A new book, *Prayers and Rituals for Benedictine Oblates*, is designed to help oblates sanctify their day. The book helps oblates pray as Benedictines—and particularly as Saint Meinrad Benedictines.

The idea for the book originated with the Oblate Study Days held during the summers of 2006 and 2007. These study days, conducted by Saint Meinrad’s Fr. Denis Robinson, OSB, encouraged oblates to incorporate, in a concrete way, Benedictine values and spirituality into their daily lives.

As Fr. Denis explains in the book, “Monks have rituals, formal and informal, that order their lives. Lay Benedictines need rituals, too, ways of concretely acknowledging the presence of God in the activities of daily life.”

*Prayers and Rituals for Benedictine Oblates* offers more than prayers and rituals. The book opens with an essay by Fr. Denis explaining the importance of creating a Benedictine home and ideas on how to make this happen. “The life of the Benedictine is the persistent attempt to find God in the most mundane activities and the most commonplace things,” writes Fr. Denis. “Dedicating each day to this relentless pursuit of the Divine One gives Benedictines their particular charism.”

The book contains a biography of St. Meinrad, along with general prayers. Some are familiar, like the “Our Father,” and some are less familiar, such as “Anima Christi.” Some of the prayers and novenas are specific to Saint Meinrad Archabbey, including the “Novena to the Black Madonna” and “The Chaplet of St. Meinrad.”

To help oblates glorify God in all things, there are rituals for “the most mundane activities and the most commonplace things.” Each ritual contains a quote from the Rule, a reading from Scripture and a prayer. There are rituals for everyday activities such as cooking and receiving guests, as well as seasonal events such as the “Blessing of Easter Foods” and the ritual for Thanksgiving Day.

There are rituals specifically for oblates (Bona Opera) and there are life rituals like the “Prayer for Expectant Parents.” To offer oblates a source of daily inspiration, the book closes with the Martyrology, which contains biographical information about a saint for each day of the year.

Monks, oblates and Saint Meinrad co-workers worked together to bring the book to fruition. Fr. Denis suggested the creation of the book and provided the initial content outline. He also contributed to the writing of the book and reviewed its content.

*see Book, p. 10*
Epiphany party: A 30-year tradition for oblate chapters

Each year, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Epiphany 12 days after Christmas. This threefold feast includes: At the Crib (the birth of Jesus), At the Jordan (the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist), and At Cana (the miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana).

Epiphany, meaning the visible manifestation of the Lord taking on human flesh and becoming both divine and human, concludes the Christmas feast. Three manifestations are celebrated at Epiphany: Jesus manifests Himself as King to the Magi, the heavenly Father proclaims Jesus as His Son, and the miracle at Cana during the wedding reception demonstrates Jesus’ miracle of divine power.

The Roman Catholic Church centers the liturgy on the adoration of the Magi at the crib. Although scholars of the Bible disagree on the number of Magi at the crib, the general consensus is that three gifts, namely gold, frankincense and myrrh, were offered to the baby Jesus. Consequently, it was assumed there were three Magi.

Matthew 2:11 says that the Magi offered the Child three gifts. Christians in the West have traditionally portrayed the gift givers as three. Since the time of the Venerable Bede (eighth century), the three kings were considered representatives of the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa.

Some of Saint Meinrad’s oblate chapters have held a traditional Epiphany party for more than 30 years. Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, the oblate director, has designed a manual for the celebration. An oblate chapter can request a manual from the Oblate Office. ◆

A POINT TO PONDER FROM THE RULE

“The Prophet says: Seven times a day have I praised you (Ps. 118[119]: 164). We will fulfill this sacred number of seven if we satisfy our obligations of service at Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline, for it was of these hours during the day that he said: Seven times a day have I praised you.”

Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 16, Verses 1-3

St. Benedict certainly had in mind the concept of a fixed-hour prayer when he wrote this rule for celebrating the Divine Office during the day. He had knowledge of this prayer of the ancients when he established the Rule for his monks.

As oblates, we can reflect on the history of the Divine Office or Liturgy of the Hours when we read these verses. Oblates can feel a sense of connection with those who prayed the fixed-hour prayer in keeping with David’s admonition to “praise God seven times a day.”

Chapter 16 addresses the question of how many times we should pray each day. As oblates in the secular world, it is difficult to achieve the sacred number seven. Lauds (morning prayer) and Vespers (evening prayer) can be realistically achieved. Midday prayer and Compline can be included whenever possible.

