with a prayer from the back of a study guide for *Laudato Si'*. Then Oblate Dean Everett gave a presentation related to Chapter 52 of the *Rule*, "On Silence

in the Oratory.” He connected the reverence that Christians are to have in the oratory with the reverence that we should have toward other people as well toward “our common home,” the earth. Such reverence, however, requires personal conversion, as described by Pope Francis. All that we do builds up or detracts from the Kingdom of God, and each of us has an important part in this endeavor. Silence can advance the Kingdom or (if not practiced out of love) detract from it.

In January Deacon John sent the Oblate Office four applications for investiture, and it was hoped that the four men could be invested as Oblate novices soon.

On January 28 the first meeting of the year followed the celebration of Mass by Fr. Sean Pogue. The meeting, attended by two Oblates and six inquirers, began with a praying of Midday Prayer and then the Oblate prayer. Fred gave a presentation on the traps of bodily desires, based on *RB* 7: 19-23 and James 1: 14-15. (The group has also been studying James 1 with the help of a guide by Michael Hunt.) We can choose to obey the voice of the Lord or to walk contrary to God’s way. Victory over slavery to sin is possible only if we remain vigilant and obedient. Being a Christian means being countercultural; it involves an ongoing surrender to God’s will and resistance to the tendency of expecting God to approve whatever we want to do.

Pittsburgh, PA (St. Peter Deanery) -- meetings on Thursdays (usually 3rd or 4th), 7:00 P.M., St. Peter Church.

Oblate George Ponticello reported by e-mail on November 13, November 29, and January 31. At the meeting on November 17, attended by ten people, the group first prayed Evening Prayer in St. Peter Church as usual. Then they entered into a lively discussion based on Chapter 25 of *Lessons from Saint Benedict* (on simplicity and reverence in speech). Some plans were made for the pre-Christmas party on December 17.

The party on December 17 was attended by fifteen people, including four guests. After the praying of Evening Prayer, the group enjoyed food and conversation at Sister Alice’s apartment at Our Lady Queen of Peace Worship Site.

Despite cold weather six Oblates joined Fr. Vincent Zidek, moderator, for the meeting on January 21. After the praying of Evening Prayer in the church, the group went to the church basement to discuss the last chapter of *Lessons from Saint Benedict*, involving preparation for death. The subsequent meetings were scheduled for February 23 and March 31. George invited the members to propose ideas for books to discuss at future meetings, for field trips, and for service projects. He also suggested a Lenten field trip to the Oratory in Oakland some time in early March.

Rosharon, TX -- monthly meetings

There was no report.

St. Marys, PA (St. Maurus Deanery) -- meetings on Thurs. before 1st Fri. of month, 7:00 P.M. at Queen of the World Church

Secretary Peggi Gabler wrote on November 23. The meeting on November 5, attended by moderator Fr. Alfred and five others, began with Evening Prayer and Benediction. After a reading of the minutes from the last meeting and of a letter from Fr. Donald, the group discussed the fact that there were no responses to the invitations in three parish bulletins to inquire about the Oblate Program. Oblate Lynn Nicklas spoke of plans to try again and to speak at Masses about the Oblate Program in March. Then the group read the reading from the *Rule* for the day, namely *RB* 29:1-3, and briefly discussed it. The meeting ended with the Oblate prayer and a social with refreshments. The next meeting was planned for March of 2016.

Saint Vincent College – monthly meetings to begin in September, in Mary, Mother of Wisdom Chapel

There were meetings of Oblates and inquirers in November and January and on February 1. The campus-ministry bulletin, *The Benedictine*, invited interested students to “find out more about Benedictine values and how to live them as a college student” and to “join other students who have begun to study about St. Benedict and his Rule for life as we continue in our desire to improve our spiritual lives.”

Fr. Killian Loch, moderator, mentioned in his report of February 6 that the Oblate group continues to meet monthly and now has six members who attend meetings faithfully and several others who come occasionally. The group has been continuing a study of the book *Lessons from Saint Benedict*. The discussions have involved useful insights, with reflections on the application of the values of the *Rule* to situations on campus. Several of the attendees have expressed the desire to become Oblate novices.

Savannah, GA (St. Katharine Drexel Deanery) -- special monthly events at Sunday Vespers at Benedictine Priory

There was no report.

