



NAABOD Newsletter

Spring Issue

April 2019



Dear Oblate Directors,

I hope you are all trying to live these last two weeks of Lent with a joyful anticipation of the Paschal Triduum. The intense immersion into these holy days is certainly a reminder of our call to live out our *Suscipe* in the Paschal Mystery every day of the year.

As I write this, the words "*I am the light of the world*" in today's Gospel (Jn. 8:12-20) are imprinted upon my heart. Jesus is already proclaiming the Light of Easter glory to come. I am sure that each one of us can recall many holy luminous experiences throughout our lifetime, both within and outside the monastery walls.

As Oblate Directors, we are called to be the Light of the world as we share the Benedictine way of life with our Oblates. We are also called to bring the monastic community and the Oblates affiliated with our monasteries to holy relationship and service. How often we find that our times together are so joyful and profound. We nourish each other to live the life of seeking God together.

The upcoming 2019 NAABOD Biennial Conference at St. Benedict Center in Schuyler, Nebraska promises to be an uplifting experience for Oblate Directors, Associate Directors, and Oblates involved in leadership for their Oblate Chapters. The theme, *Continuing the Sacred Tradition: Benedictine Spirituality Today and Tomorrow*, is a timely one as our communities engage in future planning and look for ways that our Oblates can assist us in keeping the light of the Benedictine charism alive in our world today.

I am looking forward to our gathering at Schuyler. Let us keep the Nebraska areas devastated by the recent floods in our prayers. Please try to get your registrations in by the April 30th deadline so that we can get started on all the last minute details. Please send names of deceased Oblate Directors and Oblates to Vice-President Sister Celine Schock (see details on pg. 4).

Blessings on your Lenten/Easter journey,

Lovingly in St. Benedict,

Sister Priscilla Cohen, OSB

NAABOD President

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Sacred Heart Monastery

916 Convent Road NE

Cullman, AL 35055



North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors

Mission Statement

The North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors provides assistance to and ongoing formation for directors of oblates. It provides a forum for discerning needs and issues associated with this formation activity and guidelines for leadership and the oblate way of life.

NAABOD 2019 Biennial Meeting Conference

July 5-10, 2019

Schuyler, Nebraska

*“Continuing the Sacred Tradition:
Benedictine Spirituality Today and Tomorrow”*



Saint Benedict Center



Early bird registration due April 30, 2019. Registration information available at naabod.org if you need additional forms.

Thank you to Father Volker Futter, Oblate Director of Christ the King Priory, Father Thomas Leitner, Director of St. Benedict Center, and all the St. Benedict Center staff for their willingness to host our conference.

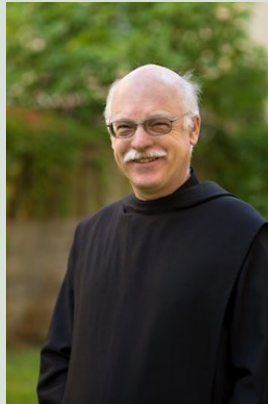
Website at <https://christthekingpriory.com/sbcabout/>



NAABOD 2019 Conference Speakers



Sister Rosann Ocken, OSB- Immaculata Monastery, Norfolk, NE



Father Joel Macul, OSB- Christ the King Priory, Schuyler, NE



Sister Marielle Frigge, OSB- Sacred Heart Monastery, Yankton, SD

NAABOD Annual Membership Dues

If you have not yet paid your Monastery's \$50.00 membership dues for January 1, 2019-December 31, 2019, please send check payable to NAABOD

**Mail to: Sister Priscilla Cohen, OSB
 916 Convent Road NE
 Cullman, Alabama 35055**

Oblate Director News

What exciting things are happening with your Oblates?

Please send any news you wish to share for future newsletters.

Please send content to Sister Priscilla Cohen— priscillacohen@hotmail.com

Service of Remembrance for 2019 NAABOD Meeting in Schuyler, Nebraska

Please send the names of deceased Oblate Directors and Oblates (July 1, 2017-June 1, 2019) to Vice-President Sister Celine Schock (celineosb@gmail.com) by June 1, 2019

Sister Celine Schock, OSB

300 No. 18th St.

Norfolk, NE 68701

Please be sure to include the name of your monastery.

The Service of Remembrance is scheduled for July 5, 2019.

Oblate Director Scholarships

for the 2019 NAABOD Conference are available.

