Visit to the monastery offers spiritual renewal

One of the unique things about being a Benedictine Oblate is the special attachment that the oblate has to a particular monastery. Unlike other religious associates, Benedictine Oblates are not part of any regional or national group. Their membership is not “freely transferable.” Wherever they are, they have a spiritual home at their monastery, where they are welcome and, in a very real sense, at home.

For this reason, the oblate director and the Oblate Council of Saint Meinrad Archabbey encourage every oblate to visit the monastery. As important as your relationships are with the members of your local chapter, they are not a substitute for the relationship that you have with the community of Saint Meinrad itself.

The spiritual life of the oblate community is nourished by the prayers of the monastic community, and it is hoped that the spiritual life of the monastic community is nourished by the prayers of the oblates. Just as with any good relationship, the development of bonds of friendship and caring takes time and cultivation.

When you visit your monastery, you become part of the ongoing works of the monastic community. If you come during the school year, you will see the seminarians at work on their studies and be encouraged to pray for their vocations. You will see the novices and junior monks in their various stages of formation and be encouraged to pray for their perseverance.

If you come for one of the oblate retreats or days of recollection, you will meet oblates from other chapters and other cities and be encouraged to pray for them. You may find that, over time, you develop a special bond with one or more of the monks, who will be happy to see you upon your return. You will come to know the lay co-workers who play such an important part in all aspects of the monastery. If you plan your visits for different times of the year, you will come to know the Hill during the different seasons, both liturgical seasons and natural seasons. In all of these ways, you will find your own spiritual life deepened as you breathe in the air of the Holy Hill.

Oblate retreats are offered in Advent and Lent each year. Oblate Study Days are offered each summer. In addition, there are weekend retreats offered throughout the year, and the guest house is available to accommodate guests for private days of retreat and refreshment throughout the week.

FROM THE RULE:

“Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brothers should have specified periods for manual labor as well as prayerful reading.”

Rule of St. Benedict
Chapter 48:1

Continued on p. 9
Retreat conference: Does the abbot ever get angry?

The Advent retreat conferences in December 2011 were presented by Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB. He gave each of the five conferences a title in the form of a question: Does the abbot ever take a nap? Does the abbot have any friends? Does the abbot have a sense of humor? Does the abbot ever get angry? Does the abbot ever get discouraged? The fourth conference opened with a description of a guest’s first visit to Saint Meinrad Archabbey and the impressions of peace, beauty and quiet that manifest themselves. Peacefulness and good order settle over the monastery.

The abbot mentions the cellarer of the monastery, which today would be the business manager. If the monastery is large, then the cellarer would be given helpers so that good order would be preserved and peace would prevail.

When things don’t pan out as he would want, does the abbot ever get angry? Does disappointment kindle our anger? He quotes from Chapter 58 of the Rule, The Procedure for Receiving Brothers: “When he is to be received, he comes before the whole community in the oratory and promises stability, fidelity to the monastic life, and obedience.”

The new monk knows that all hardships and difficulties will lead to God. The hard and the bitter things will lead him to God. This is no doubt. There is the hard and the bitter. Hardness is a thing of temperament. In the Prologue to the Rule, St. Benedict says: “In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh or burdensome.”

Life provides the hard and the bitter; we do not have to make it up. St. Benedict establishes a school for the Lord’s service, the monastery. It is more of a guild than a school in the true sense. In a guild, mistakes are made. Monks come to learn and mistakes are sometimes made.

Mentioning Chapter 68, Abbot Justin points out that a monk may be given a task that he cannot do – or perceives it that way. He should choose the appropriate time and approach his superior and explain. If denied, the monk must obey in love. It may be a bitter pill to swallow, but he does it anyway, without grumbling and without being angry.

The perfect is the enemy of the good. If we cannot see this, we will always be angry. Be angry but do not sin. Give no opportunity for the devil. Choose wisely, for one day everything will be perfect and God will prevail. Does the abbot ever get angry? At times he does.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

How you can help:

• Pray for vocations
• Remember Saint Meinrad in your will
• Request information about life income gifts

For more information, contact Barbara Balka
Director of Planned Giving
Saint Meinrad Archabbey and Seminary and School of Theology
development@saintmeinrad.edu
800-682-0988
www.saintmeinrad.org

A POINT TO PONDER FROM THE RULE

“Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brothers should have specified periods for manual labor as well as prayerful reading.”

Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 48:1

Benedict promotes hard work for his monks, but also advocates time for focused reading such as lectio divina. Apart from the liturgy, the monks are to occupy themselves in two ways: by manual labor or by lectio divina.

Benedict also states that the monks are to spend about six hours in manual labor and three hours in lectio divina. The monks were to read not only spiritual books, but also the Bible.

Lectio divina was not just reading the Bible as study, but approximated prayer as a focus. Ancient monks spent a great deal of time memorizing Scripture passages and this is evident in what they wrote or quoted. Basically, it was the language they spoke and it was replete with quotations from the Scriptures.
Fr. Meinrad gives talk on *lectio divina*

Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, gave the conference at the Lancaster, OH, chapter meeting on October 25. It was also “Trick or Treat” night in Lancaster, but for Benedictines it was a “Treat Night” because of the presentation given by Fr. Meinrad on the Scripture passage of the Prodigal Son.

*Lectio divina* was presented, using this passage in a new and different way. After meditation on it and three readings, oblates shared new insights on this Scripture passage. We were not hurried. We simply rested in the Spirit, reading God’s Word slowly and prayerfully.

The oblates were enriched and grateful for the presence of God by reading, reflecting, responding and resting in the heart of the Holy Spirit.

*Rita Merk, oblate
Lancaster, OH*

Pennsylvania oblates enjoy day of recollection

The Lancaster, PA, Oblate Chapter celebrated a day of recollection on September 8. Twenty-five people began the day with Mass in St. Joseph’s Church, Lancaster. Following Mass, the group enjoyed coffee and doughnuts before Lauds and the start of the first conference by Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB, on “*Lectio Divina*.”

Teresa Thompson was invested as an oblate novice during Lauds. The oblates listened to two conferences before lunch, along with reconciliation. After lunch, we broke into five groups and experienced *lectio divina* using Sunday’s Gospel. This, for most of us, was the highlight of the day. After learning about *lectio divina*, it was a good opportunity to put that knowledge to use.

*Tracy Andres, oblate
Bronx, NY*

**OBLATE NEWS**

After Vespers, the day ended with a huge downpour and heavy winds leftover from Hurricane Isaac!

*Sharon Ogden, oblate
Silver Spring, PA*

Fr. Gueric offers retreat on *lectio divina*

Twenty-nine oblates from the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut area attended the 2012 Labor Day Retreat. The gathering was hosted by the Dominican Sisters of Hope who run the Mariandale Retreat Center in Ossining, NY.

The conferences were given by Fr. Gueric DeBona, OSB, who offered ways to learn (or re-learn) how to read God’s word as it manifests itself in Scripture and in the crucible of creative human communication.

One highlight of the conferences was an extensive booklet compiled by Fr. Gueric, which included excerpts from Scripture (from several Bible translations), Liturgy of the Hours, texts on Christian spirituality, and English and American literature.

Individuals and groups were able to practice *lectio divina* daily. The group also got an opportunity to compose *oratio* prayers, drawing on a petition or need that is reflected in the theme of the text that is read.

Some of the readings used in *lectio divina* were these: Exodus 3:7-12, Matthew 25:1-13, 1 Corinthians 17-25, Ephesians 1:3-10, the Magnificat and the Benedictus, Sirach 39:13-16a, Song of Songs 1:5ff, Colossians 1:12-20, Romans 8:18-27, Mark 10, Psalms 91, 95, 8, 45, 47, 86, 96, 122, 126, 148, 149.

*Tracy Andres, oblate
Bronx, NY*

Two oblates ordained as permanent deacons

Oblate Rev. Dr. William Sweet of Crofton, KY, was ordained as a permanent deacon for the Diocese of
Oblate News from p. 3

Owensboro at Holy Spirit Church in Bowling Green on September 15.

Oblate Rev. Mr. Edward Christ of Colonial Heights, VA, was ordained as a permanent deacon for the Diocese of Richmond at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Richmond on October 13.

