



Saint Meinrad

NEWSLETTER FOR BENEDICTINE OBLATES OF SAINT MEINRAD

Benedictine Oblate

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FROM THE RULE:

“During the days of Lent, they should be free in the morning to read until the third hour, after which they will work at their assigned tasks until the end of the tenth hour. During this time of Lent each one is to receive a book from the library, and is to read the whole of it straight through.”

Chapter 48, Verses 14-15

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A history of the Oblate Library: An icon for stability

The oblate library probably began when a monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey loaned a book from his own modest collection to early oblates who were seminarians. Perhaps this kindness was extended to more oblate seminarians associated with monk mentors and to those seeking spiritual guidance. The first to officially do this was Fr. Henry Brenner, OSB, the first director of the Saint Meinrad Abbey Oblate Office (1917-29).

The roots of Benedictine spirituality can be found in the recorded wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Books and other written records were an aspect of stability in the lives of both the monks and the early oblates, making a library necessary for the continual evolution and development of the community.

The first oblates were students in Saint Meinrad Seminary. The chapter was established in 1879 by Fr. Martin Marty, OSB, the first abbot of Saint Meinrad. The oblate program began to flounder after Abbot Martin's departure to assume duties as vicar apostolic of the Dakota Territory.

It was the third abbot, Athanasius Schmitt, OSB, who sought papal permission to “invest major and minor seminarians as oblates.” On November 18, 1906, he received authorization from Pope Pius X to carry out this mission, and the oblate movement at Saint Meinrad Abbey was

initiated on December 26, 1906, with the investiture of 21 students.

Two of the students were Edward Meinrad Esser, who later succeeded Abbot Athanasius as Abbot Ignatius, and Joseph E. Ritter, who would become bishop of Indianapolis and, later, cardinal-archbishop of St. Louis. Although no records exist of books being made available to these oblates, there is no doubt that monks shared books with students, and perhaps a shelf in the monastery library was for the oblates' use.

Fr. Cyril Vrablic, OSB, was the first oblate director to designate a room in the old Guest House for the purpose of housing books for the oblate library. Fr. Jerome Palmer, OSB, used to keep books in his cell and periodically loaned them to oblates desiring extended spiritual reading. Later, Fr. Jerome was instrumental in the development of the oblate library book collection. Historically, the oblate library was mostly a collection of books donated by monks and oblates.

Volunteer Cataloging Begins

The organization of a cataloged library began with Mona Rinear of Martinsville, IN. In March of 1952, she met with then-oblate director Fr. Gerard Ellspermann, OSB, and soon began to work with him in the oblate program of Saint Meinrad

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Archabbey. Mona served for 44 years as a volunteer in the oblate program, and her accomplishments are legion.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, Mona taught grade school in Covington, KY, and in Indianapolis, IN. She began a "Little Benedictine Program," where third, fifth and seventh graders became oblates. She was instrumental in the editing, revising and printing of *The Benedictine Oblate Companion Manual*. She assisted in the reorganization of the Oblate Office.

In the Summer 1996 issue of the *Benedictine Oblate* newsletter, an article about Mona's volunteer service in the Oblate Office stated that she almost single-handedly cataloged the oblate library. Mona spent much time in cataloging each book, developing

appropriate records and shelving the books.

It would be a great omission not to mention in greater detail the influence and pioneer work of Mona in a presentation of the historical development of the oblate library. When asked when she first became an oblate, she answered, "I was born one." This was because her mother was very involved with the Benedictine nuns of St. Walburg Academy in Covington, KY.

Her association with Saint Meinrad Archabbey began in March 1952, when she met Fr. Gerard, who gave a retreat for the Benedictine nuns in Covington. At the time, Mona was a member of the Benedictine community in Covington. She began to work closely with Fr. Gerard in the oblate program following that retreat.

Books Move to New Space

Originally, the oblate library books were housed in Fr. Gerard's cell at the monastery. When donations and acquisitions increased, the library oblate books were housed in a large room on the third floor of the old monastery. Next, the books were moved from the old monastery room to the Guest House. Fr. Gerard was on sabbatical leave, and the books were moved during his absence.