It’s worth noting that praying the Liturgy of the Hours can lend a cadence or rhythm to our prayer life.
Revisiting World War II

In July, oblate Edward M. Saraniero of Columbus, OH, gave Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, a book of memories of his life experiences and spirituality while serving in Italy and southern France during the latter part of World War II.

50th anniversary of oblation

Ms. Jo Ann Moeller of Cincinnati, OH, became an oblate on February 28, 1960. Congratulations in celebration of her 50th anniversary as an oblate.

Congratulations and blessings

Oblate Fr. Patrick Gallagher was ordained a priest on June 5 in the Diocese of Memphis, TN. He is a graduate of Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology.

Celebrating St. Benedict

The feast of St. Benedict was celebrated at Corpus Christi Monastery in Bronx, NY, on July 10. Carmen Flores remarked that the sisters were gracious and hospitable. Fr. Tom D’Angelo celebrated Mass.

Change of Secretaries in the Oblate Office

Joan Lasher is the new executive secretary to the oblate director. Joan previously worked at Abbey Press for 31 years. For 13 of those years, she was the executive secretary to Fr. Rupert Ostdick, OSB, general manager of Abbey Press. We welcome Joan.

We offer many thanks to Brenda Ubelhor for her eight years of service as the former executive secretary in the Oblate Office. She left in June and will be missed by many oblates and others.

Council hears about oblate plate

The Oblate Council gathered with Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, for its regularly scheduled summer meeting on July 10. Present were Janis Dopp, Dennis Skelton, Pat Phillips, Jennie Latta, Chris Topa, Mike Reffett and Al Kovacs. Br. Martin Ersramer, OSB, also attended at the beginning of the meeting.

Br. Martin has been working on the concept of a decorative plate to be given as a gift from the monastic community to new oblates upon their final oblation. Each plate will be made from clay and feature St. Benedict handing the holy Rule to a disciple. Because of the handcrafted nature of the plate, each will be an original work of art. Oblate Council members enthusiastically approved the sample that Br. Martin presented.

Reports were made regarding a number of ongoing projects that have been described in recent issues of this newsletter. Publication of the second edition of the Benedictine Oblate Companion may be delayed slightly due to the large volume of material being incorporated.

The council began making detailed plans for hosting the upcoming biennial meeting of the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors, which will be held at Saint Meinrad in July 2011.

Mike Reffett gave a brief financial report. Thanks in large part to the generosity of Saint Meinrad oblates and benefactors, the oblate community’s finances continue to track favorably.

The council continued its discussions about sharing Benedictine spirituality with young adults and attracting more young adults to the oblate community. We focused on reaching out to families with young children and decided to further explore two suggestions: resources to help apply the Rule of St. Benedict to family life and a future annual oblate family picnic or conference on the Hill.

The council also continued to follow up on last year’s leadership conference and meeting of chapter representatives and coordinators. It is our goal to implement all of the good ideas that grew out of the meeting and subsequent surveys.

Al Kovacs, oblate
Indianapolis, IN

Day of Recollection focuses on Liturgy of the Hours

For the past several years, a day of recollection has been held at Saint Meinrad Archabbey. In the Guest

see Oblate News, p. 4

From left, Robert Siebenaller, Teresa Siebenaller, Lora Alstadt and Gerald Alstadt were invested as oblate novices on June 13.
House on July 12, the oblates attending this year’s event also had the opportunity to participate in Mass, the sacrament of Reconciliation and the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. The topic this year was “Liturgy of the Hours: The Intersection of Kairos and Chronos,” presented by Fr. Brendan Moss, OSB. The word “liturgy” originates from the Greek, meaning work of the people. The word “hours” stems from the concept that time is divided into two concepts: Chronos, referring to humanity’s time, and Kairos, referring to God’s time that is eternal. When we pray the Liturgy of the Hours, we pray it for the entire Church of Christ.

Fr. Brendan emphasized that praying the Liturgy of the Hours puts us in touch with the whole of humanity, contributes to the salvation of the entire world and makes holy the entire day. It consecrates to God the whole cycle of day and night, as it was in centuries past, and it is an excellent preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist.

The second conference stressed the psalms in praying the Hours. Fr. Brendan emphasized that praying the psalms should open our hearts to the different emotions (grief, trust, gratitude, praise) they express, and reciting them must still be in keeping with their musical character.