Selingsgrove, PA (St. Anselm Deanery) – monthly meetings at 2 P.M. on 2nd Sundays at St. Pius X Church in Selingsgrove

Oblate Bonnie Morgan reported on November 14, and Oblate Teresa Warlow reported by e-mail on December 30 and January 10. Each meeting begins with the “Prayer for Oblates” and ends with a praying of Mid-afternoon Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours. There was a meeting on September 13, but no report was available. The meeting on October 11, attended by four people, involved a discussion on silence based on the *Commentary* on the *Holy Rule* by Dom Paul Delatte, O.S.B. It was recommended that each member of the deanery purchase a copy of the book. The group also pondered the possibility of a retreat either at “Haven” in Richfield, PA, or at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC.

Five people attended the meeting on November 8. Co-lay leader Frank Stoshack was congratulated on his 80th birthday. There had been plans to listen to a C.D. on obedience from the Archabbey, but since the equipment was not working, the group conducted a

discussion on obedience based on Delatte's *Commentary*.

The meeting on December 11 opened with the "Prayer for Oblates." The group then viewed a D.V.D. of a presentation on obedience by Fr. Jean-Luc, O.S.B., and there was some discussion about obedience in daily life. It was agreed that the group continue occasionally to draw upon the collection of C.D.'s and D.V.D.'s from the Archabbey. For the next meeting it was suggested that the group read and discuss the chapter on the Prologue of the *Rule* from Delatte's *Commentary*.

Before the meeting on January 10 in St. Pius X Church's chapel,

James W. (Justus) Wert of Selinsgrove, PA,

made his final Oblation in the presence of Rev. Daniel F.X. Powell, pastor, and the other Oblates who were present. Then the group proceeded to the church's conference room for a study of the Prologue of the *Rule* based on Delatte's *Commentary*. Topics which emerged in the discussion were living an authentic life, practicing humility and obedience, counteracting the effects of original sin, the renunciation of one's own will to embrace God's will, the states of one's will, and the use of obedience as a weapon against evil. Each Oblate contributed to the discussion. The meeting ended with Mid-afternoon Prayer and the "Prayer for Oblates." The next meeting was scheduled for February 14.

Somerset, PA (Blessed John Paul II Deanery) – meetings on 2nd & 4th Tuesdays, 6:30 -8:15, chapel annex

Co-lay leader/secretary Steward Steckley wrote on November 3 with Christmas greetings.

Southern Pines, NC (St. Ephrem the Syrian Deanery) – monthly meetings on 2nd Thurs. of month, St. Anthony of Padua Church

Lay leader Laura Lowder reported by e-mail on January 4. The group met on September 10, and two Oblates renewed their Oblation with Fr. Andrew McNair, pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Church. Also, Fr. McNair received as an Oblate novice

Mark Denardo of West End, NC.

The meeting in November was led by Rev. Randal Foster since Laura was out of town.

At the meeting on December 10, the attendees prayed the Divine Office and had a very animated conversation about the *Rule*. The deanery has been working through the whole of the *Rule*, and in December the conversation involved how we all serve as "abbots" in our various roles and how the responsibilities of the abbot in *RB 2* apply to our life's duties.

State College, PA (St. Joseph Deanery) -- meetings on 2nd Monday of each month, Our Lady of Victory Church, Activity Center.

Secretary Kay Tittmann reported on November 10 with a personal delivery and then by e-mail on December 16 and January 12. The meeting on November 9 was attended by Fr. David Griffin, O.S.B., moderator, five Oblates, four Oblate novices, and one inquirer. The group began a discussion of Pope Francis' encyclical *The Joy of the Gospel*, which is about the Church's commitment to evangelization. Various themes were discussed: the Gospel invitation to see God in others and to seek the good of others, the Church as a mother, the Church as the father of the prodigal son, and the Eucharist as medicine and nourishment for the weak. (*continued*) These days evangelization is especially urgent because of the media's threat to such traditional values as the sacredness of marriage and the stability of the family. The Church needs to provide education that teaches critical thinking and the development of mature moral values. The teaching of the truth needs to be combined with mercy. After the discussion, the meeting was closed with a prayer, the singing of the "Ultima," and the voicing of prayer intentions, especially for the Oblates who were unable to attend the meeting.

The meeting on December 14 was attended by Fr. David, six Oblates, three Oblate novices, and one inquirer. After the praying of Evening Prayer, the group continued its discussion of *The Joy of the Gospel*, paragraphs 68-101. Among the topics discussed were the challenges to handing down the faith in an individualistic, urban culture; the crisis of identity; the cooling of fervor; and the need for pastoral workers to oppose selfishness and spiritual sloth. Christians must lead by example and say "no" to spiritual worldliness, which amounts to seeking human glory rather than the Lord's glory. It can be an act of evangelization to pray for a person with whom one is irritated. The meeting ended with a prayer, the singing of the "Ultima," and the voicing of prayer intentions.