Mona assisted in the transition. She would drive two and a half hours from her home in Martinsville, IN, to Saint Meinrad Archabbey to work for the oblate program. She did this several times per week and seldom stayed overnight, because she had animals to care for at home. Often, she would leave the monastery at midnight, arriving home at 2:30 a.m., sleep about two hours, and begin her *Indianapolis Star* newspaper route at 4:30 a.m.

In the years 1970-90, Mona was an indefatigable organizer of the Oblate Office and its program. She cataloged the library books by a simple system utilizing the letters of the alphabet to signify subject category and numbers to

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A POINT TO PONDER FROM THE RULE

"During the days of Lent, they should be free in the morning to read until the third hour, after which they will work at their assigned tasks until the end of the tenth hour. During this time of Lent each one is to receive a book from the library, and is to read the whole of it straight through."

Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 48, Verses 14-15

During the sixth century, the time of St. Benedict, monastery libraries were limited in resources. The books were copied by hand and bound as large volumes. The Bible, as a large volume, was perhaps one of the most available of reading materials. Ancient handwritten books such as the Bible were often very large and had to be bound in sections. Only a few monks were literate, and so were assigned to read to other monks who were illiterate.

Monastery libraries were often inaccessible to monks who were not assigned to work there. As time went on, monastery libraries became more expansive and accessible. More and more monks became literate. Lent was a good time for reflection and prayer through the reading of holy prayerful works.

So it is with oblates that, during Lent, they go through the obligations of *bona opera* (good works). Often spiritual readings are selected by oblates as part of *bona opera*. Libraries and bookstores become good sources for these selected readings.

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INSTITUTES & OBLATIONS

December 1, 2007, Oblations—**Mr. Thomas Stephen of Hungary Fezy** and **Mr. John Maurus Lehner**, both of South Bend, IN.

December 8, 2007, Oblations—**Ms. Cynthia Gertrude Scoggins-Butler** of Dallas, TX, **Mrs. M. Linda Theresa Faulhaber** of Bethel, OH, and **Mr. Joe Matt Talbot Teague** of Danville, KY.

December 8, 2007, Investitures—**Mr. Alan Carter** and **Mr. Christopher Mileski**, both from Saint Meinrad School of Theology, St. Meinrad, IN, and **Mr. Thomas Lehr** of Richland, IN.

December 11, 2007, Oblation—**Mr. Raymond Erlebold Gwaltney** of Rockford, IL.

December 21, 2007, Investiture—**Mr. Wayne Moore** of Lexington, KY.

January 10, 2008, Oblations—**Mrs. Michelle Rose Elizabeth Blalock** and **Mr. Stephen Anthony Michael Wollenmann**, both of Ferdinand, IN.

January 12, 2008, Oblation—**Mrs. Josephine Ann Mary Stickford** of Indianapolis, IN.

January 12, 2008, Investitures—**Miss Bridget Cull** of Indianapolis, IN, and **Mr. Robert Miskell** of Fishers, IN.

January 27, 2008, Oblation—**Mr. Gerard Francis Hughes** of Blauvelt, NY.

February 1, 2008, Oblation—**Mr. John John Beadles** of Atlanta, GA.

February 1, 2008, Investiture—**Mr. Albert Frabutt** of Wyandotte, MI.

February 3, 2008, Investitures—**Miss Gretchen Hargis** and **Mr. Robert Mebringer**, both of Evansville, IN.

February 9, 2008, Investiture—**Mr. Mark Schipper** of Fishers, IN.

February 11, 2008, Oblation—**Dr. Donna Jude Harper** of Antioch, TN.

February 12, 2008, Investiture—**Dr. Tom Sutula** of Bristol, IN.

February 17, 2008, Oblation—**Mr. James Augustine Hubbman** of St. Peters, MO. ♦

DEATHS

Mrs. Gloria M. Sager of Allentown, PA, died on November 1, 2007.

Mr. Victor Marino of Michigan City, IN, died on December 25, 2007.