Fr. Brendan demonstrated how psalms should and should not be sung, as he did with the recitation of the psalms. Participation with him, both in the singing and the recitation, added to our understanding of how to pray the psalms. The basic concept was that psalms, when sung, should be lyrical and, when recited, should be said with poetic inflection.

The third conference led to the order of worship for the Liturgy of the Hours. He introduced the concept of the “psalm sandwich,” where the antiphons are the bread and the psalm canticle and prayer are the ingredients, followed by another antiphon that is the other slice of the bread. He clearly stipulated that canticles are not psalms. They come from the Old Testament (Canticle of Zechariah) or the New Testament (Canticle of the Blessed Virgin Mary). His sense of humor and demonstrations of how and how not to read were entertaining as well as informative.

Study days focus on understanding the psalms

“O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me.” With these words in Psalm 70, Benedictines begin their daily prayer, imploring God to help them in their need, to stand beside them and to save them from their enemies. Fr. Vincent Tobin, OSB, led the annual study days, held at Saint Meinrad June 14-17, on “To Pray as Jesus Prayed: The Psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours.”

The 150 psalms used in the Liturgy of the Hours are both poetry and prose and are seen through the filter of the incarnate Jesus, who prayed these psalms long ago and who prays them today along with millions of Benedictines around the world.

Although there is not a word in the psalms about how to pray or how to become holy, they give the reader permission to talk (pray) with God in any way necessary. According to Fr. Vincent, seldom can one get a literal meaning of the psalms, but that is good because the reader may use what is needed at the time.

The ancient people who wrote the psalms were earthbound. They were focused on sun, sea and stars; their neighbors; their crops and farm animals. They talked to an incomprehensible God in terms of things about which they knew. Everything that happened was immediately caused by God, and they had a very personal discourse with God that was verbalized in the psalms. They remembered Yahweh in the past, so they trusted Him in the present. It is from the traditions of the ancients that today we derive the form of our liturgies, beginning with the events in the Upper Room and the bread and wine. Thus, although today there are many settings for liturgy and many liturgical types (praise, thanksgiving, lamentations, wisdom, prophecy, celebration), it is always Jesus among us.

The psalms are based on patterns of meaning with a great density of word pictures. They are conversations with Yahweh, who was friend and brother, and they are one-on-one expressions of our humanity. Psalm 1 is a synopsis of everything to follow and indicates that God wants us to be happy. It shows us how to do that by giving us permission to relate to God in any way.

Psalm 18 defines love (agape) as an energetic and beneficent good will that focuses on bringing about good in another person’s life. Psalm 23 describes the role of a shepherd. In Psalm 32, one reads about the joy of forgiveness as a beginning. Psalm 33 is a magnificent, joyous shout, bringing faith and reason together. The psalms can become a cry of meaning in the midst of suffering.

The majority of psalms were composed with flexibility for community worship, and they have bridged 3,000 years. Since the 18th-century Enlightenment, the psalms have been set in the context of contemporary culture, but using the words in contemporary ways rather than with the intent of ancient culture can make the meaning of the psalms hard to accept and understand.

Among the words misused are “fear” (the ancients understood fear as reverence for the mystery of God, rather than being afraid of God) and “holiness” (the ancients meant transcendence and consecration). Nowhere in the psalms is holiness mentioned as something to strive for, but rather it means belonging to God. Another
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example is “justice” (understood by the ancients as God’s covenant love for us, rather than justice under the law).
It seems that we are called to persevere and to be faithful, rather than perfect.
We are called to listen because God’s favorite language is silence, and listening is the heart of prayer. We are called to pray because prayer is always a response to a voice speaking to us.
In that prayer, there is a whole world of possibilities waiting to be realized. One way to respond to those calls is to pray the psalms, listening with the ear of the heart and accepting God’s willingness to hear anything we have to say.

Cathey Byers, oblate
Nineveh, IN

Journey to Africa
Oblate Dick Hollowell from Greensburg, IN, visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo July 29-August 1. He worked with the WAZA Alliance for Quality Education, conducting three teacher training conferences.

Inmates learn Benedictine spirituality
The residents of Pendleton Correctional Facility in Pendleton, IN, were issued certificates to mark their completion of studies in Benedictine Spirituality and Living the Benedictine Way of Life. The seminar was conducted by oblate Deacon Dr. James MacDougall, a retired professor from Ball State University in Muncie, IN. Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB, signed the certificates.