We ask God’s many blessings and graces be upon these newly ordained deacons in their ministry and service for the people of God.

Oblates celebrate anniversaries of oblation

September 2, 2012: Susan Anderson made her oblation on May 8, 1962, at the Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, IN. She renewed her oblation before the oblates of the Cincinnati Area who were gathered for their chapter meeting.

We thank Ken and Susan for their faithful witness as oblates over these many years. Through the intercession of St. Benedict, may they be filled with the grace and spirit of God.

Oblate’s article to be published in magazine

St. Anthony Messenger plans to publish an article by oblate Ron Beathard of Harrison, OH. The title of his article is “Beer, Pizza and St. Benedict.” He mentions that, 60 years ago, he came with his dad and family to ride around the Saint Meinrad campus.

Later, he became an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey. The title refers to the UnStable, which serves beer and pizza for students and guests. The article offers reflections on St. Benedict and his Rule.

Oblate is honored by Boy Scouts

On October 3, oblate Scott Schwinghammer of Jasper, IN, was honored with the Boy Scout Distinguished Citizen Award for his dedicated service. There were 300 guests at the banquet in Jasper.

Respect for Life Award given

Oblate Sandra Bierly of New Albany, IN, received the Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Respect for Life Award at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis on October 7, 2012.

Finance Committee reviews fiscal year

The Oblate Finance Committee met October 19 to review financial results for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2012. Once again, generous gifts (renewal, Bona Opera and other donations) adequately covered the oblate community expenses.

Expenses to be covered by revenue include office staff, printing and travel. The printing expenses include the Liturgy of the Hours schedules, seasonal spiritual pamphlets and the Benedictine Oblate Companion 2 that will be given to those who make their final oblation.

The Committee noted how positively gift-giving, including endowment contributions, have contributed to the livelihood of the Saint Meinrad oblate community. Sales of the recently published Benedictine Spirituality for Oblates have been active with nearly 500 sold within the past year.

Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, expressed great appreciation for the oblates and their continuing support of the oblate community.

Mike Reffett, oblate
Evansville, IN

Oblate Council hears reports of new projects

The Oblate Council gathered on the Hill for its 24th meeting on October 20, 2012. Present were Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, Dennis Skelton, Al Kovacs, Pat Phillips, Jennie Latta, Mike Reffett, Chris Topa and Janis Dopp, chair. Also present was Michele Reffett, who acted as secretary. Gail Chambers and John Pelletier were absent. The meeting was opened with prayer by Fr. Meinrad, followed by a reading of the Statement of Purpose of the Oblate Council.

The Council heard a report from Fr. Meinrad on a number of topics. Fr. Meinrad reported that he has been giving a series of talks on this year’s theme, lectio divina. A new holy card listing the steps of lectio divina is in preparation. The members of the Oblate Council were asked to make comments on the final look and content of the card.

The card will be made available to all oblates in the coming months. Fr. Meinrad noted that, if an oblate merely uses the Gospel reading for each day, the oblate will have meditated through each of the four Gospels by the end of a year.

Fr. Meinrad also gave a report on publications in process. An Updated History of the Benedictine Community of Saint Meinrad Archabbey 1995-2012 is at the press now. This volume has been carefully prepared by oblate Ruth Engs. It will be mailed, along with the requests for renewals of oblation, in November. Another publication in process is an oblate novice mentoring guide that the Council hopes will be helpful to novice mentors and novices in their preparation for final oblation.

Fr. Meinrad also reported that he discussed the state of the oblate community with the monastery visitors. He was proud to report there has been steady interest in the
The Council spent a portion of its meeting making plans for this meeting. More information will be provided to chapter coordinators as those dates approach.

Jennie Latta, oblate
Memphis, TN

Poetry book offers spiritual insights

Oblate Thomas J. Rillo has written a third book of spiritual poems, Growing Closer to God through Poetry. The book’s 115 poems offer a way for the reader to develop a heightened spirituality.

Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, a monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, provided the cover and inside illustrations. Br. Martin is a well-known liturgical artist whose works include ceramics, stained glass, paintings, drawings and furniture.

All proceeds from book sales will go to the Saint Meinrad Benedictine Oblate Program. Books are available from the Oblate Office or from the author. They will also be on sale at various retreats.