The gathering on January 11 began with Mass at 5:00 P.M. at Our Lady of Victory Church celebrated by Fr. David. Attending were nine Oblates, four Oblate novices, and seven guests. Fr. David's homily was based on the Gospel verse "Who do you say that I am?" , and he said that the question is posed to each of us personally, so that in union with Christ we might better discern God's will for our lives, overcome forces of selfishness, and surrender our wills to His, with trust in His mercy and grace. The Oblates present renewed their Oblation after the homily. After the Mass the group enjoyed a pot-luck supper in the church's social hall. The evening ended with the Oblates' presenting Fr. David with a Christmas gift of \$1100.00 to be used for "Mission Mexico." Fr. David spoke briefly about the annual mission, undertaken during the spring break at Penn State, and about the enthusiasm of students to go on the mission to help the very poor people whom they encounter. The next meeting was scheduled for February 8.

Virginia Beach, VA (St. Scholastica Deanery) -- meetings on 1st Wed., 7 P.M., Assembly Room, St. Gregory the Great School

Lay leader/secretary Delina Pauls wrote on November 8 and January 17. The meeting on October 7 was attended by twelve members along with Fr. Lee Yoakam, O.S.B., moderator. The opening prayer was offered for all sick Oblates and other intentions from the Archabbey. Dee suggested that the Oblates try to spend time in Eucharistic adoration on Friday, October 9, and another Oblate also highly recommended Eucharistic adoration. It so happened that Fr. Lee had planned to give the presentation on Eucharistic adoration, beginning with a letter that he had found on the Internet. The group discussed how one can benefit from an hour of adoration.

The meeting on November 4 was attended by thirteen people. Oblate Cindy Lucero gave a presentation based on different passages of the *Rule*, with the themes "Living with Hope," "Unhesitating Obedience," "Listen to Me," and "Speaking and Teaching: the Master's Task." After Cindy's talk the group, including Fr. Lee, entered into a discussion of each section. The attendees seemed to enjoy this new format for meetings. At the end of the meeting

Joseph M. (Meinrad) Rae of Chesapeake, VA,

made his final Oblation in the presence of Fr. Lee and the Oblates gathered for the meeting.

The meeting on December 2 was also well-attended. The group spent an hour reading Pope Francis' letter proclaiming the Year of Mercy, and there was some discussion about ways to practice the corporal works of mercy. There was also a decision that, beginning with the new year, there would be a social time at the end of the meeting.

The meeting on January 6 drew a very large attendance, including Oblate Damian Finke, who had just returned from deployment near Afghanistan. One Oblate contributed a picture of St. Scholastica to be displayed at meetings. Fr. Lee spoke about the corporal and spiritual works of mercy and how they could be practiced in daily life. He specifically suggested attending Mass on Wednesdays at Marian Manor, a personal-care home. After the time of discussion the group proceeded to enjoy some refreshments for about 45 minutes.

It was decided not to have a meeting during February since Fr. Cristiano, parochial vicar and former moderator of the Oblate deanery, would be celebrating his 25th anniversary of priestly ordination with a Mass on February 3. Many Oblates were planning to be involved in the celebration. It was expected that Archabbot Douglas would preside at the Mass.

Williamsport, PA (Saints Martha, Mary, and Lazarus Deanery) -- meetings on 2nd Sunday of each month, 2 P.M., St. Anne Church

Lay leader/secretary Sue Wykoff reported by e-mail about November 21 and by phone on January 16. The meeting on October 11, attended by six people, began with the praying of Mid-afternoon Prayer. Then the group discussed the Liturgy of the Hours and, specifically, the invitatory psalm. They decided to have small workshops after meetings to learn better how to pray the Office. In fact, they decided to focus on learning the basics of the Office for the coming year with the use of the book *The Divine Office for Dodos*. Next they discussed Pope Francis visit to the U.S., watched a D.V.D. on "Hospitality" presented by Fr. John Peck, and closed with a praying of the Angelus.

The meeting on November 8 was attended by six people. The group discussed plans for a trip to the Archabbey, with a tentative date of December 5. Then they watched a D.V.D. of Fr. Robert Keffer's presentation on "Silence." After the praying of the Angelus, there was a brief discussion about the D.V.D., but there was no time for a lesson on the Liturgy of the Hours (as had been hoped).