Oblate publishes new book
Oblate John McMullen’s new book, The Miracle of Statag 8A—Beauty Beyond the Horror: Oliver Messiaen and the Quartet for the End of Time is completed and dedicated to Fr. Columba Kelly, OSB. The October issue of the St. Anthony Messenger will publish a review of the book.

Pre-Vatican music book published

A new and interesting publication
Br. Matthew Mattingly, OSB, has written an article, “Saint Meinrad Archabbe: Portrait of a Historic Monastic Community,” in Christian Reflection, a quarterly series on faith and ethics. The publication is a refereed journal from The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University. The topic of this recent issue was Monasticism Old and New.
Br. Matthew profiled Saint Meinrad Archabbe, using the oblate program as a focus. He points out that, through its oblate program, Saint Meinrad Archabbe builds bridges between the cloister and Christian living in the secular world. Br. Matthew further stipulates that oblates are living witnesses that centuries-old traditions of monastic prayer, contemplation and practice can transform the world at a practical level. Congratulations to Br. Matthew.

INVESTITURES & OBLATIONS
April 24, 2010, Oblation—Miss Ann Benedicta Morrill of Grove City, OH.
May 2, 2010, Investiture—Ms. Jean Bybee of Onalaska, TX.
May 7, 2010, Investiture—Mr. Jacob Crisler of Muncie, IN.
May 7, 2010, Oblations—Mr. Caleb Tarsicius Crisler and Mr. Jerry Benedict Sparks, both of Muncie, IN.
May 11, 2010, Investiture—Mr. Joseph Groepper, of Iowa City, IA.
May 21, 2010, Investiture—The Rev. Bruce Jacobson, of Groveland, MA.
May 25, 2010, Oblation—Mr. Gary Francis of Assisi Phillips of Brandon, MS.
May 27, 2010, Oblation—Mr. Brian Kevin of Glendalough Leo of Frankfort, IL.
June 5, 2010, Investitures—Mrs. Marie Crull of Millington, TN; and Mrs. Brenda Barber, Mr. Joseph Kons and Mrs. Regina Kons, all of Munford, TN.
June 11, 2010, Oblation—Mr. Mark Faustina Windsor of Plano, TX.
June 13, 2010, Investitures—Dr. Gerald Alstadt and Mrs. Lora Alstadt of Huntingburg, IN; and Mr. Robert Siebenaller and Mrs. Teresa Siebenaller of Toledo, OH.
June 16, 2010, Oblations—Mrs. Annemarie Frances Muth of Louisville, KY, and Rev. Carol Ruth Wiley of New Castle, IN.
June 16, 2010, Investiture—Mrs. Margaret Sherlock of West Chester, OH.
June 17, 2010, Investitures—Mr. James Essner and Mrs. Sharon Essner of Cape Girardeau, MO.
June 22, 2010, Investitures—Mr. David Bartolowits of Indianapolis, IN, and Mr. Robert Gideon of Portland, TN.
June 24, 2010, Investiture—Mr. James Schmitt of Albion, IN.
June 26, 2010, Oblation—Mr. Ralph Bede Smith of Smyrna, TN.
July 4, 2010, Investiture—Ms. Corazon Vezas of Elizabethtown, KY.
July 8, 2010, Investiture—Mrs. Tammy Becht of Floyds Knobs, IN.
July 11, 2010, Oblation—Mr. Jesse Joseph Leamon of Greenwood, IN.

see Oblate News, p. 7
Most books and articles dealing with the biblical psalms assume an attitude of reverence and respect based on the sacred nature of their content. The words of these psalms are not only human utterances directed toward God; they are also God’s holy words directed toward humans.

After all, for centuries, the Book of Psalms has been Judaism’s and Christianity’s most treasured prayer book. There is, however, a counter attitude to all this, one that is more prevalent than many might think, even though it does not readily get a hearing or is summarily dismissed when voiced. I refer to this counter attitude as “the elephant in the room.”

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the phrase “an elephant in the room” was first used by *The New York Times* on June 20, 1959: “Financing schools has become a problem about equal to having an elephant in the living room. It’s so big you just cannot ignore it.” The phrase has subsequently come to designate an important and obvious topic that everyone present is aware of, but which isn’t discussed, as such discussion is considered to be uncomfortable.

