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# THE SAINT VINCENT OBLATE NEWS

## Saint Vincent Archabbey

300 Fraser Purchase Road, Latrobe, PA 15650-2690

724-805-2291



February – April, 2019

Volume 72, Number 1

e-mail address: svaoblates@stvincent.edu ; web site: <http://www.svaoblates.org>

### THE HARD SAYINGS OF OUR LORD AND SAINT BENEDICT: ALL FOR THE SAKE OF OUR SALVATION

Dear Oblates, Oblate novices, and Friends,

#### ***No blessings without hardships***

Several years ago upon returning from the March for Life, I realized that I needed a new winter coat. Fortunately, the weather in Washington, DC, had been mild, but nonetheless it had been frustrating to have my coat falling apart. The zipper had been irreparably broken for several years; then the snaps failed; then the velcro stopped sticking; and then, during the march, the plastic belt buckle would not fasten properly. By God's grace a very similar coat appeared in the monastery's "beggars'-bench" room within a short time. Indeed, I rejoiced at the undeserved gift. However, I soon discovered that the zipper of the new coat could be problematic. Whenever I tried to zip up the coat hastily, the zipper would come off track. Again and again I must remind myself to slow down and take time when I put on that coat. If I do not pay attention to what I am doing, the zipper will inevitably become unattached; if I am mindful and bear the slight hardship of connecting the parts of the zipper with care, then the coat will be zipped up successfully.

Surely there are greater problems in life than dealing with a recalcitrant zipper, but that example points out the need for us to bear patiently with imperfect and even tragic conditions over which we may have little control. One of our monks recently preached eloquently and powerfully about the right-to-life cause. He said that it should be obvious to welcome and nurture human life in the womb. It should be obvious that all people have equal God-given dignity, including the unborn, the frail, elderly, the mentally ill, immigrants, and prisoners. However, many people fail to acknowledge that dignity. Perhaps even we Christians at times and in practice do not give certain people the dignity that they are due, possibly because of deeply ingrained biases and fears. Therefore, it is a great struggle to accept and to promote the right to life of all people, especially those chronically deprived of society's respect and love. For this reason and other reasons, Christian life, Christian prayer, and Christian ministry involve laborious efforts to overcome stubborn obstacles and to accept heavy crosses.

#### ***Some hard sayings of Christ***

Our Lord told us on many occasions that following Him would not be easy. There are far too many "hard sayings" of Jesus to record in this essay, but let us just consider a few. In Lk 12:51, Our Lord says, "Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." (Pondering this saying carefully will lead us to realize that Christ does not

actually will divisions but that He is warning that speaking His truth will inevitably lead to divisions; so we are prepared!) Shortly afterward, in referring to Galileans whose blood had been mixed in their sacrifices by their murderers, Our Lord calls attention to eighteen people killed by a falling tower; then He proclaims, "But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!" (Lk 13: 3, 5). (Here is a valuable warning about our need to repent; so let us take heed!) Similarly challenging is the whole Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). One of the more startling statements of Our Lord is, "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt 5: 11-12). (Are we to rejoice in being persecuted? No, but we are to rejoice in the Lord and in the grace He gives to sustain us and encourage us to hope for the eternal reward that He promises.) Also, a number of times in the Gospels, Our Lord admonishes us, "So do not worry" (e.g., Mt 6:31); can we really stop worrying in this age of hyperactivity, multitasking, world crises, national crises, local crises, and Church crises? (Perhaps we cannot stop worrying completely, but we can begin the fight against it since worry weakens trust.)

Some of Our Lord's hard sayings are hard to understand or hard to put into practice, but others actually seem unreasonable. Among them is His admonition, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off!" (Mk 9:43). He says the same for one's foot and one's eye. Certainly, such sayings must be interpreted in context, and the ones about maiming one's body cannot be taken literally. Still, one must avoid the temptations to dismiss them entirely or to water them down so that there is no challenge or difficulty left. We should be ready to take strong measures to avoid sin and be ready to suffer bodily in our struggle against sin. Perhaps the hard sayings can be summarized in Our Lord's statement of conditions for discipleship: "Whoever wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me" (Mt 16:24). Yes, Christian discipleship is difficult. Of course, we should not impose hardships on ourselves or on others simply to make life hard, but Christian life will always, if lived authentically, present difficulties that seem beyond our ability to cope. These should lead us to rely on the grace of God and to heed the Sacred Tradition and teachings of the Church in order to find splendid opportunities amid the difficulties. Furthermore, using reliable commentaries on Scripture can provide welcome assistance and keep us from being discouraged or misguided.

### **Hard Sayings in the Holy Rule**

Since the *Rule* of Saint Benedict was written to edify and encourage Christian monks of the sixth century, we would expect it to involve some hard sayings. Indeed, the Prologue reminds us that the *Rule* includes legislation for “a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love (Prol: 47). Some years ago at a biennial meeting of Oblate directors, Fr. Columba Stewart, O.S.B., of St. John’s Abbey spoke about three particularly difficult-to-understand passages of the *Rule*. I can remember only one of them at present, namely the seventh step of humility (and perhaps also the sixth), but one does not have to look far in the *Rule* to find passages which our fallen natures would prefer to ignore. The seventh step includes the stipulation “that a man not only admit with his tongue but also be convinced in his heart that he is inferior to all and of less value, humbling himself and saying with the Prophet: ‘I am truly a worm, not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people’” (*RB* 7: 51-52, quoting Ps 22:7). Does not equating ourselves to a worm deny our human dignity? It does not, if we take this passage in its proper context. St. Benedict undoubtedly was trying to counteract some monks’ tendencies to exalt themselves above others. In his book *Humility Rules* (Ignatius Press, 2017), Fr. J. Augustine Wetta, O.S.B., reflects on this passage in terms of “self-abasement.” He reminds us that self-abasement is the antidote to the delusion that “we must somehow show ourselves worthy of God’s love” (p. 99). To abase ourselves is to acknowledge the truth “that we are nothing without God’s grace and will never earn it” (p. 99). Fr. Augustine continues, “Ironically, this healthy sense of nothingness, understood correctly, brings with it a deeper sense of confidence and freedom” (p. 99). To acknowledge that we are nothing before God is to abide in the truth; but we must go beyond the self-abasement to praise and thank God since “we haven’t earned that divine dignity; it is a gift” (p. 99) - a gift that God lavishes upon us so graciously and mercifully!

I remember also that in his presentation in 2001, Fr. Columba mentioned that in St. Benedict’s time very few people were afflicted by low self-esteem. In contrast, today vast numbers of younger people (and by this time older people, too) grow up in an environment lacking unselfish love and so have rather low self-esteem. Because of that situation, one must be careful not to tell a person bluntly that he must become “a worm and no man.” The lesson is a good and holy one, but one must find appropriate ways and times to help people realize that divine dignity is an undeserved gift that is not acquired by efforts to earn it. Openness to grace is the way!

Another passage in the *Rule* that could be problematic is *RB* 71: 6-9, which involves a monk who senses that one of his seniors “is angry or disturbed with him even slightly” (71:7). The monk “must, then and there without delay, cast himself on the ground at the other’s feet to make satisfaction, and lie there until the disturbance is calmed by a blessing” (71:8). From a perspective of

justice and equal dignity of persons this practice seems utterly unfair and perhaps even abhorrent. (In fact, Fr. Terrence Kardong, O.S.B., says bluntly that St. Benedict was wrong in this stipulation.) Of course, this passage, like others, cannot be applied literally in monasteries today. However, there is some good spiritual fruit here. Once again, Fr. Augustine Wetta finds something redemptive. In his chapter “Repentance in Deed” (pp. 83-85), he asserts, “Real Christian community needs all of its members to look out for one another. Therefore, the moment a monk senses that he has done the opposite - inspired some anger or anxiety in his brother - he stops what he’s doing and fixes it” (p. 83). Specifically, the author recommends, “Never water down an apology with an excuse. If you’ve done wrong, own up to it. In fact, even if you haven’t done wrong, find a way to make amends. Throw yourself on the floor and beg for a blessing. Then let the whole thing go” (pp. 84-85). We might add that a senior should also be sensitive to the rights and feelings of juniors and should do his best to heal relationships with younger people with humility and self-emptying love. Being sensitive to other people’s disturbances can be hard! Certainly, one has no duty to say that he was wrong when he was not, but it does no good to make a big issue of such matters, to belittle offenders, or to show a sour disposition.