Mrs. Norma Mary Reinert of Louisville, KY, died on January 2, 2008.

Mrs. Bernadine Kochert of Corydon, IN, died on February 13, 2008.

Mr. L. Melvin Meiners of Louisville, KY, died on February 15, 2008.

Mr. Raymond Saksa of Brownsburg, IN, died on February 2, 2008. ♦

HAPPENINGS

New Books—Three new Benedictine books have been published recently by monks and an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey. The first, *The Tradition of Catholic Prayer*, edited by Fr. Harry

Hagan, OSB, and Br. Christian Raab, OSB, was published by Liturgical Press in 2007. Fourteen monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey contributed to the book text. This book will be reviewed in the summer issue of *Benedictine Oblate*.

The second book, *Conversations in the Abbey*, was written by Ruth Engs, PhD, a retired Indiana University professor and an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, who served as editor and interviewer for the book. It was published through Booklocker by Saint Meinrad Archabbey in 2007. Eleven senior monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey reflected on their lives. This book will be reviewed in the fall issue of *Benedictine Oblate*.

The third book is a coffee table book featuring the liturgical art of Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, published by OCP in 2007. *The Work of Our Hands: The Art of Martin Erspamer, OSB*, gathers together 44 full-color plates embracing a lifetime of liturgical art. This book will be reviewed in the winter issue of *Benedictine Oblate*.

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The new gallery that connects St. Gregory and St. Anselm halls.

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designate book position on the shelf. Her efforts in organizing the Oblate Office records were meritorious.

Not all of her volunteer efforts are related to the oblate library. She was instrumental in the editing process of the revision of the *Benedictine Oblate Companion*. Mona was involved with the March oblate retreats, and she was responsible for organizing the office and the library for those oblates interested in spiritual reading material during the retreat.

A great achievement was Mona's project that involved writing a four-volume set titled *Benedictine Miracles*, a life history of Benedictine saints for Benedictines and others. This set can be found today in the oblate library.

In 1996, Mona was awarded the Saint Meinrad, Martyr of Hospitality Medal for her many years of volunteerism to the oblate program and her service to Saint Meinrad Archabbey. The library would not be what it is today if it were not for her efforts. Dr. Monina Aberra, a retired Indiana University librarian, paid special tribute to Mona's pioneer work with the oblate

library when she said, "Mona did the best possible job of library organization at that time."

Librarian Offers Assistance

Dr. Abrera has been a more recent contributor to the oblate library organization. She is an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey and a member of the Bloomington Chapter. Dr. Abrera received her PhD from Indiana University and was a faculty member in the School of Library Information Science from 1976-96.

Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB, a monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, received a master's degree in library information science from Indiana University and knew of Monina's reputation as a professional librarian. He suggested to Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune that she would be a logical choice for reorganizing the oblate library. She accepted Fr. Meinrad's invitation.

During the summer of 2007, she began by examining the oblate library and making some decisions about the oblate collection. She chose 1969 as a cutoff date for the circulation process. If certain books were significant enough, they were retained in the

collection even though they dated beyond 1969. An example would be spiritual books written by the Cistercian monk, Thomas Merton.

Other decisions were made concerning the reference shelving of old and valuable books on Benedictine spirituality. Some books were relegated to non-circulatory status and shelved as reference books only. Approximately 1,000 volumes were taken out of the library. Some were given to the monastery library, while others were designated to book sales. Some books were selected for sale in support of the Cincinnati, OH, Public Library System. Books were also made available to students for purchase. Frs. Joseph and Meinrad assisted Monina in decisions about the elimination or preservation of books.

Monina chose the Dewey Decimal System because it was most suitable for smaller library collections. The next step was to label the books according to the Dewey system. Monina did a lot of this work, assisted by novice monks and seminarian Br. Stanislaus Sullivan, OSB.

Technology Plays a Role

In the summer of 1996, a co-worker from Abbey Press entered the book titles into a database. Fr. Patrick Cooney, OSB, a monk of Saint Meinrad, continued to refine the database program for the oblate library books. Over 2,000 books were entered. Christopher Topa, an oblate living in Howell, MI, further refined the database program for the oblate library. The next step was to enter all of the retained books into a database.