“The elephant in the room” of psalm study centers around, but is not limited to, the so-called imprecatory or cursing psalms. These are the psalms within which we hear the psalmist utter terrible and violent curses against the enemy. Examples of this can be found in the following psalm references: Ps 35:4-10, 59:10-13, 69:22-28, 83:9-18, 109:6-20, 137:7-9, 139:19-22.

There are other complaints about the psalms that I frequently hear from laity, religious and clergy alike. The images of God, which highlight God as a militaristic warrior or a harsh judge, do not set well with many people. The cosmology reflected in many of the psalms is primitive and unrelated to how the world really works. The theology found in numerous psalms seems at odds with the theological perspective of Jesus found in the gospels. Complaints such as these have caused more than a few believing Christians to use the psalms in a very limited way or to cease using them altogether. These issues should not be dismissed as nonsense or merely the ramblings of ignorant non-believers.

Another suggestion is always to remember that the psalms, by intent, express the full range of human experience and emotion. We tend to feel very comfortable when the psalms express joy, delight, goodness, coherence and the reliability of God, God’s creation and God’s governing law. We back away from those psalms that express hurt, alienation, suffering, death, rage, resentment, self-pity and hatred. Like it or not, however, human life includes all these feelings and emotions. Some Christians feel that the cursing psalms should be
excluded from the Psalter and rendered unfit for Christian prayer.

While it may be the case that such psalms are not fitting for public liturgical prayer, to exclude any of them from the Psalter is to block out some dimension of human life with God. There is not any feeling or emotion expressed in the psalms that humans do not, at one time or another, experience. The psalms give us a language to express our deepest emotions, both positive and negative.

We do not have to act out our feelings of anger and hate, but we do need to find ways to express them. The psalms are a safe and effective place for that to happen. It is probably not by accident that the majority of the psalms are laments. Life can indeed be a struggle, and more than a few times we find it totally overwhelming. The Psalter recognizes that and invites us to come and beat on God for a while, rather than beating on one another or ourselves. We cannot hurt God nor do we have to be embarrassed by our human frailty. It is all part of the bigger picture of God’s creation.

A final suggestion for reading and praying the psalms comes from the Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann. He suggests that we approach them from the perspective of three rather general themes: poems of orientation, poems of disorientation and poems of new orientation. Brueggemann here is actually building on the work of the philosopher of religion, Paul Ricoeur.

What is really being described is the flow of human life. There are times when we are contented and life seems to be working as it should. This is characterized in the Psalter by psalms of orientation, which express in a variety of ways the joyful goodness of life and all of God’s creation (Psalms 1, 8, 14, 15, 24, 33, 37, 104, 112, 119, 131, 133, 145).

There are other times when life seems to consist of anguished seasons of pain, suffering, confusion and despair. These times and emotions are expressed by the psalms of disorientation. The language and images are often extravagant and filled with hyperbole and abrasiveness called for by the experience (Psalms 13, 32, 35, 50, 51, 74, 79, 81, 86, 88, 90, 109, 130, 137, 143).

Finally, there are those times when life is filled with surprise and newness. God’s goodness seems to overwhelm us and surprise us, so that we can see light where there has been only darkness. Our whole being radiates thanksgiving. These times are expressed by psalms of new orientation (Psalms 29, 30, 34, 40, 47, 65, 66, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99, 114, 124, 138).

Orientation, disorientation, new orientation is just another way to express the flow of human life. In relationship with God, this flow is not simply developmental—it is transformational. It is about change, conversion and radical newness. It takes all 150 psalms to express this, not just a few of the nicer ones.

Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED
Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office have included MA Regina R.C. Abrera, Monina Abrera, Chris Adams, Gail Chambers, Rosemary Conrad, Ruth Engs, Stephen Frueh, Rev. Larry Jackson, Philip Jobst, Daniel Leal, Tom Lehr, Patricia Linder, Novice Michael Luckett, OSB, Tom and Joan Rillo, Eugene Ritter, Dennis Skelton, Jonathan Stotts, George Thompson, Br. Luke Waugh, OSB, Yvonne Weaver and Novice Timothy Wymore, OSB.

DEATHS
Mr. Bobby L. Stoltz of Lawrenceville, IL, died on May 23, 2010.

Mrs. Betty Tabor Woods of Springfield, IL, died on June 14, 2010.

Mrs. Magdalen Schwenk of Jasper, IN, died on June 14, 2010.

Mrs. Lorraine V. Bradley of Bloomington, IN, died on July 2, 2010.