Sue Wykoff and five others associated with the Williamsport Deanery came to the Archabbey on December 5 for a brief tour (it was the first time for some of them), Midday Prayer, Oblation ceremonies, and lunch. At the ceremonies in the Archabbey Basilica at 11:50 P.M., Fr. Donald received the following:

Oblate: **Lawrence S. (John Paul) Hamm** of South Williamsport, PA

Oblate novice: **Bernice G. Kibbe** of South Williamsport, PA.

Also present were the other four who had traveled from the Williamsport area.

Four people attended the meeting on December 13, which began with Midday Prayer and continued with the viewing of a D.V.D. of a presentation on poverty and simplicity by Br. Lawrence at the Archabbey. The viewing was followed by a short discussion and a praying of the Angelus. There was also some discussion about the trip to the Archabbey eight days before. (*continued*)

The meeting on January 10 drew ten people, including a veteran Oblate who was welcomed back after a long absence. The group prayed Midday Prayer for the Baptism of the Lord and then viewed a D.V.D. of a presentation on prayer by Fr. Wulfstan at the Archabbey. There followed a short discussion and a praying of the Angelus. There was also some discussion about *RB 49* on Lent, and suggestions for spiritual reading were offered. One member brought a relic of St. Benedict, and the group spent some time in prayer before the relic. Also, before the meeting, from 1:30 to 2:00, some time was spent by several members studying the book *The Divine Office for Dodos*. This session will continue to serve as a "prelude" to monthly meetings.

Various Locations

At St. Ann Chapel in Waynesburg, PA, Rev. J. Francis Frazer, chaplain, has performed the following ceremonies:

On September 20 he received the final Oblation of

John (Paul) Binion of Waynesburg, PA.

On October 6 he invested as an Oblate novice

Dustin Briggs of Waynesburg, PA.

On November 28 he invested as an Oblate novice

Michael D. LeMilliere of Waynesburg, PA.

On November 10, at Infant of Prague Church in Jacksonville, NC, Fr. Jeffrey Bowker, pastor, invested

John W. Bradley, Jr., of Jacksonville, NC,

as an Oblate novice.

On December 10, 2015, in the Lady Chapel of St. Peter's Cathedral Basilica in London, Ontario, Canada,

Jane Elizabeth (Sarah) Lawson of London, Ontario,

made her final Oblation in the presence of Deacon Leonard Hughes, ofs. Also present for Elizabeth's final Oblation were a number of friends and the sacristan of the cathedral, Larry Lewis, a former Benedictine monk, who rang the cathedral's bells for the occasion.

On January 16, during a one-day Kairos retreat in Craigsville, VA, Deacon Gordon Cartwright of Lynchburg, VA, invested

E. Steven Reid of Craigsville, VA,

as an Oblate novice.

On January 27, Rev. Thomas D'Souza of St. John the Baptizer Church in Bridgeport, TX, invested as an Oblate novice

Richard D. Polmon of Bridgeport, TX.

SICK & INFIRM MONKS:

The following monks of the Archabbey have been hospitalized or otherwise especially ill during the past three months and could use our prayers: Br. Stephen Nazaruk, Fr. Bede Hasso, Fr. Augustine Flood, Fr. Vincent de Paul Crosby (dislocated shoulder), Fr. Thaddeus Rettger, Fr. Andrew Campbell (injured shoulder), Fr. Frank Ziemkiewicz, Fr. Paul Rubadue, Br. James Cartwright, Fr. Luke Policicchio, and Br. Pio de Souza (in Brazil; he underwent heart surgery on Jan. 29)

DECEASED MONK:

Fr. Justin Withrow, 60, died very suddenly on February 3. Please pray for the repose of his soul.