Other hard sayings of the *Rule* occur in *RB* 58, “The Procedure for Receiving the Brothers [New Monks]”. St. Benedict says that a newcomer should not be granted “an easy entry” (58:1) and that he should keep “knocking at the door” for “four or five days” (58:3) and show himself “patient in bearing his harsh treatment and difficulty of entry” (58:3). That procedure sounds rather inhospitable! It seems also to go against St. Benedict’s reputation for moderation. In any case, he goes even further to assert that once the applicant becomes a novice, he should show “eagerness ... for trials” and “should be clearly told all the hardships and difficulties that will lead him to God” (58:8). [The phrase “all hardships and difficulties” reads in Latin, “omnia dura et aspera”; it has a poetic sound and has become a good-to-remember motto that can help the monk to embrace his calling amid its challenges.] We might ask ourselves why these seemingly harsh procedures have not discouraged many men from accepting monastic vocations. It may be true that the element of trials helps people to persevere in responding to God’s call. Of course, the details change over time. These days we do not make vocation guests wait outside the monastery doors for four or five days; but we do require that they undergo all sorts of other testings, including background checks, the submission of transcripts and letters of recommendation, and multiple visits and interviews with monastic officials (if the candidate gets that far). All this can take many months or even years. A monastic vocation, or any special vocation in the Church, is not easily discerned and should not be taken lightly. Although they are not arbitrarily imposed, the apparent obstacles become opportunities to test the genuineness of a vocation. Lay people making decisions about God’s

will in their lives should also be ready for patient waiting and a good measure of “dura et aspera.”

Furthermore, if a novice is judged ready to profess vows, the *Rule* states that “he must be well aware that, as the law of the rule establishes, from this day he is no longer free to leave the monastery nor shake from his neck the yoke of the rule ...” (58: 15-16). These days this passage would apply only to the solemn profession of vows, which at St. Vincent occurs only four years (or more) after entry as a novice whereas in St. Benedict’s day lifetime vows were professed after a one-year novitiate. In any case, the words “no longer free” may strike us as oppressive. In reality, however, the “yoke” of living the monastic life is essentially the same yoke involved with living any Christian life. We do indeed carry a heavy yoke when we strive to live consistently in God’s presence and in Christ’s sacrificial love. At the same time, we know that the yoke is a good and holy one which Christ shares with us. He assures us, “My yoke is easy and My burden light” (Mt 11:30). Vows do restrict a monk to be “no longer free” to do whatever he pleases since he is bound for life to obey the abbot and the *Rule*. On the other hand, if his vocation is genuine, he becomes freer to do God’s will and, with the graces of vows, to overcome slavery to self-will and the impulses of the “old self.” As St. Paul tells the Galatians about true freedom, “For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). He also asserts, “For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love” (Gal 5:13). This is true freedom: the acceptance of the grace to become the full person that God intends us to be! Such freedom also applies to marriage vows; each spouse becomes freer to follow Christ since he or she puts himself at the other’s disposal in love. Since all of us are called to be “wedded” to Christ by baptism, this freedom of life in self-emptying love is a task and a gift for every Christian.

One could also cite many other passages of the *Rule* which some people might regard as stumbling blocks. These include the chapters of the “penal code,” about which there was an essay in this newsletter several years ago. For all of these passages, when properly interpreted and applied, there is a redemptive meaning and an opportunity to embrace the “hard things” of Christian life.

#### **Challenge of living in the truth in our day**

On the memorial of St. Thomas Aquinas (January 28), the celebrant at our daily Mass delivered a powerful homily about the difficulty of seeking the truth and living in the truth. Our culture, and in particular the social media, promotes the argumentative expression of personal opinions without regard for what is authentic and true. One opinion is taken to be as good as another without any regard for absolute standards. Of course, great contentiousness is the result! We Christians, on the other hand, have high regard for the truth, since, as the Scriptures, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Pope St. John Paul II have taught, all truth comes from God;

furthermore, Christ is our Truth, and the Devil is the “father of lies.” God’s standards for human life are absolute and eternal. They must be observed and are violated only at the peril of separating oneself from God and from His loving plan. The sanctity of human life from conception to natural death, the dignity of every human person, the sacredness of marriage between one man and one woman, and the validity of the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes (and all of Scripture when properly interpreted) are not negotiable. When God has spoken, we cannot, without serious sin and its dire consequences, pick and choose what to believe. The Post-Communion Prayer on the memorial of St. Thomas Aquinas reads: “Through Christ the teacher, O Lord, instruct those You feed with Christ, the Living Bread, that on the feast day of Blessed Thomas Aquinas they may learn Your truth and express it in works of charity.”

Lent will soon be here. Although we should offer to God some special sacrifices “with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (*RB* 49:6), those acts of self-denial can be painful. Of course, we should not choose hard practices just to make life harder; but we should discern one or two penances carefully so that, in accordance with God’s will, they will help us to overcome evil habits and to conform our lives more closely to Christ’s. We can be assured that if we choose wisely, God will provide the grace for us to endure the hardships cheerfully, to “look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing” (49:7), and to be better prepared to embrace our ultimate communion with God in eternity.

#### **Conclusion: gratitude for the hard sayings**

Let us, then, give thanks for the hard sayings of Christ and those of the *Rule*. They remind us that Christian life is difficult. They remind us that seeking the truth can be painful. They remind us that God’s truths are to be pondered, savored, and esteemed even when they go against our natural inclinations and intuitions. By accepting and embracing the hard dimensions of God’s teachings and of daily life, we learn “not to be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation” (*RB* Prol: 48). With grace and with practice, the challenges of the Gospel and the *Rule* lead us to true joy, which is far greater than the gratifications of our fallen nature. Living by those hard sayings propels us to “run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love” (Prol: 49).

In the peace of Christ and St. Benedict,

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

Dear Oblates and Friends of Saint Vincent,

As we move from the Christmas Season into Ordinary Time in the liturgical cycle of the Church, we become more and more aware of our role in carrying forward the legacy of God's love made visible in the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. The love of Jesus Christ embraces Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men, and Simeon and Anna and extends to the calling of the Lord's disciples. The circle of God's love expands quickly to embrace Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, and the early Christians. Over the centuries, we see the "circle of God's love" expand from the martyrs of the early Church, to the great founders of religious orders in the Middle Ages, to the political martyrs of the twentieth century.

Here at Saint Vincent we celebrated the "circle of God's love" that embraced our founder, Abbot Boniface Wimmer, with the inspiration and vision to undertake his mission to America. Today that mission has spread to more than 30 monastic communities in all parts of the world.

We are privileged to welcome our Oblates and friends in joining us to carry forward the legacy of Christ's love and the mission of Abbot Boniface Wimmer by reaching out to all those whom each day the Lord sends into our lives. Through loving service, we bear witness to Jesus Christ and affirm our trust in His ever-abiding presence.

May God's love be with you always!

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Douglas R. Nowicki, O.S.B.  
Archabbot

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**RETREAT SCHEDULE FOR 2019**

The retreats at St. Vincent for summer, 2019, have been scheduled. Regarding the two retreats on Benedictine spirituality; there will one on May 24-26, 2019, to be directed by Fr. Donald, and a second one on June 28-30, 2019, to be directed by Fr. Boniface. All Oblates and Oblate novices are urged to consider making a summer retreat at the Archabbey.