Mrs. Catherine Kessens of Tell City, IN, died on July 15, 2010. She became an oblate in 1964 and was appointed along with her husband, Norman, as president and secretary of the Tell City Oblate Chapter in October 1969. She began taking minutes in November of 1969 and faithfully continued until September 2004, when she stepped down as coordinator of the Tell City Chapter.

Mr. George McLaughlin of Larchmont, NY, died on July 21, 2010. He had been an oblate for almost 60 years, was a founding member of the Farmingdale, NY, chapter, and was a good friend to many in the monastic community as well as oblates of the New York chapters. For several

see Oblate News, p. 9
An interview with Fr. Meinrad: The traditional Epiphany party

Q. How did the concept of the traditional Epiphany party originate? Who began this tradition?

In 1952, when I first came to the monastery as a student, Fr. Gerard Ellspermann, OSB, was the oblate director. He supported the custom of blessing the rooms of the minor seminary that was the high school at that time. When the students returned from Christmas vacation, the dormitories, classrooms, study halls and dining rooms always were sprinkled with holy water and incensed by the priest.

Chalk that had been blessed was used to mark the overhead doorframes. The letters signifying the first letter of the names of the Three Kings were used. An example would be 19+C+M+B+53. The first two numbers of the century were used at the beginning of the inscription, and the end numbers were the year.

When I came to the monastery in 1955, we still had the custom of blessing the rooms of the monastery. It was my first experience with the blessings of Epiphany. We continued this custom for several years. I would say that Fr. Gerard was indeed a pioneer of the custom of celebrating the Epiphany feast for oblates. He also extended the ritual of the Epiphany party to the oblate chapters. Although optional, Fr. Gerard encouraged various chapters to conduct an Epiphany party in their respective local settings.

Q. Did the chapters holding Epiphany parties receive guidelines for conducting this activity?

The oblate director or his representative went to each chapter to participate in the celebration and to provide the guidelines and instructions for the Epiphany celebration. Because of the number of chapters and their monthly meeting times, it took the entire month of January for all of the chapter parties to conclude. This put it beyond the 12 nights of Christmas.

Using the threefold manifestations of Jesus (the Crib, at the Jordan and at Cana), the format for the Epiphany party took form. In 1990, Fr. Gerard developed a manual depicting the guidelines and format. Epiphany means “manifest” and, through that, the Lord taking on flesh became visible. The party is enriched with psalms, hymns and readings from the Vespers of Epiphany, including the blessing of the Epiphany water, and the renewal of baptismal and marriage vows.

The house of the oblate/host was blessed with holy water and incensed. Blessed chalk is used to mark the front doorway of the house. The front door is selected because it is open to the light of Christ. In 2010, I prepared a manual for the traditional Epiphany party assisted by George Thompson, an oblate from Louisville, KY. This version of the Epiphany manual is used today by the oblate chapters that celebrate the traditional Epiphany party. I attend most of the celebrations or one of the other monks, such as Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB, will attend when I cannot.

Q. How many chapters are involved in holding Epiphany parties?

Of the 20 oblate chapters that are affiliated with Saint Meinrad Archabbey, only 10 have been involved, historically. The 10 chapters are Indianapolis, Sr. Meinrad, Tell City, Jasper, Evansville, Madison and Haubstadt, all in Indiana, as well as Louisville, KY, Columbus, OH, and Lancaster, OH. Louisville’s Epiphany party has been eliminated since the chapter no longer meets during January.

I have attended 150 Epiphany parties over the past 15 years that I have been oblate director. I have attended 10 chapter parties each year. I enjoy doing this, and it is not a hardship for me. It is a joyous experience, not only for me but for everyone involved.

Q. Would you like to see this tradition carried on by more of the 20 chapters?

Yes, but only if the chapters feel comfortable with it. I think they should try it once to see if it is feasible and desirable. It is a wonderful way to become intimate with the three manifestations of Jesus Christ. It is a beautiful way to conclude the Christmas season.

Q. The Epiphany party requires costumes, candles, incense, decorations, crib, statues, etc. How do the chapters access such needed materials?

I bring all of the materials needed. I have two large suitcases that hold the manuals, statues, a crib with bright red and gold cloth for the crib, incense and incense holder, candles
and the Three Kings costumes, including the crowns. Rose Ranno, an oblate from New York, provided the suitcases and helped me pack or replenish them during the years she was a sabbaticant at Saint Meinrad.

Q. I understand that some chapters have had difficulty with the selection of the Three Kings. Have they resolved this in any way?