The book reminds readers of their joys, fears, doubts and relationships. The poems can be read and studied as devotional readings or as inspirational messages.

New book brings oblate program’s history up to date

Oblate Ruth Engs has written a new book, An Updated History of the Benedictine Oblate Community of Saint Meinrad Archabbey 1995-2012. The book was inspired in part by the need to update the prior oblate history written by the late Edward L. Shaughnessy. Published in 2000, the first book covered the period from 1879-1999.

Engs has researched and written a superlative account of the oblate history, limiting her work to those years that Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, has been the oblate director of Saint Meinrad (1995-2012). An expert researcher and writer, she has provided a valuable resource for oblates interested in the program’s history.

Every active oblate will receive a copy of the book. Many oblates are a part of the history or they will know fellow oblates who have been active in the history of the oblate community. They will also learn about the monks who have supported and contributed to the oblate community during the years included in the updated history. Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB, wrote the foreword to the book.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

Note on Book Corrections: Since the publication of the new history book on the oblate community, some errors have been noted in the book’s index regarding the oblate chapter in Lancaster, PA. The incorrect references are pages 113, 313, 1990s, 113-115; 2000s, 115-117; 2010s, 117. These references were listed under Lancaster, OH. Also, there should have been references for Lancaster, PA, on pages 87, 113, 313 and 316. We sincerely apologize for this oversight.

Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB
Director of Benedictine Oblates

INVESTITURES & OBLATIONS

August 12, 2012, Investiture transfer—Mr. Jeffrey Warren of Holliston, MA, transferred his novitiate from Blue Cloud Abbey to Saint Meinrad.

see Oblate News, p. 8
Lectio gives me the courage to trust

As an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, I have found the practice of lectio divina to be particularly helpful, as I continue to discern God’s call.

My “quiet place” is the living room floor, sitting on an area rug, writing on paper bound in a portfolio resting on a loveseat.

My “quiet time” is often long before sunrise. My wife is asleep in the bedroom and, while sipping juice, I can rest my mind, ease my heart and pray for the Lord to “make His will my will.”

This summer of high heat and drought brings me more easily to Scripture that speaks of Jesus going off alone to escape the crowds – “human heat,” so to speak – to pray.

I write poetry and prose, and lectio helps me to focus, before “dawn’s early light,” to “pronounce His words quietly, listening carefully, as you would do in any serious conversation.”

To rest with these words, to allow them gently to seep into my life today; the three readings done in the ancient practice of lectio fortify my journey to open my spirit to the Spirit, to make His will mine.

As a writer, I try always to keep in mind the words of the mystic poet, William Blake, who says, “I myself do nothing. The Holy Spirit accomplishes all through me.”

Joseph Chilton Pearce says, “We must accept that this creative pulse within us is God’s creative pulse itself.”

Through the practice and discipline of lectio, I am better able to listen to the Lord speaking within me, prodding me. As the Talmud states, “Every blade of grass has its Angel that bends over it and whispers, ‘Grow, grow.’”

Writing is like praying. There is no one way, there is no precise formula and, most importantly, there is no wrong way to pray or write. God created us in His image; our creativity on this Earth is us giving our gift of being God’s crowning creative act back to Him as a way of fulfilling our part of that covenant relationship.

Lectio divina gives me a spiritual framework to fully focus and live each day as part of an “examined life.” To “carry the Word” with me each day serves as a reminder that God is at work in all to whom I minister. And when I can truly listen with a “servant heart,” then I can truly reflect the created “image and likeness of God” and live out my blessings and my faith.

Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, oblate lessons, the Rule, lectio, centering prayer, Scripture and spiritual readings; all of these help to open pathways to the Divine.

It is in oratio that my feelings can be expressed in open “conversation” with God. I pray for myself, especially for the ability to listen three times as much as I speak. I pray to remember that to truly “be for the other, in Christi Personae,” I must be fully open to their story, to their pain and suffering, to their joy and celebration.

As an oblate of Saint Meinrad, as one committed to the “servant model” of discipleship, I am called to pay attention to the needs of others, to acknowledge people, and to give them the appreciation, focus and sincerity that all of God’s creatures deserve by the very act of being created in the image and likeness of God.