**OBLATE DAY AND DAY OF RECOLLECTION FOR 2019**

Oblate Day for 2019 has been scheduled for Sunday, September 22, 2019, since facilities will be available on that day. The fall day of recollection for 2019 has been scheduled for Saturday, October 12, 2019. Those to give presentations have not yet been chosen.

**MENTORS NEEDED**

A number of people who are Oblate novices or inquirers have requested Oblate mentors. There are still a few people who have requested mentors but who have not been matched. If you are a full Oblate and think that you could serve as a mentor for someone new to the program, please contact the Oblate Office. There is a set of guidelines available for mentors.

**THIS SUMMER'S BIENNIAL ASSEMBLY OF DEANERY REPRESENTATIVES: June 22, 2019**

The Assembly of Deanery Representatives in 2019 has been scheduled for Saturday, June 22, a date when not many other events are occurring. Each deanery is asked to select members who wish to attend and consider if they might need overnight accommodations. Two representatives from each deanery would be ideal, but if a married couple is involved, three may attend. Deaneries should let the Oblate Office know who will attend and mention any need for overnight rooms.

**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 one's schedule allows) and the regular practice of *lectio divina* on the Bible (daily, if possible). 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 to apply it personally to one's everyday life.

**BASILICA GIFT SHOP OFFERS 10% DISCOUNT TO OBLATES**

Oblates and Oblate novices who purchase items in the Basilica Gift Shop may receive a discount of 10% on all purchases.

**MEETINGS OF OBLATE BOARD OF ADVISORS, January 11, 2019**

Members of the Board assembled for their 71<sup>st</sup> regular meeting at 6:30 P.M. on January 11 in Brownfield Room 203. The topics discussed included the 2021 International Congress of Oblates, potential speakers at Oblate events in Latrobe, mentoring in special situations, a pilgrimage by Pittsburgh Deanery Oblates to the Archabbey on March 2, the 2019 Assembly of Deanery Representatives at the Archabbey, the 2019 Biennial Meeting of NAABOD in Schuyler, NE, the possibility of an annual summary of Oblate activities, and developments in deaneries and potential deaneries. The Board agreed to schedule the next meeting for April 12.

**PRAYER-PARTNER PROGRAM**

Our revised Prayer-partner Program has begun to be implemented. New Oblates are automatically partnered with a monk who has agreed to participate. There is no communication between partners unless both agree to such communication. It is quite simple. Each partner prays for the other regularly, as best as he or she can. (If you have not yet been assigned, you should receive a prayer partner soon.) If you are a full Oblate who wishes to have a monk prayer-partner, please phone the Oblate Office.

## **THE SOLEMNITY OF ST. BENEDICT AT THE ARCHABBEY ON MARCH 21, 2019**

Oblates from all locations are welcome to join Oblates of the Latrobe (St. Gregory) Deanery on **Thursday, March 21**, to celebrate 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), and Vespers with the monastic community at 7:00 P.M. Members of the Oblate community and their guests who wish to attend should complete the form on the flier and send it to the Oblate Office by March 15. The cost of the supper is \$9.50. 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 accommodations should contact Fr. Donald very soon since the number of rooms is very limited.

## **PLANS FOR 2021 INTERNATIONAL OBLATE CONGRESS**

The Oblate Office has received information about the Oblate Congress scheduled for November 6-12, 2021, at the Fraternal Domus convention center outside of Rome. A committee coordinating the event met from October 27 to November 4 this past fall to begin the planning process. The theme for the next Congress is "Moving Forward: Living the Wisdom of the Rule." Fr. Benoit Allogia, O.S.B., of St. Vincent Archabbey, now resides at Sant'Anselmo in Rome and is in charge of the overall planning for the Congress, and he has already chosen three keynote speakers, including Abbot Primate Gregory Polan. If you are an Oblate affiliated with St. Vincent and are tentatively interested in attending the 2021 Congress, please contact the Oblate Office.

## **SOME ITEMS AVAILABLE FROM THE OBLATE OFFICE**

- (1) pamphlet "God's Love for You" with message of evangelization – free
- (2) booklet *St. Benedict for Busy Parents* – for \$1.00 each
- (3) booklet of deanery histories – free or with donation for postage
- (4) book *Nadeem Feroze: Oblate of Saint Benedict, Pakistani, Defender of the Faith* - \$8.00 each
- (5) blessed St. Benedict/St. Scholastica scapulars (sometimes the supply is limited)

## **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. Members of the Board of Advisors have put together a brochure for first-time Oblate guests, but any Oblate is welcome to request a copy.

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

- Shirley Sullivan, *Practical Guide for the Liturgy of the Hours* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 2008) [for those wanting simple instructions on praying the Liturgy of the Hours]
- Fr. Michael Casey, O.C.S.O., *Grace: On the Journey to God* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2018)
- Derya Little, *From Islam to Christ: One Woman's Path through the Riddles of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017)

## **NEW (or newly discovered) BOOKS ON BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY**

- R. Jared Staudt (Oblate), *The Beer Option: Brewing a Catholic Culture Yesterday & Today* (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2018) [In this book, as the title suggests, there is discussion about the monastic tradition of brewing.]

## **OBLATE MEETINGS IN LATROBE AND PRESENTATIONS ON BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY**

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 17, March 17, April 14, and May 19. Those wishing to come early for Evening Prayer (usually at 5:00) and supper before the meetings at St. Vincent should phone Fr. Donald in advance at (724) 805-2291. The book *Seventy-Four Tools for Good Living* is currently being discussed. Also, informative presentations on Benedictine spirituality continue to be offered at 3:00 P.M. on the same dates. All are welcome. The session on February 17, to be offered by Fr. Killian Loch, will address the topic "Humility in Benedictine Spirituality"; the session on March 17, to be offered by Fr. Thomas Hart, will be entitled "To Love Fasting"; the session on April 14, to be offered by Fr. Boniface Hicks, will be about *lectio divina*.

## **OBLATE GROUP IN CAMBRIDGE, ONTARIO, CANADA** –meetings on 1<sup>st</sup> Thurs. mornings at St. Gregory the Great Church in Cambridge

Oblate Cathy Mayled reported by phone on November 19 and by e-mail on January 7. The meeting on November 2 was attended by six people. The group read and discussed Chapter 53 of the *Rule* (on hospitality) and relevant sections of the book *Preferring Christ* by Norvene Vest. No meeting was scheduled for December.

The meeting on January, attended by three people, began with prayer. The group discussed a quote from Fr. Basil Pennington, O.S.C.O., from the book *The Monastic Way: Ancient Wisdom for Contemporary Living*. The meeting ended with Noon Prayer.

## **OBLATE GROUP IN MORGANTOWN, WV - monthly meetings at Pauline Lanciotti's house**

Secretary Pauline Lanciotti reported by e-mail on January 15. The meeting on November 26 was attended by six people, including then-moderator Fr. Justin Blanc. After the praying of Vespers, the group concluded a discussion of Fr. Michael Casey's commentary on RB 7, namely *A Guide to Living in the Truth*. The focus was on Chapters 8-11, corresponding to the 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> degrees of humility. The discussion included acknowledgment of the need for radical self-honesty and transparency, with both oneself and a trusted advisor; a lengthy probe of the notion of self-abasement and the corollary of voluntary deferring of control; and observations about the role of silence in the interior life and suggestions about cultivating silence in daily life. Praise for the text was voiced. Fr. Justin closed the meeting with a "Glory Be." *(continued)*

There were no meetings in December or January. Since Fr. Justin is no longer at St. John University Parish, the group planned to resume meetings in February at Pauline's home, with Pauline assuming lay leadership of the group.

Pauline also reported that she had presented a talk to the W.V.U. Catholic student group "Mountaineer Catholics" on November 15. She also offered blessed medals of St. Benedict along with the corresponding flyers to the attendees. Furthermore, the Oblate group hosted a dinner for the W.V.U. Catholic students on November 29. Pauline also gave a presentation to the parish's Confirmation prep class on December 9. She incorporated an introduction to Benedictine spirituality as a way to seek God and strengthen one in one's discipleship and offered each of the confirmandi a blessed medal, a flyer, and a St. Benedict prayer card.