Modification of the selection process has become interesting. In some cases, a cake is baked and allowed to cool before three objects (such as Hershey kisses) are placed within it. The three oblates (male or female) who get a piece of cake containing an object are then in the role of the kings. The oblates give witness as to what it means to them to be an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey. However, there is nothing wrong with other criteria for the selection. In the Indianapolis chapter, I saw three oblates chosen as kings from the oldest, the newest and the youngest. Their witness was beautiful to hear. They were diversified because they themselves were different. The Magi are a part of the threefold feast for Jesus manifests Himself to them, and the Magi should be included in the celebration.

Q. What do you see as the principal values for oblate chapters in continuing or adopting this tradition?

The principal value for oblate chapters is growing in appreciation of what the Epiphany feast is about. For example, the Gospel tells us that the Three Kings found Christ on entering the house (in this case, the stable and the manger). The door to the oblate’s home is a holy threshold. Those who enter can be blessed if there is an inscription above the door marked in chalk with the first two numbers of the year, +C+M+B, and the last two numbers of the year. Tradition tells us that the letters stand for the names of the Magi: Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. This is also interpreted as meaning Christus Mansionem Beneficat or “May Christ bless this house.”

The presence of Christ is a blessing to our homes, opening our homes and our hearts to the world. Oblates will come to realize that their homes, their families and their parishes are open and receptive to the Word-Made-Flesh dwelling among us. This is a most beautiful way to conclude the Christmas season.

Q. Do you feel this newsletter article will help to disseminate information about the traditional Epiphany party to those chapters not currently involved?

I think it will help in disseminating information. However, I reiterate that the chapters will have to want to do it and feel comfortable with it. No oblate chapter should feel compelled to hold an Epiphany party. Perhaps the word “party” might be misleading, although there is great joy within this tradition. It will further establish that our Lord is fully human and fully divine. The Epiphany party is a joyful prayer in its own right. The psalms, the Vesper readings and the hymns are a part of the fixed-hour liturgical prayer. If it is viewed in this light, then perhaps it will be more attractive to members of the oblate chapter community.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

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years, he was co-coordinator with his wife, Virginia, of the Westchester County Oblate Chapter.

Mrs. Mary Catherine Woodall of Huntingburg, IN, died on July 22, 2010.

Mrs. Dorothy Jean Cartwright of Evansville, IN, died on July 26, 2010.


Mrs. Mary Rose Hunter of Haubstadt, IN, died on July 31, 2010.◆

CHECK THE WEBSITE
Past issues of the Benedictine Oblate newsletter are available at www.saintmeinrad.edu.◆
Other monks who deserve thanks for their contributions are: Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, for generously donating the use of his art for the book; Br. Silas Henderson, OSB, for contributing the martyrology; Fr. Julian Peters, OSB, for providing the Office of the Dead; and Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, for his support and encouragement.

The oblates who contributed to the book are Mary Miller and Gail Chambers, who developed the rituals with Fr. Denis; Janis Dopp, who contributed the “Blessing of Oblates on Benedictine Feast Days”; and the Very Rev. Joseph McMahon, who wrote the “Litany of St. Benedict.”

Co-workers in the Saint Meinrad Communications Office and at Abbey Press handled the proofreading, layout and printing. They also produced the Liturgy of the Hours book that was published last year. As a result, the book looks like a companion to the Liturgy of the Hours book. The same nice soft cover and gold edging on the pages are used on both volumes.

Although the book was compiled and written for Benedictine oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, it is a prayer book that anyone may use. It offers a wide variety of opportunities to encounter God. It strengthens the belief that all moments are moments of prayer and it offers ways to integrate prayer into our daily activities.

In her book The Breath of the Soul: Reflections on Prayer, Joan Chittister writes, “If we miss the little things, we will soon begin to take love and friendship and blessings for granted.” Prayers and Rituals for Benedictine Oblates will help us to be more aware of “the little things.”

The book can be ordered from the Oblate Office at a cost of $20, plus $5 for shipping. To place an order, call (812) 357-6817 or e-mail oblates@saintmeinrad.edu.
Sharing the wealth—
About our chapters

Beginning with this issue of the newsletter, articles about chapter origins will be welcomed. Oblate chapters are invited to submit their “stories” of how their chapter came about, as well as what activities the chapter is doing at the present time.