Above all else, I am to allow the present moment to be what it is, to let the person in front of me say what they need to say, be the person they are this day. I am to step out of my comfort circle and enter into their space, with the trust and understanding that it is with the recognition of my human limitations, the diminishing of ego and the pure gift of grace that God is present to whatever is said and done in a shared Trinitarian communion of heart, mind and spirit.

Lectio divina gives me the courage to continue to trust in God. If we truly step out in faith, act with compassion, and seek peace and justice through the grace of the ever-living God, then we cannot fail.

Chaplain Edward Huff, BCC, oblate
Henderson, KY

During the Lancaster, PA, Day of Recollection, guest Michael Lambert offered some comments after the group lectio session.
The Oblate Finance Committee posed for a portrait. Front row, left to right, Chris Topa, Barbara Phillips, Michele Reffett; back row, Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, Maureen Reichardt, Pat Phillips, George Thompson and Mike Reffett.

Five men from the Diocese of Kalamazoo, MI, were invested as oblate novices. From left to right: Steve Borchert, Tim Hardigan, John Hulsebus, Mike Anderson and Jan van Schaik. They hope to get enough men and women to begin an oblate chapter.

Lance Mary Schortmann and Beth Benedict Gootee pose with Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, after their oblation on November 10, 2012.

Oblates Rene and Jessie McCurdy enjoyed the potluck at oblates Joe and Trish Lamont’s home. The Lancaster, PA, oblates gathered on September 5, 2012.

Members of the Oblate Council are, from left, front row: Janis Dopp, Jennie Latta and Michele Reffett. Back Row: Dennis Skelton, Pat Phillips, Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, Mike Reffett, Chris Topa and Albert Kovacs.

Oblates Rene and Jessie McCurdy enjoyed the potluck at oblates Joe and Trish Lamont’s home.

Paul Reichardt and Maureen Grant pose with Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, after their wedding ceremony on June 16, 2012, in Lawrence, IN.

Five men from the Diocese of Kalamazoo, MI, were invested as oblate novices. From left to right: Steve Borchert, Tim Hardigan, John Hulsebus, Mike Anderson and Jan van Schaik. They hope to get enough men and women to begin an oblate chapter.
Oblate News from p. 5

August 13, 2012, Oblation transfer—Mr. and Mrs. Joe and Alice Holtzmann of Milbank, SD, transferred their membership from Blue Cloud Abbey to Saint Meinrad.

September 2, 2012, Oblation—Mr. Damon Benedict Schultz of North Massapequa, NY.

September 8, 2012, Investiture—Mrs. Teresa Thompson of Leola, PA.

September 17, 2012, Oblation—Rev. Deborah Julian Apoldo of Harrods Creek, KY.

September 23, 2012, Investiture—Mrs. Paula Yerke of Cincinnati, OH.

October 4, 2012, Investiture—Mr. Kevin Hurst of Columbus, IN.

October 4, 2012, Oblation—Ms. Muriel Barbara Kdan of Bloomington, IN.

October 6, 2012, Investiture—Mrs. Cathy Moriarty of Columbus, IN.

October 11, 2012, Oblations—Ms. Christine Teresa Benedict Vincent of Berkeley, CA; Mr. Timothy Timothy Smith of Owensboro, KY.

October 11, 2012, Investiture—Mrs. Brenda Winkler of Santa Claus, IN.

October 13, 2012, Investiture—Mr. Herb Spalla of Indianapolis, IN.

October 20, 2012, Oblation—Mrs. Joan Hildegard Teresa Dilger of Sellersburg, IN.

October 21, 2012, Investitures—Mr. Kevin Maloney and Mr. Robert Sherrod, both of Louisville, KY.

October 27, 2012, Investiture—Mr. Benedict Kirk of Nashville, TN.

November 7, 2012, Investiture—Ms. Maria del Pilar Arroyo, Mishawaka, IN.

November 10, 2012, Oblations—Beth Benedict Gootee of Indianapolis, IN, and Lance Mary Schortmann of Louisville, KY.

November 13, 2012, Investitures—Mr. Jan van Schak, Kalamazoo, MI; Mr. Steven J. Borchert, Mr. Michael Anderson and Mr. Tim Hardigan, all of Portage, MI; Mr. John Hulsebus, Mattawan, MI.