#### **OBLATE GROUP IN TENNESSEE COLONY, TX (Michael Unit)**

Lay leader/secretary Robert Bernhardt reported on January 1 about meetings in October, November, and December. On October 30 the meeting was attended by three Oblates, two Oblate novices, and three inquirers. The group read and discussed *RB 23* and the reasons for praying the Liturgy of the Hours. The Hours were prayed at both meetings in October. The meeting on November 27 was very brief; the seven people who attended read the "Prayer for Oblates."

In December there was no regular meeting, but the group gathered to pray the Liturgy of the Hours and to read from the *Rule*. As of January 1, the group included four Oblates, five Oblate novices, and one inquirer.

#### **OBLATE GROUP IN ROSHARON, TX (Terrell Unit)**

Secretary Gilberto Gomez wrote on January 13. The prayer meetings occurred once a week in September, October, and November and two times during December. There was an average attendance of 12 or 13 men. Once a month there has been a visit from Sherri Burns, a spiritual director and an Oblate affiliated with Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey in Pecos, NM. Sherri has been speaking about St. Benedict, his life, and the *Rule*; she has been giving her personal testimony. Gilberto also outlined the schedule for meetings each week when the group meets four times a month. At each meeting the Divine Office is prayed. The other topics considered are the *Rule* (week 1), the *Catechism* (week 2), the history of the Church or monasticism (week 3), and "leadership development" (week 4). The group has been meeting under the direction of "prior" Mr. Durinjes, and the group misses the presence of Donald Schnidt and Juan Rosiley, who are no longer with them.

At the meeting on January 13, the fifteen attendees heard Sherri Burns speak about prayer.

#### **OBLATE GROUP IN BEAUMONT, TX (Stiles Unit)**

The group sent Christmas greetings to the Oblate Office with eight signatures. On December 9 Oblate José Alvarado reported on meetings from October 3 through December 5. Attendance ranged from six to twelve. The meetings generally began with a chanting of the invitatory of the day and then Morning Prayer, followed by a reading and discussion of the passage from the *Rule* for the day. On October 3, José gave a presentation about Part 2 of a Cistercian retreat on Thomas Merton's writings on "The True Self." On October 17 Stephen Stoeltje gave a presentation on formation lesson 10 on hospitality, and there was a discussion about welcoming the "stranger" and bringing the light of Christ to those whom we welcome. On October 31 José reflected on Part of the Cistercian retreat discussed on October 3. There was a lively and thought-provoking discussion on the topic "Contemplation and the Journey to the True Self." The attendees also viewed the beginning of a D.V.D. with a presentation on silence by Fr. Pio of the Archabbey. On November 7, José presented a talk about Part 4, "The Flight to Unity," of the Cistercian retreat. On December 5, Jose gave a report on Part 5, "Christ, the 'Subject' of Contemplation; Mary, the Model of Contemplation," from the Cistercian. The group finished viewing the D.V.D. on silence. In the report it was also mentioned that during Morning Prayer, the members of the group offer personal intercessions and, in particular, pray for the intentions from the last letter from the Oblate Office.

On December 26 Oblate Stephen Stoeltje wrote concerning Oblate ceremonies on December 19. At that time, during a Mass offered by Fr. Francis X. Conroy, the following were received by Fr. Conroy:

Oblates:           **José "Joe" (Francis Xavier) Alvarado** of Beaumont, TX  
                          **John S. (Martin) Auer** of Beaumont, TX  
                          **Thomas A. "Tom" (Roman) Broussard** of Beaumont, TX  
                          **John Francis Harrup** of Beaumont, TX  
                          **Kenneth D. (Pio) Martin, Sr.**, of Beaumont, TX  
                          **Stephen (Aelred) Stoeltje** of Beaumont, TX  
                          **Leslie W. (Jerome) Todd** of Beaumont, TX

Oblate novices:   **George A. Dyer** of Beaumont, TX  
                          **James M. Chin** of Beaumont, TX.

#### **NEWS FROM OBLATE DEANERIES**

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

Lay leader Mary Ann Bingeman reported by phone on February 5. There were no meetings in December or January. Five people attended the meeting on February 3. In a discussion led by Oblate Mike Kinney and Oblate novice Mike DeCristofaro, the group considered Chapter 9, on work, from *Formation Lessons for Oblate Novices and Oblates*.

**Baltimore, MD (St. Walburga Deanery)** -- meetings at 3:00-4:45 on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sun. of month, parish house, St. Benedict Church

Oblate Bonnie Bezila reported by e-mail on November 28, and lay leader/secretary Jay Wells reported by e-mail on December 15. The meeting on November 18 was attended by five Oblates and Fr. Paschal Morlino, moderator, who made available several devotional booklets and other reading materials for Advent. One attendee suggested that attendees take some time at each meeting

just to get to know one another, and all agreed. One attendee reported on the regional Oblate meeting that had taken place in Bristow, VA, on October 13. The meeting had been well-attended, and there had been one notable presentation about the role of the cellarer in Chapter 31 of the *Rule*. Two Oblates then reported on their recent trip to Italy. Next Fr. Paschal read two articles meant to help the attendees to prepare for Advent. One article involved looking to the Blessed Mother as a “best friend,” and the other pointed out how the high-tech world fosters impatience and the missing of the small, soft voice of God speaking to people. There were substantial discussions about both articles, and Fr. Paschal encouraged the group to take time during Advent to slow down, render the soul still, and listen for God’s voice. As usual, the group went to the church at 5:00 P.M. to sing Vespers.

The meeting on December 9 was attended by seven people besides Fr. Paschal, who began by offering a presentation on dreams based on an Advent talk by Fr. Edward Mazich. Included were stories of dreams from the Bible, the theme of dreams as a window to the soul, and the sharing of significant dreams by the attendees. Fr. Paschal then offered the reflection for the day from *Magnificat* magazine. The attendees subsequently spoke about the meaning of being an Oblate and the implications of their Oblate vocation in interactions with society. Next Fr. Paschal related recent experiences from his travels in Italy as he led a group of pilgrims there. The session ended with the praying of Vespers.

**Butler, PA (St. Hildegard Deanery)** -- monthly meetings at St. Fidelis Parish Hall, 6:30 P.M., 4<sup>th</sup> Thurs. of each month

Lay leader/secretary Ronald Weleski reported by phone on February 5. The one combined meeting for November and December consisted of a potluck dinner at the home of Ron and Marsha Weleski. Sixteen people attended, including Oblates and their spouses and Fr. Will Wuenschel of the parishes in Butler. The group also prayed Vespers for the First Week of Advent and played the game Christmas Trivia.

The deanery began to meet according a new schedule of meetings on January 24. On that date the attendees discussed Lesson 3 (“Conversion of Heart”) from the formation lessons. They reflected on the meaning of conversion and the means to achieve it.

**Cyber Deanery (St. Isidore of Seville Deanery)** [Those interested in the deanery may contact tmgeorge.oblate@gmail.com .]

Co-lay leader Theresa George reported by phone on January 10. As of that date there were 38 members. Theresa has been posting the formation lessons and reflections. In January the group was considering the lesson on *lectio divina*. There have been very few responses lately, perhaps because of activities related to Christmas. Members are encouraged to be more actively engaged.

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

Lay leader/secretary Kathy Kristofko wrote in early November and on December 8. The meeting on November 5 began with Evening Prayer in St. Benedict’s Church and then continued in the John Paul II meeting hall. Deacon Michael Russo, moderator, gave a brief summary of the trip to Rome and Assisi. Then the group continued its study of the book *Humility Rules* by Augustine Wetta, O.S.B.

Members of the deanery met on December 3 for Evening Prayer followed by a meal in a local restaurant. They planned not to meet in January because of the likelihood of bad weather.