This would place them into a Web site, thereby providing access for individuals not present at the monastery. Using the database, oblates could check out the books online. Monina enlisted the aid of a friend with expertise in computer science at Indiana University.

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Many oblates have enjoyed reading books from the oblate library.

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Monina paid for the computer database and Web site development from her own funds. A recommendation on whether oblates will be able to check out books online will be made in the future by the Oblate Council.

Another individual who should be recognized for work on the oblate library is Stephanie Towle, an oblate from Nashville, TN. Stephanie started work in the summer of 2002, when she spent five days cataloging 136 new books for the oblate library. Stephanie had worked in the medical library in the city of Khamis Mushay, Saudi Arabia.

Stephanie is a professional librarian with a degree from Peabody College, now a part of Vanderbilt University in Nashville. She has considerable experience in cataloging as well as with graduate school libraries. While she worked with the oblate library, Stephanie cataloged 400 to 500 books during her two years, according to the system set up by Mona Rinear.

The Winter 2004 issue of the *Benedictine Oblate* indicated that, when Stephanie had finished, the library had 2,752 books. On May 24, 2004, the Oblate Office and library moved to St. Anselm Hall while the new Guest House was being constructed. On November 3, 2005, the Oblate Office and library moved into its present quarters. In the fall of 2006, Stephanie again worked on the cataloging of the oblate library books. Her many hours of volunteer work are much appreciated.

More volunteer work took place on April 16-17, 2003. Three novices and oblate Vicki Taylor from St. Catherines, Ontario, Canada, computerized all the books, according to author and call number, for the entire collection of 2,646 books.

Others also contributed to the library's development. Fr. Joseph Feltz, then a work-study student, moved all of the books to a storage room in the old Guest House while Fr. Germain Swisshelm, OSB, built new shelving. Fr. Feltz then replaced all the books on the completed shelving.

More Oblates Volunteer

In the move from the old Guest House to Anselm Hall, oblate Ray Emsweller, Dublin, OH, packed the books in boxes and oblate Rosemary Conrad, Cincinnati, OH, and her daughter, Susan Conrad, reshelved them in the temporary office in St. Anselm Hall. Oblates Ray Emsweller and Jerry Campbell, Chillicothe, OH, packed the books once again for the move to the quarters in the new Guest House. Brothers Jerome and Fidelis replaced the books on the shelves of the new library.

Rosemary and Susan Conrad continued the weeding-out process for the older books and those that did not focus on Benedictine spirituality. Monina Abrera then eliminated the books in accordance with the guidelines of Frs. Meinrad and Joseph. Currently, the oblate collection has 1,175 titles in the database.

The oblate library is an example of the labor and prayers of monks and oblates alike. Many have labored to make this library one of the best small libraries focusing on Benedictine spirituality. The library is a place of stability and wisdom. It is an example of how an oblate can volunteer to do God's work alongside those monks who have dedicated their lives to knowing God.

*Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN*

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Chapter History Books—Two oblate chapters have produced history books of their chapters. The Louisville, KY, oblates have produced a brief history from 1945-2007, along with information defining oblation and its commitments, a listing of oblate spiritual directors and various pictures.

The oblates of Dayton, OH, have provided a thorough introduction of oblation, questions and answers about oblation and commitments, and a history, which began in 1987 with Fr. Gerard Ellspermann, OSB, and one group meeting. Formation of a chapter bogged down, but as interest spread and grew, the desire for a chapter was rekindled. In 1996, Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, as oblate director, spearheaded a renewal of the chapter that has continued to the present.

November 16, 2007—

Congratulations to Greater Cincinnati oblate Tom Dwyer and Katharine Teipen, who were married at Good Shepherd Parish.

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The Virgin Mary statue stands near the Guest House in "Paradise."

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December 24-26, 2007—Oblate Ron Beathard wrote a beautiful essay, “Miracle on Hill Drive,” about his solitary Christmas stay at Saint Meinrad Archabbey—the unusual things he explored, the sights and sounds that he experienced, and the feelings he experienced. He related all of his adventure, along with prayer, to his oblation promises.