SOME SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Over the years Fr. Donald has accumulated a large pile of issues *Columbia* magazine (issued by the Knights of Columbus) and of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper. If anyone is interested in having some or all these, please contact the Oblate Office.
2. Oblates are welcome to attend concerts offered by the Saint Vincent Camerata. On Friday, March 18, at 7:30 P.M. in the Basilica and on Sunday, March 20, at 3:00 P.M. at the First Presbyterian Church in Johnstown, there will be a performance of "Songs for the Soul" and Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*. On Friday, April 1, at 8:00 P.M., on Saturday, April 2, at 8:00 P.M., and Sunday, April 3, at 2:30 P.M. at Heinz Hall in Pittsburgh, the Camerata will join the All-University Choir in performances with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. For tickets and further information for all performances, phone 724-805-2579.
3. Bishop Edward Malesic of the Diocese of Greensburg has agreed to address the Oblates in Latrobe on Sunday, November 20, the Solemnity of Christ the King. The tentative schedule for the evening is: Solemn Vespers with Benediction at 5:00 in the Basilica, supper at 6:00 in Placid-B dining room, Bishop Malesic's presentation at 7:00 in the Foundations Room (2nd floor of Placid Hall). Note the changes of location because of the possibly large number of attendees. Oblates who wish to attend will be asked to make reservations a week in advance. This announcement will be repeated and updated in the May and August newsletters. We are grateful that our new bishop has set aside time to be with our local Oblates of St. Benedict this coming November.
4. If you have moved or are away temporarily, please inform the Oblate Office about your change of address. In some cases mail sent by other departments may come back to St. Vincent, and names can be eliminated from our mailing list without out knowing. Please keep in touch as best as you can!

RESERVATION FORM FOR CELEBRATION OF ST. BENEDICT DAY ON APRIL 5

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

___ I plan to attend the dinner for Oblates at St. Vincent on Tuesday, April 5, along with ___ guests; I enclose _____ (\$6.50 per person; make out checks to **ST. VINCENT ARCHABBEY**. An additional donation for the social would be welcome).

___ I plan to be invested as an ___ Oblate, ___ Oblate novice on April 5. On becoming a full Oblate, I plan to take the Oblate name _____. (*application form required*)

___ I would like overnight accommodations. (Please contact Fr. Donald well in advance.)

Please send this form to **Oblate Office, Attention: St. Benedict Day event, 300 Fraser Purchase Rd., Latrobe, PA 15650-2690**.

SCHEDULE FOR SOLEMNITY OF SAINT BENEDICT, APRIL 5, 2016

4:00 P.M. – Concelebrated Mass in Archabbey Basilica

5:15 P.M. – dinner in Placid Hall Dining Room B

6:15 P.M. – Oblation ceremonies, Archabbey Basilica, choir area

7:00 - Vespers in Archabbey Basilica, choir area (tentative)

7:40 P.M. – social in Assembly Room

RENEWAL OF OBLATION

Peace! In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I, (name), renew my Oblation and offer myself to Almighty God, through the Blessed Virgin Mary and our holy Father Benedict, as an Oblate of Saint Vincent Archabbey, and I promise again, before God and all the saints, to dedicate my life to the service of God and neighbor according to the *Rule* of St. Benedict, insofar as my state in life permits.

“Sustain me, O Lord, as You have promised, that I may live, and disappoint me not in my hope” (Ps 119:116 & *RB* 58:21).

Name _____

Address _____

Date of Renewal _____

Please detach and return to:
Director of Oblates
St. Vincent Archabbey
300 Fraser Purchase Rd.
Latrobe, PA 15650-2690

Order Form for C.D.'s & D.V.D.'s of Presentations in Latrobe
(See past newsletters or phone Saint Vincent College Book Center for previous presentations.)

Fr. William Beaver's talk on hospitality (October 19, 2014):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Br. Lawrence's talk on poverty and simplicity in Benedictine spirituality (December 21, 2014):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Br. Hugh's talk on holiness and Benedictine spirituality (January 18, 2015):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Fr. Wulfstan's talk on prayer in Benedictine spirituality (February 15, 2015):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Fr. Justin Matro's talk on hospitality in Benedictine spirituality (March 15, 2015):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Br. Ignatius' talk on *lectio divina* (April 19, 2015):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Br. Matthew Hershey's talk on poverty & simplicity in Benedictine spirituality (May 17, 2015):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Fr. Jean-Luc's talk on obedience in Benedictine spirituality (June 14, 2015):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Fr. Matthew Lambert's talk on silence in Benedictine spirituality (July 19, 2015):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Oblate Nicholas Parrendo's presentation "A Spiritual Journey in Light" (September 20, 2015):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Fr. Boniface's talk on weakness and strength on Oblate Day (September 27, 2015):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Br. Mark Liatti's talk on St. Benedict and his *Rule* (October 18, 2015):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Fr. Robert Keffer's three conferences for the day of recollection (October 17, 2015):

Set of 2 C.D.'s _____ (number) Set of 2 D.V.D.'s _____ (number)

Fr. Boniface's talk on work in Benedictine spirituality (November 15, 2015):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Fr. Donald's talk on the Liturgy of the Hours (December 20, 2015):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Br. Rafael Dos Santos' talk on holiness and Benedictine spirituality (January 17, 2016):

C.D. _____ (number) D.V.D. _____ (number)

Please enclose \$6.00 per D.V.D. and \$3.50 per C.D. (Pennsylvania residents only: Add 6% Pa. sales tax before shipping cost; then add \$4.95 for postage & handling per order.)