**Jacksonville, NC (new deanery - St. Michael the Archangel Deanery)** - meetings at Infant of Prague Church

Oblate James Hough, lay leader, and Oblate Diana Schmidt, secretary, reported that on January 22 the deanery had its initial meeting in the Parish Hall Library of Infant of Prague Church in Jacksonville. It was determined that eighteen Oblates and Oblate novices live in the area and so are part of the deanery. Diana agreed to serve as secretary. Attending the initial meeting were six Oblates, two Oblate novices, and three inquirers. (Several other people expressed interest; so another introductory session was planned.) The meeting began at 7:00 P.M. with the praying of Vespers. James then read from Chapter 7 of the *Rule* and from the *Oblate Formation Booklet*. (continued)

The attendees introduced themselves to one another. James then explained the requirements for becoming Oblate novices or Oblates. It was mentioned that the group is to work with St. Vincent Archabbey to learn to live their Christian lives more intensively. A yearly retreat at the Archabbey for the group has been set for June 29 - July 1, 2019. The meeting adjourned at 7:55 P.M.

**Kalispell, MT (Holy Trinity Deanery)** - meetings at St. Matthew’s Roman Catholic Church in Kalispell on 2<sup>nd</sup> Tues, 9:00 A.M.

Lay leader/secretary Tanishia Sperling reported by e-mail on November 14, December 11, and January 11 and 28. The meeting on November 13 was attended by three Oblates. After an opening prayer, the attendees shared thoughts about Chapter 7 of the *Rule* (on humility) as they had been prepared to do from the “homework” given at the last meeting. The participants pointed key passages in *RB* 7. The meeting ended with a prayer.

The meeting on December 11 was attended by three Oblates. After an opening prayer, the Oblates continued a reading and discussion of an article entitled “The Heart of New Monastic Life,” adapted from a book *The New Monasticism*. The attendees shared personal insights about prayer, care-giving, and “shadow work.” The meeting ended with a prayer. The group planned to begin a study of the book *Seventy-Four Tools for Good Living* in January.

The meeting on January 8 was attended by four Oblates. After an opening prayer, the attendees shared thoughts from the first two chapters of the book *Seventy-Four Tools*. In particular, they pointed out passages that caught their attention, such as those referring to St. Benedict’s words about the crucial role of grace and about the need to exert oneself in order to make progress in the spiritual life. They noted that God is actively and lovingly present in our lives but also that we have a responsibility to search for His graces and to “work” for them. The next meeting was scheduled for February 12.

On Sunday, January 27, at St. Matthew Church in Kalispell, Fr. Roderick Ermatinger, moderator, invested as an Oblate novice

**Judith “Jude” A. Seddon** of Darby, MT.

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

At the meeting on November 18, some eleven people gathered to continue a series of discussions about Chapter 4 of the *Rule* with the guidance of the book *Seventy-Four Tools for Good Living* by Fr. Michael Casey, O.C.S.O. During this session the group reflected on murmuring, detraction, putting hope in God alone, attributing good to God, and attributing evil to ourselves. The session ended with the praying of Compline in the Archabbey Basilica.

After the 3:00 presentation, the attendees gathered in the Archabbey Basilica, where Fr. Donald invested as an Oblate novice

**Richard Yokopenic** of Marguerite, PA.

Rick had been praying Vespers regularly with the monastic community for some years.

On December 16, some ten people gathered at 5:45, after supper, to discuss St. Benedict's instruments on judgment, hell, and eternal life - and thus the "eschatological" dimension of monastic and Oblate life. The session ended about 6:45 so that the attendees could attend Vespers with the monastic community at 7:00 P.M.

On January 20, on a very cold evening, six people joined Fr. Donald to reflect on tools 47 to 49, with the guidance of the book *Seventy-Four Tools*. It was noted that these precepts are closely linked with the first step of humility in *RB* 7. The group discussed being mindful of death daily, keeping guard over one's actions (and acting mindfully), and being aware of God's watchful and loving presence as He continually invites us into deeper communion with Him. The session ended with the praying of Compline.

**Latrobe, PA: Presentations at 3:00 P.M.**

On November 18, replacing the scheduled presenter because of a conflict in scheduling, Fr. Donald gave a presentation on humility, with emphasis on the first step and with reference to Fr. Michael Casey's book *Living in the Truth*. First, Fr. Donald gave an overview of humility as truth in our relationship with God and others. Secondly, he reflected on the concept of "seriousness," or mindfulness of God's presence, as a key practice for growth in humility. Thirdly, he spoke about compunction of heart as an abiding sense of our sinfulness along with an eagerness to welcome God's abundant mercy. As usual, at the end of the session the group prayed one of the standardized prayers for the canonization of Dorothy Day. Over twenty people attended the presentation. Also, Oblate Mary Ann Kaufman offered her home-made holiday sweet breads for sale to benefit Christian children in the Holy Land, the prep school operated by Newark Abbey, and some local charities.

On December 16, some fifteen people heard Br. Dominic Leo, miller at the St. Vincent Gristmill, socius of novices, sacristan, assistant in the Vocation Office, and deacon, give a presentation on *conversatio morum*. He based his very organized talk on a book by Fr. Augustine Roberts, O.Cist., namely *Centered on Christ*. He summarized the meaning of the vow as taking up one's cross each day, living in self-giving service to others, and heeding Christ's call, "Come, follow Me." The vow of *conversatio morum* involves self-renunciation and a radical reorganization of the heart. There is a need for consistent progress; it is not just a matter of adhering to customs and ceremonies. Br. Dominic then went into detail in reflecting on five dimensions of *conversatio morum*, namely withdrawing from society, living a life of prayer, practicing austerity (e.g., fasting, vigils, simplicity of life), living a common life, and doing work that will build up the community. In sum, a spirit of continual conversion involves a renunciation of a worldly manner of life and an internalization of Christ's life and values. There is a connection between *conversatio* and Advent, which summons us to live in joy (since God is in our midst) and in transformation, which occurs in response to the voice of God.

On January 20, a very cold and snowy day, some ten people gathered to hear Br. Cassian Edwards speak about forgiveness in Benedictine spirituality. He began with a personal story about a reassignment which he anticipated not liking and the need to forgive in that situation. Then he outlined his three main points: that God forgives us, that we need to forgive others, and that we need to receive forgiveness. It is important to realize, Br. Cassian said, that God takes the initiative in forgiving, healing, and loving. We are reminded of this truth in the fifth step of humility; God forgives us when we confess our evil thoughts. The Cross is also the primary example of this. Br. Cassian then asserted that, for Christians, to forgive others is non-negotiable. We might examine if there is anyone whom we still need to forgive. (continued)

In *RB* 13 we see the precept of praying the Our Father at least two times each day "for all to hear" so that the monks might not be overcome by "thorns of contention." Since this prayer of forgiveness occurs at Lauds and Vespers, the hinges of the day, St. Benedict is telling us that we should seek God's forgiveness and forgive others during the whole day. It is good to realize also that forgiveness is a process; it can become deeper after the initial will to forgive. Finally, Br. Cassian commented on what forgiveness is not. It is not a matter of emotion. (It involves principally the will; we can forgive even when hurt feelings remain.) It is not a matter of forgetting. (Often we cannot forget a hurt, but we still can forgive with the will.) It is not the same as reconciliation. (Reconciliation involves two parties; even if one person does not wish to restore a relationship, the other can still forgive.) Then several people in the audience addressed questions or comments to Br. Cassian.

**Niagara Area, Ontario, Canada (St. Henry/St. Gertrude Deanery)** -- meetings on 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Thurs. of each month, meeting room of St. Thomas Aquinas Church, St. Catharines, Ont.

Lay leader Brian Chisholm reported by phone on December 7. Ten people attended the meeting on November 26. Fr. Benjamin Weber, moderator, spoke about the meaning of being Oblates - "why we are here." He also mentioned various saints who founded religious movements and their charisms; he included St. Benedict, the motto *ora et labora*, and the spirituality of the *Rule*. Each attendee was asked what the *Rule* meant to him or her. Then the group finished discussing Lesson 1 from the formation lessons on St. Benedict and the *Rule*. Also, fliers with prayers for the canonization of Dorothy Day were distributed, and plans were made to order copies of the *Rule* of St. Benedict.