November 15, 2012, Investiture—Mr. Steven Sharrett of Skandia, MI.

DEATHS

Mrs. Rose Ann MacDonald of Flint, MI, died on August 7, 2012.

Mrs. Rochelle Pease of Huntsville, AL, died on October 14, 2012.

Mr. Jens Thomsen of Fredericksburg, Denmark, died on October 23, 2012.

Mr. Michael McVey of Pittsboro, IN, died on October 31, 2012.

Mrs. Rose Ranno of Chestnut Ridge, NY, died on November 3, 2012. For 28 years, she was the coordinator of the New York Oblate Chapter, as well as the chapter’s November Day of Recollection and Labor Day Weekend Retreat. Also she would drive the monk who came for the events to the various locations. After she stepped down as coordinator, she came to Saint Meinrad and entered the sabbatical program. She stayed for nine years and then returned to New York. Rose loved to organize large groups of oblates from New York to fly to Louisville and then drive on to St. Meinrad, IN, for oblate retreats in December and March.

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office have included Ruth Engs, Melanie Isaacson, Novice Bradley Jensen, OSB, Albert Kovacs, Tom and Joan Rillo, Dennis Skelton and Chris Topa.

CHECK THE WEBSITE

Past issues of the Benedictine Oblate newsletter are available at www.saintmeinrad.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 20-22, 2013—The Oblate Retreat is scheduled to have Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB, as the presenter on “Lectio Divina and Spiritual Work: Praying and Progress.”

April 20, 2013—The Day of Recollection for the Louisville Oblate Chapter will feature Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, as the presenter on “The Silent Gospel: A Visual Lectio.”

May 18, 2013—The Day of Recollection for the Ohio oblates will have Fr. Columba Kelly, OSB, as the presenter of “Lectio Divina: A Conversation with God.” The Dayton Oblate Chapter is hosting.

June 10-13, 2013—Oblate Study Days will have the theme “Encountering Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.” Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB, is the presenter.

July 11, 2013—Oblate James O’Connell will be the presenter for the Day of Recollection at Saint Meinrad. The title is “A Little Bit of Something and a Lot of Nothing,” on how listening is enhanced by the sacraments and our faith traditions.

As an oblate of Saint Meinrad

Oblates Deacon Edward Christ and his wife Susan of Colonial Heights, VA, after his ordination to the permanent diaconate.
Faithful Witnesses
Br. Silas Henderson, OSB
Monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey

St. Caedmon
Feast: February 11

What little we know of the English monk Caedmon comes to us from the Ecclesiastical History of St. Bede the Venerable. Although Caedmon (whose name is pronounced KED-mon) lived only a few generations after St. Benedict and was part of a Celtic tradition that predated St. Benedict’s Rule, he has long been numbered among the saints associated with the Benedictine Order.

It seems that Caedmon was a servant of the abbey of Whitby. Although he was already an old man, he had shown no talent for poetry and music. He was so self-conscious of his lack of talent that he used to leave community celebrations on feast days when singing would begin. St. Bede tells us:

One night he did this and went to the stables to tend to the animals when he saw a man standing next to him. “Caedmon,” the man said, “sing me a song.” “I don’t know how to sing,” he replied…. The man who addressed him then said: “But you shall sing to me.” “What should I sing about?” he replied. “Sing about the creation of all things,” the other answered. And Caedmon immediately began to sing verses in praise of God the Creator that he had never heard before.

Caedmon’s vision was recounted to the abbess of Whitby, St. Hilda, who was inspired by the beauty of Caedmon’s verses. Hilda succeeded in convincing the poet to become a monk so that he could study Scripture and use his gifts for the good of the Church. Although only a fragment of Caedmon’s Hymn has survived, it seems his words had a profound impact on the spread of the Christian faith in England. St. Caedmon died in the year 680.

As Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, notes, “Benedictine spirituality is about bringing the uniqueness in us and around us to holiness.” Like a good abbess, St. Hilda challenged Caedmon to develop his God-given talent for the good of others; Caedmon responded to Hilda’s appeal with humility and helped bring beauty and the truth of God’s goodness into the lives and prayer of his contemporaries.