**Bloomington, IN, Chapter**

In hidden ways, mid-March of 1991 proved to be a time of germination. Nancy Lux and I made a two-day visit to Saint Meinrad Archabbey, where we had gone previously for a couple of retreats. Our usual practices of attending Mass and having private prayer time increased the desire for God. Recognizing a need for something more, we asked questions about spiritual directors and were informed about the oblate program.

Meeting with Fr. Gerard Ellspermann, OSB, who was the oblate director at that time, he said that if we could gather a group together, he would drive to Bloomington to give us an introductory talk. In May, he did speak to 11 of us, of whom six decided to continue. He required us to wait three months to be invested, and in September we were invested at the Archabbey Church.

We began meeting in homes, praying Vespers and sharing our lives. Of the six, one eventually left the oblate formation and two others allied themselves with the Beech Grove community. In September 1992, Nancy Lux, Janis Dopp and I read our promises to God with our families and some monks at Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

Our final oblation was a solemn and joyous day of commitment for each of us! We knew we had found a way to deepen our connection with God, and that realization and reality filled us to overflowing.

The Bloomington home meetings remained small, with only three to seven members for several years. Fr. Michael Keene, OSB, had become oblate director and occasionally visited us to celebrate a home Mass and attend an oblate meeting.

In 1998, there was a burst of spiritual activity, and 15 additional persons seeking God made the decision to be invested. Eight of the novices made final oblation in May 1999 in the beautiful, refurbished Archabbey Church with Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, and many other monks present. Following that year of amazing growth, only one or several persons joined our chapter in any given year. With some of the oblates dying, moving or deciding not to pursue final oblation, our present number is 33 oblates with several more people interested in fall investitures.

Our communal evenings with one of the monks begin with a potluck supper at the parish, followed by Vespers and a conference. There is a strong camaraderie in our chapter with great enjoyment as we eat, pray and listen together. The past two years, on the feast of St. Scholastica and within the context of a regular daily Mass, our parish priest has given a special prayer and blessing to oblates as they stood before the altar as a group.

A few years ago, we began a mentoring program where novices and guests interested in becoming oblates are given attention and guidance by an oblate mentor, who is a wise and longtime member of our chapter. This has been well received and beneficial.

For about 15 years, we have had small group meetings between the regular monthly meetings, focusing on Vespers, intercessions and discussions of books centered on Benedictine spirituality. Further connection and support comes through our chapter secretary asking for prayer and using our chapter e-mail list to disperse the request to the members. We are grateful to have this prayer resource in place.

Realizing that flux in numbers is inevitable, we give thanks to God, who brought each of us into an awareness of this pathway for being a disciple of Jesus and who initiated our chapter and sustains it.

*Diane Rivera, oblate
Bloomington, IN*
**Reading Room**

*In Constant Prayer* by Robert Benson (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008) is a very readable book, beautiful in its simplicity. The oblate will discover that the writer brings his poetry to defining the fixed-hour prayer.

Benson is a critically acclaimed writer who has published nine books on contemplative prayer life. He is a graduate of the Academy for Spiritual Formation and a member of The Friends of Silence and of the Poor, an international ecumenical prayer community.

His books have ranged from those on prayer and spirituality to travel, gardening, the *Rule of St. Benedict* and even baseball.

Chapter 2, “Ancient Prayer for the Ancient of Days,” is an excellent historical presentation of the Liturgy of the Hours or Divine Office. He places the fixed-hour prayer chronologically at 6,000 years and 4,000 years before the birth of Christ. He traces the history of the Liturgy of the Hours to early Judaism, where worshippers said a set of daily liturgical offices at specific times of the day, such as daybreak, before the workday, noon, mid-afternoon, sundown/retiring and midnight. Benson gives full credit to the desert monks and nuns who kept the praying of the Office from dying out altogether.

He points out that the Liturgy of the Hours was not a consideration for the Protestant groups who came to the New World seeking freedom of worship. He does note that there has been some sporadic interest in fixed-hour prayers among Protestant believers, specifically the Lutheran and Episcopal churches.

Benson brings to the reader many examples of the benefits and liabilities of praying corporate prayer, as opposed to private prayer. He tried to quit praying with his group, but could not do so because of the need for continuity of prayer to grow closer to God. The examples he uses are both pragmatic and realistic.

Benson uses clear, simple language and avoids the difficult language of theological theory. This book is highly recommended for all oblates, as well as others who pray fixed-hour prayers.

*Thomas J. Rillo, oblate*

*Bloomington, IN*