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

Secretary Frederick Laux reported on November 30, December 16, and January 21. The meeting scheduled for October 9 was cancelled because of the chapel's being locked. The meeting scheduled for November 13 was cancelled because of an emergency

situation. The meeting for November finally took place on November 30, but it began late because of fog. It was attended by four Oblates, two Oblate novices, and one inquirer. After Morning Prayer for the Feast of St. Andrew, Oblate Ted Davis gave a presentation on the eleventh step of humility (*RB* 7:60-61). He cited several passages from Scripture and showed how that step is connected with the eighth Commandment. He also quoted passages from the *Catechism* and summarized the references by stating that the Church teaches that improper speech offends God, neighbor, and the speaker himself. He ended the presentation with Mt 5:37. Then the group prayed the "Prayer for Oblates" and viewed the beginning of a D.V.D. from the Archabbey involving a talk on obedience by Fr. Donald. Some points discussed were the connection of obedience with a personal relationship with Christ, God's readiness to give us the grace to obey, the *Rule's* call to obey all those whom God places in one's path, the value of the Divine Office and *lectio divina* in assisting the practice of obedience, and the value of obedience in overcoming self-will. Obedience and humility thus work together. The meeting ended with a "Glory Be."

The meeting on December 14 was attended by four Oblates, two Oblate novices, and one inquirer. The session opened with the praying of Lauds for St. John the Cross, with special intercessions for people associated with the deanery and those who had moved away from the community. Then the group finished viewing a presentation on humility by Fr. Donald at the Archabbey. They then discussed applications of obedience and humility to the daily lives of the deanery members. In particular, they focused on the verse *RB* 7:33: "Consent merits punishment; constraint wins a crown." Next the attendees discussed the first three pages of a handout given out the previous month entitled "Laughter and Tears: St. Benedict and the Entertainment Culture" from a book by Fr. Terrence Kardong, O.S.B. Then Oblate Steve Davisson gave a presentation on *RB* 60 that focused on the "discipline of the rule." He also offered references to humility in the Bible and stressed the choice involved in being humble in imitation of Christ Himself, as He tells us in Mt 11:29. Then Oblate Cory DesArmo brought up the idea of purchasing some media from the Archabbey or from Ignatius Press, and he had lists of items from both sources.

The meeting on January 11 was attended by only three Oblates and one Oblate novice. After the praying of Morning Prayer, Oblate Cory DesArmo gave a presentation on *RB* 2: 11-15. His interpretation included the theme of action along with a cautionary message against hypocrisy, with references to the *Catechism*. The group also finished discussing the essay by Fr. Terrence Kardong begun at the last meeting. Included were the notions of having a sense of humor for one's psychological health and recognizing the healthful value of tears. The meeting ended with the praying of the "Prayer for Oblates." The next meeting was planned for February 8. The deanery requests prayers for the resumption of Catholic pastoral service.

**Philadelphia, PA (St. Augustine of Canterbury Deanery)** – meetings at Saint Mary's (Episcopalian) Church, Philadelphia, every two months

Moderator Fr. Vincent de Paul Crosby, O.S.B., reported on December 22. The meeting on December 8 began with Morning Prayer. The attendees welcomed a special guest, Bishop Frank Griswold, the former presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church and an Oblate affiliated with Mount Saviour Monastery in New York. Fr. Vincent facilitated a conversation with Bishop Griswold, in which he spoke about how he became interested in Oblate life and how Benedictine spirituality continues to inform his life as a priest and a bishop. He also responded to a question on the influence of Benedictine spirituality on the Church of England and, by extension, the Episcopal Church. The group also discussed how Benedictine spirituality could be a helpful tool in ecumenical efforts. The meeting ended with the praying of Noon Prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer*. As usual, the attendees enjoyed a lunch prepared by their devoted hosts, Sharon Fischer and her daughter Joann.

**Pittsburgh, PA (North Side - St. Peter Deanery)** -- meetings on 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays, 7:00 P.M., basement of St. Peter Church.

Oblate George Ponticello reported by phone in early December. The Oblates met for an annual pre-Christmas party on December 18 at St. James Parish in Sewickley. The meal was preceded by a time of Eucharistic adoration in the church and the praying of Evening Prayer.

**Pittsburgh, PA (South Hills - Blessed Columba Marmion Deanery)** -- meetings on 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of month at St. Louise de Marillac Church in the Bishop Leonard Room, 1:45 P.M. - 3:00 P.M.

Lay leader Mary Ann Kaufman reported personally with her notes on November 11 and then in January and also by phone on February 4. The meeting on November 4 drew 22 people, including eight Oblates, six Oblate novices, and eight inquirers. It began, as usual, with Midday Prayer, "A Prayer for Oblates," and "Consecration to the Blessed Trinity" (from Blessed Columba Marmion, O.S.B.). Mary Ann welcomed all those present and provided information for the new guests. "Beggar-bench" items included books by Bl. Columba and a biography of him, and a new holy card for Bl. Columba was distributed. All were also given a sheet with prayers for the canonization for Dorothy Day. Next Mary Ann introduced the guest speaker, Fr. Nathanael Polinski, O.S.B. After opening in prayer, he distributed handouts about *lectio divina*, which was the topic of his presentation. He described the four dimensions of *lectio*, emphasized the need to practice *lectio*, and mentioned the practice of "group *lectio*," although the intimate conversation with God is most powerful when it is done privately. Fr. Nathanael referred to passages in the *Rule* that concern *lectio*, and he mentioned how reflecting on Psalm 25 helped him to make decisions in his earlier professional career and how *lectio* ultimately led him to pursue a monastic vocation. All people, he stated, hope for two things: to be listened to and to be understood; it is important to remember that by baptism we are brought into a relationship with God. All relationships need time and attentiveness in order to grow. Through *lectio* we enter more deeply into a conversation with God, even though there may be distractions. Then Fr. Nathanael led the attendees in a practice of group *lectio*. After that the attendees moved upstairs to the church for the investiture of Janice Calzacorto, as reported in the last newsletter. Finally, many stayed to share refreshments and conversation.

The meeting on December 2 was attended by five Oblates, four Oblate novices, and two inquirers. After the usual opening with Midday Prayer and two other prayers, the good-will bag was passed around, and new Blessed Columba Marmion holy cards were made available. Mary Ann reminded Oblate novices to continue to read the *Oblate Formation Booklet* and to read the whole *Rule*

(before final Oblation) prayerfully; resources in the formation booklet can help one to understand the *Rule*. Other issues that were brought up were the call for two volunteers for the Assembly of Deanery Representatives on June 22, plans for the deanery's pilgrimage on March 2, the speaker for January 6, and an article on the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh. Mary Ann then handed out a number of reprinted materials and read excerpts on praying the Divine Office by Br. Columba Marmion; a card with a quote from him was also distributed. Next the passages *RB* 43:3, 48:1, and 4:55 were read or summarized, and there was a discussion on the importance of placing Christ at the center of our prayer. The attendees then entered into a period of group *lectio divina* using Mt 8: 5-11. The meeting concluded with prayers of intercession followed by the canonization prayer for Br. Columba Marmion.

Attending the meeting on January 7 were ten Oblates, seven Oblate novices, and 22 guests. After Midday Prayer and the other usual opening prayers, Mary Ann made some announcements, including a reminder that Oblates and Oblate novices should take time regularly to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, to read and pray over passages in the *Rule*, and to make time for *lectio divina*. A newly formed diocesan apostolate called Mary's Missionaries of Mercy was also mentioned. Next Mary Ann introduced Fr. Jon Brzek, parochial vicar at St. Joan of Arc/St. Louise de Marillac Parishes, who was the guest speaker. Fr. Jon spoke about St. Anthony of Padua and his emphasis on living a balanced life; he also mentioned that heresies in the history of the Church showed imbalance. Oblates and monks must keep prayer and work in proper balance; lay people have a particularly difficult challenge from demands that require more work than they anticipate. As with physical exercise, spiritual exercises are important for keeping us spiritually alive and healthy. Also, recreation is needed. Fr. Jon also mentioned that we all have a vocation to be children of God and to use our gifts to do God's will - in service of God and neighbor. The meeting ended with a prayer from the St. Benedict holy card.