Enclosed is _____ for my order of _____ C.D.'s and _____ D.V.D.'s.

Name _____

Address _____

I will pick up my order _____ Please mail my order to me _____ (Remember to include \$4.95 for postage per order plus tax [if PA resident].) **Please order from Saint Vincent Book Center over the phone at 724-805-2557 or online at www.bookstore.stvincent.edu , or by mail (St. Vincent Book Center, 300 Fraser Purchase Rd., Latrobe, PA 15650-2690); or come in person to the Book Center. Please make out checks to ST. VINCENT ARCHABBEY. N.B.: Those who attend monthly meetings in Latrobe will still be able to order copies of recent presentations at a discounted price.**

Some reflections on D.V.D.'s of presentations at 3:00 meetings in Latrobe by Oblate Cynthia Ruff (slightly edited by Fr. Donald

The presentations given by the monks on the third Sunday of each month at 3:00 P.M. at St. Vincent Archabbey are an opportunity to meet the monks and learn something about St. Benedict, the *Rule*, the Catholic Church, and the monks themselves.

During my initial relationship with St. Vincent Archabbey and the Oblate Program, I found myself driving from Toledo (270 miles one way) several times the first year, and the next year about four times. It was an enlightening period for me as I came to understand the Benedictine *Rule* and the routine of the monks and began to develop friendships with other Oblates.

What I have come to find is that the presentations follow a pattern. For example, the main ongoing topics are work, holiness, poverty and simplicity, *conversatio morum*, silence, the *Holy Rule*, hospitality, the Eucharist, obedience, *lectio divina*, prayer, and the Liturgy of the Hours.

My interest in the presentations given by the many monks is what spurred me on to begin searching through the on-line Oblate resources. Electronic newsletters dating back to February 2006 provided me listings of past presentations, and over the course of a couple of months I began to order the D.V.D.'s and now have a collection of about two dozen.

The most significant and interesting aspect of this experience is that I am able better to concentrate on the lecture and lecturer because the camera is focused directly on the speaker, and therefore there are few outside distractions or none. And although over the course of time, a variety of monks have spoken on the same topics, each one brings his own perspective, understanding, knowledge, and wisdom to the topic. This enables the listeners to open their minds to a fresh and new perspective.

Another great joy for me is the opportunity to feel as though, with each presentation, I have gotten to know another monk; I can put a name to a face, and this provides an even richer and greater spiritual experience for me when I do come to visit St. Vincent and see the monks in prayer or pass them in the hallway.

The six-dollar investment for each D.V.D. is certainly worth it, and I would suggest it to anyone who is seeking a better understanding of the Benedictine *Rule* and the monks of St. Vincent. It is also a great way to evangelize. For example, Oblate groups from all over could watch these D.V.D.'s at their monthly meetings.

SPECIAL SCHEDULE FOR MONASTIC PRAYER AT THE ARCHABBEY DURING HOLY WEEK AND THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

The following times for liturgical services will be different than the normal ones:

Wednesday, March 23

Evening Prayer as penitential prayer service (basilica) 5:00 P.M.
Compline (basilica) 7:30 P.M.

Holy Thursday, March 24

Morning Prayer (basilica choir) 6:45 A.M.
(no Evening Prayer)
Mass of the Lord's Supper (basilica) 7:30 P.M.

Good Friday, March 25

Morning Prayer (basilica choir) 6:45 A.M.
Midday Prayer (basilica choir) 11:30 A.M.
Commemoration of the Passion and Death of Our Lord 1:30 P.M.
(basilica; no Evening Prayer)
Tenebrae Service (basilica) 8:00 P.M.

Holy Saturday, March 26

Morning Prayer (basilica choir) 6:45 A.M.
Midday Prayer (basilica choir) 11:30 A.M.
Evening Prayer (basilica choir) 5:00 P.M.
Easter Vigil Mass (basilica) 8:30 P.M. (tentative)

Easter Sunday, March 27

Morning Prayer (with procession from Assembly Room) 7:00 A.M.
Evening Prayer (solemn, in basilica choir) 4:15 P.M.

Easter Monday, March 28

Morning Prayer followed by Mass (basilica choir) 6:45 A.M.

The regular schedule resumes on Tuesday, March 29.