Reflection Questions
Do I try to deny or diminish the talents and gifts that God has given me?
How do I consciously use the gifts I have been given to sustain and enrich the lives of others?
Am I willing to be challenged by others to grow in new directions and to develop new gifts?

Caedmon’s Verses
Now praise the Keeper of bright heaven’s realm.
Our Maker’s matchless might and purpose tell.
Such works the Father of all glory wrought:
This timeless Lord whose wonders pass all thought.

This holy Framer first for us did form
The sky above a roof, then earth a floor
Where we, once formed of breath and dust, adore
This mighty God, our Guard, and timeless Lord.


Continued from p. 1

If you are able, the oblate director often has tasks that can be performed by oblate volunteers who are on the Hill. This active service is another way of deepening your faith and connection to the monastic community. And there can be no substitute for joining the monks in prayer in the Archabbey Church. This, in a preeminent way, is what monks and oblates “do!”

The Opus Dei is the source and summit of Benedictine spirituality. If you want to know what a monk is – what an oblate is – there can be no better way to discover it than to join with the community in prayer.

So, for those who have never made a visit to the Hill or for those who have just been away for a long time, we encourage you to “come home” to Saint Meinrad! Consider making an annual visit to the Hill a part of your personal rule of life.

Invite other members of your chapter to come with you. And consider establishing a fund within your chapter to help defray the costs for those oblates and potential oblates who may be discouraged about their ability to afford a visit at this time.

Your visits to the Hill will strengthen your resolve to live the promises and duties of the oblate. You will return refreshed, carrying home the spirit of Saint Meinrad to your parishes and communities.

Jennie Latta, oblate
Memphis, TN
Interview with Br. Peduru Fonseka, OSB

Br. Peduru, can you tell us something of your background?

I was born in the town of Battaramulla, Sri Lanka, in 1982. My father, mother and older sister comprise my family. I went to St. Joseph College, which was elementary to secondary grade levels. The teachers were lay people, nuns and some priests. The school was administered by priests of the Oblates of the Mary Immaculate. I graduated from high school in 2001.

Did you participate in any extracurricular activities while attending St. Joseph College?

I did some recreational participation in the game of cricket and in cycling until an accident prevented further pursuit of this activity. I also played squash, which is a racquet-type game. I joined an organization called United Nations Youth Association that was available through the high school. It did humanitarian projects such as cleaning up neighborhoods and improving human habitat. I was vice president of this student organization for two years.

What did you do after finishing secondary school? Did you go on to college?

Yes, I did go on to college. I came to the United States to attend the University of South Alabama in Mobile. I matriculated in the civil engineering program and I graduated in 2008. I did an internship for one year with a company called Barter and Associates. I was hired by the company in 2008 and I was with them until 2011.

What were the influencing factors that motivated you to come to Saint Meinrad Archabbey?

I would say my priest at the Catholic Student Center, Fr. Alex, is the first one who suggested to me to visit Saint Meinrad when I told him about my discernment to monastic life. After that, I made a few visits to the abbey. I fell in love with the peacefulness of the place and friendliness of the people I met. Eventually, I decided to take that next step of the application process and see where God is going to lead me.

When I first met you in the oblate office, I was impressed by your computer skills. Did you learn your skills at St. Joseph College or University of South Alabama?

Neither. I learned my skills by attending a private program that taught computer skills. This was after I graduated from secondary school and it was in Sri Lanka that I took computer training.

How did your Catholicism grow and mature in a country where only 6 to 7 percent of the population is Catholic?

At first, there were Portuguese missionaries who came. They were a Catholic people. This happened in the 16th century. Secondly, my father is a devout Catholic who attends daily Mass. My mother initiated a family rosary that we recited every evening. I attended a Catholic boys school from kindergarten until high school. These were some of my earliest influences that led to a more mature Catholicism for me.

What spiritual books or writers do you read?

I enjoy reading various spiritual authors. My more serious reading includes the writings on Ignatian spirituality. I like the writings of the Desert Fathers such as John Cassian. I read much of Thomas Merton’s works. Scott Hahn’s books are of interest to me as well. A lesser known writer that I enjoy reading is Dorotheos of Gaza.