The meeting on February 3 was attended by five Oblates, three Oblate novices, and four inquirers. After the usual opening prayers, the group talked about the planned pilgrimage on March 2. Then there was a discussion about work in Benedictine spirituality. Each attendee explained his or her work and its meaning, with suggestions about how one can bring God into one's work. Sacramentals, holy cards, and faithfulness to the standard practices of one's prayer life were mentioned. The meeting ended with vocalized prayer requests and the canonization prayer. The next meeting was scheduled for April 7, with plans for a continued discussion on the meaning of work.

#### **Rosharon, TX [Ramsey Unit] (St. Bede Deanery) – monthly meetings**

Lay leader/secretary Roland Fernandez reported on November 5 and December 8 (with Christmas greetings). The meeting in October began with opening prayers from the *Oblate Formation Booklet* and then continued with the Liturgy of the Hours. Then there were readings from the *Rule* and brief discussions. In those two months the discussions involved the clothes worn by the attendees and the need for good stewardship for the tools used to perform daily duties.

The meeting in November again began with opening prayers and the praying of Vespers. Then there was a brief discussion on Chapter 25 ("On Serious Faults") from the *Rule*. Next the group completed another chapter of the "Word on Fire" series. The meeting ended with a prayer led by a volunteer.

Because of a Kolbe retreat, there was no meeting in December. Some of the Oblates attended the retreat, which was described as "a very moving experience," with each participant sharing about what God had been doing in his life.

#### **St. Marys, PA (St. Maurus Deanery) -- meetings on Thurs. before 1<sup>st</sup> Fri. of month, 7:00 P.M. at Sacred Heart Church**

There was no report. As of last fall, the members of the deanery have been meeting at Sacred Heart Church for the monthly Bible study led by Fr. Michael Gabler, moderator.

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

There was no report.

#### **Selingsgrove, PA (St. Anselm Deanery) – monthly meetings at 2 P.M. on 2<sup>nd</sup> Sundays at St. Pius X Church in Selingsgrove**

Oblate co-lay leader/secretary Teresa Warlow reported by e-mail on November 26, December 30, and January 27. The monthly meeting on November 11 began with the "Prayer for Oblates." Then the group viewed a recording of a talk on hospitality by Fr. John Peck, O.S.B. The session closed with the praying of Midafternoon Prayer.

The meeting on December 9 likewise began with the "Prayer for Oblates." Then the attendees discussed the article on good zeal from the November Oblate newsletter. The meeting ended with the recitation of Midafternoon Prayer.

The meeting on January 13 again began with the "Prayer for Oblates." Then the group viewed a video of Br. Hugh Lester's conference on *conversatio morum*. The meeting ended with Midafternoon Prayer.

Teresa later reported by phone that co-lay leader and founder of the St. Anselm Deanery Frank Stoshack had died on January 29 after a long illness. We are grateful for Frank's initiative and leadership even amid the frailties of old age. The deanery began in 2010.

#### **Somerset, PA (St. John Paul II Deanery) – meetings on 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesdays, 6:30 -8:15, chapel annex**

Co-lay leader/secretary Michael Reichert wrote on November 10 and 19, December 26, and January 22. The meeting on October 9 was attended by eight Oblates, one Oblate novice, and one inquirer. Deacon David Hornick, moderator, led the meeting. After an opening prayer and the reading of the day's passage from the *Rule*, Oblate John Lohr gave a presentation on dealing with adversity. He referred to Scripture passages and his personal experiences. In the course of the discussion that followed, it was pointed out that one can learn from adversity and thereby grow in faith.

The meeting on November 13 was attended by five Oblates, one Oblate novice, and two inquirers as well as Deacon David. After an opening prayer and a reading of the day's passage from the *Rule*, Oblate Brandon Cavanaugh gave a presentation on faith. He used a handout with quotes from Scripture readings and passages from the *Catechism*. He posed three questions: "What does it mean to have

faith? What does faith mean to you? What does faith mean to you as an Oblate?" At the end of the presentation there was discussion about these questions. The meeting ended with the praying of Compline.

In December eleven members of the Oblate community signed a card with Christmas greetings and sent it to the Oblate Office. The meeting on December 11 was attended by six Oblates and two inquirers. After an opening prayer and the day's reading from the *Rule*, there was an open discussion about Advent and Christmas. Each participant shared about family traditions and also gave a faith-perspective about the seasons. Then the group considered a schedule of presentations for meetings during 2019. The meeting ended with the praying of Compline.

The meeting on January 8 was attended by five Oblates and six inquirers. After an opening prayer and reading from the *Rule*, Oblate William Strode gave a presentation entitled "What the New Birth Means," and there was a discussion on the meaning of Jesus' birth and of our new birth as Christians. The meeting ended with the praying of Compline. There were plans for an investiture in February.

**State College, PA (St. Joseph Deanery)** -- meetings on 2<sup>nd</sup> Mon., 6:30 P.M., *Our Lady of Victory Church, St. Joseph Activity Center.*

Secretary Phyllis Austin reported by e-mail on November 14 and January 18. The meeting on November 12, led by moderator Fr. David Griffin, began with the praying of Vespers. Six Oblates and one inquirer attended. The group continued its study of the series on Catholicism by Bishop Robert Barron. This time they discussed Chapter 3, "The Ineffable Mystery of God." There were references to passages in Scripture that deal with the mystery of God as well as to the writings of such theologians as St. Anselm, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, and Meister Eckhart. After some exchange about the mystery of the Trinity, the attendees concluded that we are closely connected with God and with one another because He brought all things into existence and sustains everything with perfect love. The meeting ended with a closing prayer, prayers of intercession, and the singing of the Benedictine "Ultima."

The meeting on January 14 was attended by seven Oblates, three Oblate novices, and one inquirer as well as Fr. David. After the praying of Vespers, the group viewed and discussed the fifth chapter of the *Catholicism* series, namely "The Indispensable Men: Peter, Paul, and the Missionary Adventure." They reflected that Peter with his zeal and Paul with his education made an impact that changed the world as people knew it and formed the foundation of the Church. With our baptism, we are all given a similar mission. The discussion ended with prayers of intercession and the singing of the "Ultima." During the business segment of the meeting, Fr. David announced that the end-of-year Oblate breakfast and renewal of Oblation would take place on May 11 after 9:00 A.M. Mass at Our Lady of Victory Church. Also, lay leader David Nice presented a monetary gift from the Oblates to Fr. David for his Mission Mexico trip during the spring break.

**Tennessee Colony, TX [Coffield Unit] (St. Boniface Deanery)**

Lay leader/secretary John Lesley "Les" Miller reported on December 13, with Christmas greetings signed by six members. At ceremonies conducted by Rev. Gary Rottman, moderator, on December 5,

**Joseph M. (Bede) Macias** of Tennessee Colony, TX, made his final Oblation.

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

Lay leader/secretary Nancy Chrabot reported by mail on November 10. The meeting on November 7 was led by acting moderator Deacon Kevin Gorman. After the attendees signed a get-well card for Fr. Lee Yoakam, who was awaiting a liver transplant, Kevin encouraged the other Oblates to consider making short presentations regarding their faith journeys. He then gave a presentation on "The Uniformity of God's Will" and read an excerpt from a work by St. Alphonsus Liguori. He also recommended the book *The Way of the Pilgrim*. The attendees were also encouraged to attend a talk entitled "Prayer and Worship" on November 11 at the Catholic Charities Building. The meeting ended with the praying of Vespers.