Please contact Sister Priscilla Cohen— priscillacohen@hotmail.com

News from Oblate Directors



**Sister Antoinette Purcell, OSB, Our Lady of Grace Monastery
Beech Grove, Indiana**

OBLATES AND MONASTICS RELATE ACROSS PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

In 1998 a newsletter from the Alliance for International Monasticism (AIM) grabbed my attention. In it I read about the monastery to monastery program sponsored by AIM that invited Benedictine monasteries in North America to participate in a Lenten collection that assisted three Benedictine monasteries in Asia, Africa, Central or South America that requested grant funds for a special project. When I shared it with our oblate council to see if they thought our oblates would be interested in supporting something like this, their response was that they were interested but wanted to do more than just take up a collection for the annual Lenten program. They wanted to get to know a community, not just make a general contribution. They expressed a desire to be connected with a Hispanic community because they knew that several of our oblates could speak Spanish and could be the spokespersons to them for us.

Therefore, I contacted AIM and asked if they could provide me with a list of communities in South America that had oblates. I received the name and contact information for four communities. The council members took on the task of writing to the communities to ask if they would be willing to have an ongoing relationship with us. Two communities in Argentina responded. The information they sent to us about their foundation and circumstances indicated that one of the communities was a foundation off the other. The oblate council thought it best to take on both communities. That was the beginning of a relationship between the oblates of Our Lady of Grace Monastery and Gaudium Mariae Abbey in Cordoba and Our Lady of Parana Monastery in Entre Rio.

Since 1999 we have kept in touch with both of these communities, sharing news and pictures through email. We pray for each other, especially for special needs or intentions that are shared. We send our annual Lenten collection to assist them with their needs and the needs of those they serve. AIM is able to make sure the monies are transferred safely. We have learned much about the struggles and joys of these communities and it helps us to see beyond our own little space in the world. We know they are interested in what we are doing and that they are praying for us, too.

A few years ago, we became aware of another project we could do to assist monasteries in other parts of the world. AIM sends books to monasteries in Asia, Africa, Central and South America who can use them for their own formation or with those they serve in seminaries, schools, catechetical and retreat settings. These books are great treasures to them because they either are too expensive for them to purchase or they simply are not available. We began to collect books that people no longer want or need, box them up, and drive them to AIM's headquarters in Erie, Pennsylvania.

In 2017, I got to be one who helped deliver the books along with an additional donation to help pay postage for mailing the books to where they need to go. It was a great thrill to meet Sr. Ann Hoffman, office manager for AIM with whom I had been in frequent correspondence, as well as Sr. Therese and other staff members. I receive copies of their newsletters and share these with our oblates who enjoy reading them. They help us keep in touch with what is happening in Benedictine communities around the world. It broadens our horizon in many ways. If your oblate group would like to get involved with AIM, go to their website, aim@aim-usa.org.

Sister Patricia Heirigs, OSB

Sacred Heart Monastery, Yankton, South Dakota



St. Gertrude's Monastery in Cottonwood, Idaho, was the gathering place for the "Oblates for the Future Symposium" on October 8-12, 2018. There were over forty monastics and oblates present to help plan the future of Benedictine Oblates.

The symposium had three main goals: naming the current reality between the monastics and oblates, naming and claiming a vision of the future, and planning the next steps to move into the future.

Sister Mary Forman, prioress of St. Gertrude's Monastery, gave the keynote address, "Oblates in the Christian History of Religious Life." She gave an excellent presentation on the history of monastic life throughout the centuries. There have always been adult oblates associated with Benedictine Monasteries from the Middle Ages to the modern years. The current reality is that the aging monastic communities are decreasing in size, and the oblates are increasing in number. On the part of both the monastics and oblates, there is a sense of grief, and it is unclear how to deal with the loss.

The vision for the future of the oblates is that they are called to be more than "friends of the monasteries," but to take oblation as a life commitment to live Benedictine spirituality in all aspects of their lives. To be Benedictine Oblates can be seen as a form of a vocation, in the sense of being a call from God. Oblates will be more involved in the Benedictine Community, living in the world with an emphasis on their relationship with their Benedictine Community.

Dr. Jodi Kilcup, oblate of Mount Angel Abbey and Seminary, spoke of honoring the past, facing the reality of our grief, and fostering the courage to embrace the future. Dr. Kilcup used several symbols and rituals to help the participants envision the future of the oblates, along with letting go of the past.

