

OBLATES OF SAINT BENEDICT:

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS FOR INQUIRERS

1. Why does a Christian seek to become an Oblate of St. Benedict?

The *Oblate Formation Booklet* states that Christians “are attracted to the Oblate Program because they are seeking God in Jesus Christ and have begun to find Him through their acquaintance with a Benedictine community and through the Christian values manifested by the community and its Oblates.” Such people have come to “recognize Christ’s presence in the Benedictine community and in the spirit of the *Rule* of St. Benedict, both of which they have come to regard as gifts of God meant to nurture their spiritual lives” (*Oblate Formation Booklet*, I.A).

2. What is the first step toward entering the Oblate Program of St. Vincent Archabbey?

The first step in entering the Program is to seek to become an Oblate novice. An interested person should inquire of the Director of Oblates at St. Vincent Archabbey or of a local moderator or lay leader of the deanery close to his or her home. As of 2004, deaneries were located in Carrolltown, PA; Harrisburg/Annville, PA; Johnstown, PA; Latrobe, PA; Pittsburgh, PA; St. Marys, PA; State College, PA; Baltimore, MD; Virginia Beach, VA; Savannah, GA; and St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. (In June 2004 plans were also being made for a deanery in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.) If the inquirer lives near one of these locations, he or she should, if possible, attend several deanery meetings to assist in the discernment about becoming an Oblate novice. (See *RB* 58:3-5.) The Director of Oblates can send the inquirer the necessary application form (for investiture as an Oblate novice), a copy of the latest Oblate newsletter, and other brochures and reprints concerning Oblates and Benedictine spirituality. Most of these can also be obtained from a local deanery’s lay leader or moderator.

Upon being invested, an Oblate novice makes a temporary personal commitment of at least a year to learn about Benedictine spirituality and to apply it in his or her daily life. (After that year or more of temporary commitment, one may seek to make a lifelong commitment as a full Oblate if one fulfills the given requirements.)

3. What is the meaning of affiliation as an Oblate novice or Oblate?

Unlike members of Third Orders, Oblate novices and Oblates are affiliated not with the whole Benedictine Order but with a particular monastic community of Benedictine monks or sisters. Inquirers should, therefore, discern carefully which community is the one with which they should affiliate. Geographical closeness is certainly a key factor, but some people may choose a more remote monastery because of their personal histories, personal ties with some of the monks, or other factors involved in the calling that they have received from God.

4. What are the necessary qualifications for becoming an Oblate novice?

One must first of all be a baptized and practicing Christian. A Roman Catholic seeking to become an Oblate novice must be in full communion with the Catholic Church; that is, he or she should be confirmed and receive the Eucharist regularly. A non-Catholic Christian must be in good standing with his or her particular denomination. Clergy who do not belong to a religious order are welcome to apply. Lay people who apply should not have official affiliation with another religious community. (A person affiliated with another religious community through a Third Order or other formal means should follow proper procedures to withdraw from the other group before applying to become an Oblate novice.) A candidate for novice Oblation should be at least 14 years old and discern a call to a richer Christian life through a following of the *Rule* of St. Benedict and through affiliation with the monks of St. Vincent Archabbey.

5. What must a person do to become an Oblate novice?

He or she must complete a (blue) application form obtained from the Director of Oblates or a local deanery. The applicant should send the completed form to the Director of Oblates or the local moderator for approval well in advance of the date of the expected ceremony. After the application is approved, a ceremony can be scheduled. The person officiating should be a Benedictine monk or a Roman Catholic priest or permanent deacon of a diocese or another religious order. If the officiant is not a monk of St. Vincent Archabbey, he should have a letter of authorization from the Director of Oblates.

The ceremony for becoming an Oblate novice is called "investiture." If possible, it is best that a person be invested in the presence of an Oblate community. If a ceremony in the presence of a group of people is not convenient, the person may be invested at a private ceremony. He or she is welcome to invite family and friends. The ceremony can be arranged in the context of a prayer service or Mass, or it may stand alone. The rite of investiture is given in a brochure of Oblate ceremonies printed by the Oblate Office at the Archabbey. Anyone who wishes to see the rite of investiture may obtain a copy of this brochure from the Oblate Office.

6. Can a whole family join the Oblate Program together?

Yes. Each person 14 years or older must complete an individual application form and be invested along with any younger members. Children under 14 years of age need not complete the application, but they may be invested in the ceremony with other members of their family and may receive a blue investiture card. Although these younger members do not become "Oblate novices" in the strict sense, they are considered members of an "Oblate family." When they reach the age of 14 or older, they can decide on their own whether to apply to be invested as Oblate novices. The practice of becoming an "Oblate (novice) family" can encourage members of a Christian family to grow together spiritually through

the living out of Benedictine values. (They may wish to note that there are several books available that specifically address the issue of applying the *Rule* of St. Benedict to family life.) Those who are considering the option of family Oblation may wish to consult with families who have chosen this path.

7. May non-Catholic Christians become Oblate novices (and later Oblates)?

Yes, a Christian of any denomination may enter the Oblate Program as long as he or she is in good standing with his or her denomination, feels called to follow the spirituality of the *Rule*, and completes the required application for prospective Oblate novices. However, a Catholic who becomes an Oblate novice or an Oblate and then leaves the Catholic Church may no longer remain in the Oblate Program.

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