December 16, 2007—Congratulations to oblate Jason Arbogast and his wife, Jan, of Ft. Wayne, IN, who became parents of a third child, Lucia Joelle Arbogast.

January 20, 2008—Novice Craig Wagner, now Br. Francis de Sales, OSB, and Novice Kyle Cothorn, now Br. Karl, OSB, made their profession of vows for three years at Vespers.

January 25, 2008—Br. Christian Raab, OSB, made his solemn monastic profession. He is working with the oblate program now.

February 12, 2008—Br. Christian Raab, OSB, and Br. Thomas Gricoski, OSB, who help with the oblate community, received the ministry of acolyte from Bishop William Higi of Lafayette-in-Indiana. They are priesthood students in the School of Theology. ♦

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 17, 2008—A day of recollection will be held in Milford, OH, for all Ohio oblates. Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB, will be the presenter on the topic of prayer.

June 16-19, 2008—Oblate Study Days at Saint Meinrad Archabbey will be on “Art, Craft and *Conversatio*” and be presented by Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, with Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, assisting. They will explore the Benedictine approach to *conversatio* through art, craft and work. Sessions will include

discussion, prayer and time in the studios or workshops.

July 11, 2008—An oblate day of recollection will be held at Saint Meinrad Archabbey with Fr. Gabriel Hodges, OSB. His topic will be “Experiencing God in the Quotidian Activities of Our Lives.” A flyer will be coming out in the near future.

August 29-September 1, 2008—The Labor Day Retreat for New York oblates will have Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB, novice and junior master of the monastery, presenting “Overview of Things in the *Rule*.”

September 6, 2008—A day of recollection for Lancaster, PA, oblates will be held with Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, presenting “Change of Lifestyle: Attempting it with Small, Realizable Activities.”

October 31-November 10, 2008—A pilgrimage to Lisbon, Fatima, Santiago de Compostela, Salamanca, Madrid and Lourdes is being hosted by Br. Maurus Zoeller, OSB. This pilgrimage will include round-trip airfare from New York, accommodations at first

class/select hotels, most meals, services of a professional tour director, comprehensive sightseeing throughout, automatic \$100,000 flight insurance policy, all hotel service charges and local taxes. For a brochure or further information, call (812) 357-6674 or e-mail mzoeller@saintmeinrad.edu.

November 30, 2008—A day of recollection for New York oblates will be held at St. Ignatius Retreat House in Manhasset, NY, with Br. Thomas Gricoski, OSB, presenting “Fidelity to the Monastic Way of Life.”

December 12-14, 2008—The oblate retreat at Saint Meinrad Archabbey will have the oblate directors presenting “*Conversatio*: With the Instruments of Good Works.” ♦

Recent volunteers in the Oblate

Office: Catherine Byers, Jerry Campbell, Br. Karl Cothorn, OSB, Ray Emsweller, Ruth Engs, Robert Hess, Thomas Lehr, Jerry and Mary Maillet, Joan and Tom Rillo, Dennis Skelton, Dorothy Soudakoff and George Thompson. ♦



Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, receives a huge box of chocolates from Joan Rillo, Bloomington, IN.

Sunday Gospel reading offers a practical approach to *lectio divina*

One of the continuing questions for oblates and others interested in Benedictine spirituality is finding a workable approach to *lectio divina* or holy reading. Most people are too busy to spend much time on such an endeavor, so I have been suggesting to oblate groups a practical approach.

First, begin reading the Gospel for the following Sunday on Monday, and do this every day of the week until Sunday. This exercise takes a few minutes at most, and by Sunday we are familiar with the text.

Some have told me how much more meaningful the Gospel becomes by the time they listen to it at Mass. Others have said that they had some different ideas than those of the homilist who used the same text. It seems to me that this is opening up the sacred Word to all of us. Scripture is so alive with meaning if we just spend time with it. Three minutes a day will equal 18 minutes per week.