**Waynesburg, PA (St. Dismas Deanery)** -- meetings on 1<sup>st</sup> Wed. of each month

Oblate Jacob Maldonado, scribe, reported by mail on November 7, December 5, and January 4. The meeting on October 3 was attended by two Oblates and five inquirers. The meeting began with the "Prayer of St. Benedict," a reading from the *Rule*, and a discussion on the reading. Then Oblate Ken Miller gave a presentation about St. Peter, followed by a discussion. Then Ken gave a talk about the "Prayer for Oblates." Lesson 2 from the formation lessons was distributed, and the group discussed plans for the next meeting. The meeting ended with Night Prayer.

The meeting on December 5 was attended by two Oblates and four inquirers and began with the "Prayer for Oblates." Then the group reviewed Lesson 3 from the *Formation Lessons for Oblate Novices and Oblates*. The session ended with a prayer.

The meeting on January 2 was attended by two Oblates, one Oblate novice, and three inquirers. After an opening prayer, the group reviewed Lesson 1 from the formation lessons. Then Jacob gave a presentation on the Liturgy of the Hours. The meeting ended with the praying of Compline.

**Williamsport, PA (Saints Martha, Mary, & Lazarus Deanery)** -- meetings on 2<sup>nd</sup> Sun. of most months, 2 P.M., *former convent at St. Anne Catholic Church*

Lay leader Sue Wykoff reported by phone on February 5 and 7. The meeting in September, attended by six people, began with Midday Prayer and continued with a reading and discussion based on two articles about the abuse scandal, with focus on how Oblates should respond. The meeting closed with the Lord's Prayer.

The meeting in October, attended by five people, began with Eucharistic adoration and Midday Prayer. The attendees read and discussed Chapter 3 of the book *Lessons from Saint Benedict*.

The meeting scheduled for November was canceled because of the unavailability of the meeting room. Six people attended the meeting in December. The group viewed a U-tube video of a retreat conference given on November 16, 2018, by Fr. John Riccardo of

Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Plymouth, MI. The talk was entitled "Proclaiming the Kerygma" and emphasized the role that all Catholics have in the mission to proclaim the Gospel. All good works also are useful for the promotion of the Kingdom of God. The meeting ended with the Lord's Prayer. (N.B.: Fr. Riccardo has a program on Ave Maria Radio entitled "Christ Is the Answer.") Because of illnesses, no meeting was held in January.

### **Various Locations**

On October 14 at Mary, Star of the Sea Chapel at Camp Kinser, Okinawa, Japan

**Kimberly S. (Edith) Humm** of Jacksonville, NC,

made her final Oblation in the presence of Fr. Jude Caliba, a Navy chaplain. Kimberly is the wife of Oblate Timothy Humm, who is currently stationed at a military base along with Kimberly and their three children.

On November 28 at the chapel in Greencastle, IN, during Mass, Fr. John Hollowell, chaplain, invested as an Oblate novice

**Jeffrey Brett Buskirk** of Greencastle, IN.

On December 2 at Infant of Prague Church in Jacksonville, NC,

**Sheila (Odilia Francisca de los Milagros) Irizarry** of Jacksonville, NC,

made her final Oblation in the presence of Fr. Thomas S. Duggan. Sheila is the wife of Oblate novice Jose Irizarry.

On February 1 at the chapel in Lisbon, OH, Rev. Robert Edwards of the Diocese of Youngstown invested as an Oblate novice

**Joseph E. Brannock IV** of Lisbon, OH.

### **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: Fr. Lee Yoakam, Fr. Cyprian Constantine, Fr. Andrew Campbell, Fr. Paul Rubadue.

### **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

1. Oblates are welcome to attend concerts offered by the Saint Vincent Camerata. On Saturday, February 9, 2018, at 7:30 P.M. in the Archabbey Basilica Crypt, there was a concert of choral music celebrating American poets ("Music Was My Refuge"). On Saturday, April 6, 2019, at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Mt. Lebanon and on Sunday, April 7, 2019, in the Archabbey Basilica, there will be a performance of "Brahms - A German Requiem" with a number of special guest performers. For tickets and further information for all performances, phone 724-805-2579.

2. Those who pray regularly with the St. Vincent monastic community should note that during Holy Week and during the Octave of Easter there are some changes of schedule for our prayer times. If you have an e-mail address listed in the *Directory*, you will be notified of these changes in advance. A summary based on last year's schedule is listed on a flier.

3. The Blessed Sacrament is exposed every Sunday from 2:00 P.M. to 4:15 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 meetings, to pray for vocations, and particularly for vocations to the Archabbey.

## **DIRECTORY OF OBLATES: Application form**

I would like to be included in the next edition (whether e-mail or not) of the *Directory* of Oblates affiliated with Saint Vincent Archabbey. Hard copies will be issued in July of this year. The information that I would like to have included is the following:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please send this form to the Oblate Office by U.S. mail or by e-mail to [svaoblates.stvincent.edu](mailto:svaoblates.stvincent.edu) . Thank you.

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### **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, April 17

Evening Prayer as penitential prayer service (basilica) 5:00 P.M.  
Compline (basilica) 9:00 P.M.

#### Holy Thursday, April 18

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

#### Good Friday, April 19

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, April 20

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, April 21

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

#### Easter Monday, April 22

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

**The regular schedule resumes on Tuesday, April 23.**

**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. John Paul Heiser's talk on work in Benedictine spirituality (December 17, 2017):

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)      D.V.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Fr. Robert Keffer's talk on beauty in Benedictine spirituality (January 21, 2018):

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)      D.V.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Fr. Justin Nolan's talk on Everyday Spirituality (February 18, 2018):

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)      D.V.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Br. Hugh Lester's talk on stability in Benedictine spirituality (March 18, 2018):

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)      D.V.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Fr. Isaac Haywiser's talk on *conversatio morum* at St. Louise de Marillac Church (April 8, 2018):

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Br. Albert Gahr's talk on sustainability in Benedictine spirituality (April 15, 2018):

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)      D.V.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Fr. Donald Raila's talk on obedience at St. Louise de Marillac Church (May 6, 2018):

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Br. Martinho Zevallos' talk on *lectio divina* (May 20, 2018):

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)      D.V.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Fr. Pio Adamonis' talk on silence in Benedictine spirituality (June 10, 2018)

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)      D.V.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Fr. Adam Potter's talk on secularism & *The Benedict Option* (July 8, 2018)

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Fr. Nathan Munsch's talk on the Liturgy of the Hours (July 15, 2018):

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)      D.V.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Br. Ignatius Camello's talk humility - the 2<sup>nd</sup> step (renunciation of one's own will) (August 19, 2018):

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Fr. Shawn Matthew Anderson's three retreat conferences on forgiveness (October 13, 2018):

Set of 3 C.D.'s \_\_\_\_\_ (number of sets of 3)

Br. Placid Sellers' talk on social media & Benedictine spirituality (October 21, 2018):

(no C.D.'s \_\_\_\_\_)      D.V.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Fr. Donald Raila's talk on 1<sup>st</sup> step of humility (November 18, 2018):

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)      D.V.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Br. Dominic Leo's talk on *conversatio morum* (December 16, 2018):

C.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)      D.V.D. \_\_\_\_\_ (number)

Br. Cassian Edwards' talk on forgiveness in Benedictine spirituality (January 20, 2019):

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](http://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.**

**RESERVATION FORM FOR CELEBRATION OF ST. BENEDICT DAY ON MARCH 21**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ I plan to attend the dinner for Oblates at St. Vincent on Thursday, March 21, 2019, along with \_\_\_ guests; I enclose \_\_\_\_\_ (\$9.50 per person; make out checks to **ST. VINCENT**

**ARCHABBEY**. An additional donation for those who cannot pay would be welcome.)

\_\_\_ I plan to be invested as an \_\_\_ Oblate, \_\_\_ Oblate novice on March 21. 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, MARCH 21, 2019**

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)

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**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