In most of the monasteries that were present at the symposium, some form of appointed or elected oblate group shared responsibility with a monastic co-leader. In some cases the oblates took the total leadership of the oblate group; in others, the monastics still had all the leadership roles.

Janis Dopp, Oblate Director from St. Meinrad Archabbey, St. Meinrad, Indiana, gave an excellent presentation on how their oblate organization changed from having a monk as their director to a woman, who is their first lay director. Janis Dopp is that lay director and she reports directly to the Abbot of St. Meinrad's Archabbey. Janis Dopp shared the process of how they form their prospective new members. The twelve formation lessons are mailed to the new oblates and when they complete the assignments, they may ask to make their oblation.

It seems more monasteries are organizing their oblate groups with a special emphasis on the formation of the oblates. Dr. Charles van Leeuwen of Belgium spoke of the need for solid formation for the oblates. This formation is not only for initial formation before making oblation but a strong emphasis on how oblates continue to live their Benedictine commitment and how they continue to develop and grow in their spiritual life. Dr. Van Leeuwen said, "The spiritual life is an attitude of mind we must develop. Conversion requires us to grow and change, and requires on-going formation. The credibility of the oblate membership depends on it. The better the formation, the better the oblates are, and the better the community is."

Sister Teresa Jackson, OSB, of St. Gertrude's Monastery ended the symposium with these words, "Embracing oblates as people with a different, yet vital Benedictine vocation can allow monastics to see co-workers in the vineyard. Oblates can become the people who take our mission and charism to places we can no longer go. If oblates are seen as having a vocation, then formation matters. If formation matters, then oblates have a stake in the coordination and leadership in their groups."

Each monastic community and oblate group present were asked to focus on the next steps they will take in their communities when they return home. The symposium emphasized the need to have shared conversations about the identity and role of Benedictine oblates today. Participants were encouraged to discuss these ideas with other oblates and with members of their monastic community.

A second "Oblates for the Future Symposium" has been planned for September 9-13, 2019. Next year will be focused on Benedictine formation for oblates as well as supporting oblates' directors in developing a stronger role for oblates in our Benedictine monasteries.



NAABOD Regional Meetings

Region 4

Central Midwest Plains

Article Submitted by Oblate Carol Olson
Mount St. Scholastica Monastery, Atchison, Kansas

Regional Benedictine Oblate Directors of the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors (NAABOD) and Oblates met at St Benedict Center, Schuyler, Nebraska on September 8-9, 2018 hosted by Christ the King Priory and their Oblates. Approximately thirty-five were present for the gathering which included representatives from five area monasteries: Christ the King Priory (NE), Conception Abbey (MO), Sacred Heart Monastery (SD), Mount St. Scholastica (KS), and Immaculata Monastery (NE). The meeting began with a welcome from Sr. Celine Schock, OSB (Immaculata Monastery) and a brief presentation on Chapter 58 of the Rule of Benedict: *"above all, let them seek God"*. Attendees participated in discussions about the future of Benedictine Oblates in response to the Fourth World Congress of Oblates in 2017 held in Rome, Italy. Jodi Gehr and Steve Meysing, Oblates of Christ the King and attendees of the Fourth World Congress presented five themes of the Draft Vision Statements for Benedictine Oblates, which stirred lengthy discussions about the future of Benedictine Oblates. Several Oblates that had participated in previous World Congress meetings also shared their experiences. Currently, there are more Benedictine Oblates (25,000) than professed religious (21,000) worldwide. Many monasteries have aging members and diminished numbers of sisters and brothers. Some monasteries have closed.

Benedictine Oblates are important to the monasteries and assist the sisters and monks in understanding the world's concerns and joys. Abbott Primate Gregory Polan, OSB, describes this relationship as a "sacred triangle", with God on the top, the monastery in one corner, and Oblates in the opposite corner. The relationship between the monastery and the Oblate is a vital friendship and needs to be maintained, even, and especially, if the distance between them is long. The group discussed how each Oblate can impact a deeper bonding between Oblates and reaching out to lapsed Oblates, as well as how monasteries in this region can keep in contact with each other. Each monastery has their own individual character which is a hallmark of the Benedictine tradition. Small group discussions on current important topics such as managing destructive behavior in groups or individuals, keeping a balance in life, choosing leaders, consumerism, intergenerational interactions, and hospitality helped generate sharing of ideas and resources. Fr Joel Macul OSB, prior of Christ the King, gave a presentation on the future of Benedictine Oblates, encouraging each individual Oblate to be faithful "to the monk within", and expounded on the importance of several Benedictine charisms including balance, language, and the distribution of goods. The Regional Oblate Director/Oblate meeting included time for worship and community-building during meals and free time at the St Benedict Center.