It has been apparent in recent weeks that the chapters of Luke's Gospel have been building on a deeper faith. As faith increases, we live out the mystery of the Word a little more realistically. My end goal is that, over time, we will eventually be delving into all three readings each day prior to the following Sunday. This would give us six or seven minutes each day to spend on the Word.

The reform of the Second Vatican Council called for a greater understanding and use of sacred Scripture. We have a three-year cycle of Sunday readings, which introduces us to a good chunk of the Bible. The Christ we meet in the Word is the same Christ we receive in the Eucharist. As our understanding of the Word grows, so will our love of our Eucharistic Lord and the challenge He constantly presents to us with each reception of Holy Communion.

No matter our state in life, each encounter with the Word and with the Eucharist must bring us new challenges. For those of us who are active, this means we are willing to change our approach to life. For those who can do nothing but pray, it means we must deepen our prayer life.

We all need a place to call home, and oblates all have a spiritual home in the monastic community where they made

oblation. The world is an ongoing challenge, but it is delightful to have an anchor here at St. Benedict's Abbey.

*Br. John Peto, OSB, oblate director
St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, KS*

(This article was reprinted by permission from the Winter 2007 issue of *Kansas Monks*, a newsletter for oblates of St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, KS.)

Oblate Life—Personal Evaluation

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

1. What have I done during the past year to continue ongoing formation as an oblate?

2. What do I plan to do during the coming year?

3. How well do I see myself living the oblate promises:

Please rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 as "needing improvement" and 5 as "doing well."

- Stability of Heart? 1 2 3 4 5
- Fidelity to the Spirit of the Monastic Life? 1 2 3 4 5
- Obedience to the Will of God? 1 2 3 4 5

4. How well do I see myself fulfilling the oblate duties:

- Praying of the Liturgy of the Hours? 1 2 3 4 5
- Reading from the *Rule of St. Benedict*? 1 2 3 4 5
- Daily practice of *lectio divina*? 1 2 3 4 5
- Participating in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation or in my own faith tradition of Church and prayer? 1 2 3 4 5
- Attentiveness to God's presence in my ordinary, daily life? 1 2 3 4 5

5. In what ways can I offer my time, talent and treasure to the services of the oblate community of Saint Meinrad Archabbey?

6. If I need to improve in any of these areas, what do I plan to do?

Reading Room

Share in the Kingdom: A Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict for Oblates by Benet Tvedten, OSB, (Liturgical Press, 1989) is one of the most down-to-earth books I have ever read on the *Rule of St. Benedict*. The author is a monk at Blue Cloud Abbey in South Dakota and the oblate director there for the past 30 years.

He also has written *How to Be a Monastic and Not Leave Your Day Job: An Invitation to Oblate Life* and *The View From a Monastery: The Vowed Life and Its Cast of Many Characters*.

Throughout this commentary, Br. Benet is able to take a rule of life intended for sixth-century monastics and make it practical for the 21st century. His writing is simple, direct and practical. He speaks to Benedictine oblates using words and ideas that make sense, ones that we can easily apply to our lives.

Some of my favorites are:

- “We all need some silence in our lives. We need it in order to be calm, in order to be creative, and in order to communicate with God.” (RB 6)

- “Parents are the cellarers of the home. They frequently have to deny permissions and purchases.” (RB 31)
- “...it also tells us how to behave when we’re sick.” (RB 36)
- “...be considerate enough to beg forgiveness for even the smallest faults by which we offend people.” (RB 44)
- “An oblate may have to ask occasionally, ‘Am I gone from home too often?’” (RB 51)
- “Have you welcomed the new parishioner or the new member of your club?” (RB 61)
- “Don’t do away from home any of the improper things you would never do at home.” (RB 67)

If you ever read a section of the *Rule* and wondered “How would I ever apply this to my life?”, this book is for you. As Br. Benet writes in his foreword, “This book is for the benefit of Oblates of St. Benedict, who are also listeners and learners. It attempts to explain some things that may have remained a mystery to oblates over the years of affiliation with Benedictine communities.”

*Marianna Neal, oblate
Fairborn, OH*



**Benedictine
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