OBLATES: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Once you start practicing lectio divina and really get into it, then you will see the importance of it. It just becomes part of your day and routine. Lectio is part of being an oblate.”

Oblate George Thompson
Louisville, KY

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN
Oblate newsletter has 94-year history

The Oblate Letter, begun in 1918 as a means of communication with students of Saint Meinrad by Fr. Henry Brenner, OSB, developed over time into a mailed communication with Saint Meinrad alumni, most of whom were oblate priests. The abbot at the time was Ignatius Esser, OSB, whose deep interest in the oblate program helped to develop the oblate program as we know it today.

Fr. Henry’s many interests, the many “hats” he wore, contributed to this development, as well as his contribution as an editor at the fledgling Abbey Press in the form of St. Rita’s Letter. His devotion to this saint was unquenchable. A well-read man, Fr. Henry was also a literary figure in his own right.

This means of communication served so well that it was improved upon by every succeeding director of oblates, the most noticeable being Fr. Walter Sullivan, OSB. These improvements were then polished by the men who followed Fr. Walter: Fr. Cyril Vrablic, OSB, with Fr. Raban Hathorn, OSB, his assistant.

Succeeding directors, most with too much to do, maintained the letter, though its impact was not as great. Even more fine-tuning can be attributed to Fr. Gerard Ellspermann, OSB, whose dedication to it and the program rivaled that of Fr. Walter, who served as an assistant on many occasions.

The final polishing, however, has come through the efforts and talent for organization of Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, the current director. Fr. Meinrad was appointed by Archabbot Lambert Reilly, OSB, who had served as an assistant director and whose interest in the program had been maintained during his years of service.

In 2012, we celebrated the 94th birthday of this marvelous connection with the more than a thousand oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey. Reading through the copies that were saved and carefully guarded by Fr. Gerard, then assembled into one volume sometime between 1987 and 1989 and stored in the oblate library, one experiences a trip through history. This collection is almost a companion volume to History of St. Meinrad Archabbey 1854-1954 by Fr. Albert Kleber, OSB.

When assembling this volume, there were many missing issues (and still are). However, through the generosity of many oblates who had kept back issues, and who responded to a plea for the same, many spaces were filled. Today new issues are added as they are published. For an interesting read, try spending some time with these volumes.

Mona L. Rinear, oblate
(died July 5, 2011)
Martinsville, IN

Bishop William Medley, of the Diocese of Owensboro, places his hands on oblate Dr. William Sweet from Crofton, KY, on September 15 to ordain him as a permanent deacon.

Newly ordained Deacon William Sweet posed with his wife, Pam Sweet, and Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB.

Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, a Benedictine nun of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, IN, has written another book in the Matters series. Oblates will recall her earlier books: *Thoughts Matter*, *Tools Matter* and *Humility Matters*. This book is about *lectio divina*, that is, holy reading or meditation on the Scriptures.

As oblates, we are encouraged to engage in *lectio divina* as a part of our prayer life. Sr. Mary Margaret has written a book that not only describes *lectio*, but also is a step-by-step exercise in the art of this sacred reading.

She applies the best possible tool for encountering *lectio* – her own lived experience. The reader discovers how *lectio* has transformed the author’s life. In taking readers on a pilgrimage of deepening their faith through *lectio*, Sr. Mary Margaret uses the writings of the prophet Jonah as a stepping-stone.

Her rationale for using the Book of Jonah becomes evident as the reader grows in appreciation for Jonah and realizes how people reveal or hide many aspects of personal life. She does not preach to us about the history for she does not want us to miss her real message.

Sr. Mary Margaret knows all of the obstacles and excuses that we make as a result of our fears. But she brings readers to the realization that *lectio* is something special, a religious tool to grow closer to God. She takes the reader through a journey where the voices of Scripture make clear our total dependence on God.

She points out the importance of training the mind, the importance of virtue and the need to be attentive to our thoughts. She recalls that the early Desert Mothers and Fathers paid attention to the discipline of being attentive. She describes how many holy men and women enriched their lives with the method of prayer known as *lectio divina*.

*Thomas J. Rillo, oblate*  
*Bloomington, IN*