"Stand firm, be stable in the tradition, and all that the tradition has will open up before you. What matters is being faithful now, and hope in God's mercy will take care of the rest." Fr. Joel Macul, OSB





Region 6 Midwest Woodlands

The Midwest Woodlands NAABOD regional meeting for Oblate Directors and Oblates was held at St. Meinrad Archabbey September 30-October 2, 2018. The theme of the gathering was *The Gift of Shared Leadership –Phase 2*.



Oblate Kevin Cheers (St. Scholastica Monastery, Chicago, Illinois) welcomed the participants and explained the overall process for the weekend. She explained that shared leadership involves listening to each other. Key items necessary for networking among monastics and oblates are conversation, contemplation, and community. As monastics and oblates listen to each other, it is necessary to identify affirmations and challenges, to be open to everything, and to be prepared to be surprised. Monastics and oblates are at a threshold of change as they work together to preserve the Benedictine charism.

Sister Patricia Crowley, OSB (St. Scholastica Monastery, Chicago, Illinois) was the keynote speaker.

Sister Patricia posed the following questions for reflection:



- ◆ *What does it mean to have the gift of shared leadership?*
- ◆ *What hinders change from happening?*
- ◆ *Why do oblates become oblates?*
- ◆ *Why do communities choose to have oblates?*

Sister Patricia shared that leadership involves the ability to influence others, integrity, and interconnection. All are called to be leaders of some kind.

Small group discussions on the following questions on Best Practices were shared:

- ◆ *How do you discern leaders in your community?*
- ◆ *How do you form leaders in your group?*
- ◆ *How would you, as a lay leader, communicate with religious leadership?*
- ◆ *How do you recruit new members to the oblate group?*
- ◆ *How do you “do” ongoing formation?*
- ◆ *How do you prepare new inquirers for oblation? With mentors, prayer partners, other?*



"Being Benedictine in the 21st Century: Spiritual Seekers in Conversation"

June 2020 Conference to Explore Living Benedictine Values in Our Evolving World

It is the nature of Benedictine life to listen intently and respond faithfully to the needs of every era, qualities that have enabled the charism to remain relevant for more than 1,500 years. How we respond, then, to the new questions and pressing needs of the 21st century will determine the ongoing relevance of this way of life for today's seekers.

Societal thinking and attitudes are changing like sand shifting under our feet. We face calls for reform in our church as well as changes within our country's economic structure, justice system and political discourse. Old ways are being challenged. Likewise, something new is being born. Even as church attendance declines and vocations dwindle, a yearning for lasting gospel values, moral leadership and deeper spiritual insight is evolving.

Our long history as Benedictines, our time-tested wisdom tradition, and our ability to adapt make us uniquely capable of addressing the longing for spiritual connection, community, and ways of living with integrity in an increasingly complex world. Our values of listening, community and consensus building, hospitality, humility, prayer and good work provide an antidote for these troubled times.

"Being Benedictine in the 21st Century: Spiritual Seekers in Conversation," planned for June 26-28, 2020 in Atchison, KS, marks a first-ever gathering of professed Benedictines, Oblates, staff, volunteers, friends and benefactors of Benedictine ministries and monasteries, and any seeker who has read *The Rule of St. Benedict* and experienced a conversion of heart. We will hear from speakers including Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister, one of our visionary spiritual voices, and Oblate authors Kathleen Norris and Judith Valente and engage in facilitated conversation and idea generation. We will put special emphasis on inviting the participation of Millennials, people in their twenties and thirties who often eschew formal religion but still seek an authentic experience of faith in action.

This conference will not dwell so much on exploring *what is* but rather it will focus on, *what are the important questions we haven't yet asked?* Through listening and dialogue informed by Benedictine values, the teachings of Vatican II and inclusive theologies—inclusive of women, the environment, the oppressed, the refugee—our goal is to come away from this conference with a new roadmap for spreading the light of Benedictine spirituality well into the 21st century.

For more information, www.beingbenedictine.org

Or contact conference co-chairs,

Linda Romey, OSB — linda@monasteriesoftheheart.org

Judith Valente, Oblate — jvalente17@msn.com

FOUND!

*In this life,
This spirituality,
I have been found!
I resonate at the deepest level,
Discovering truth beyond words.*

*In this moment, and others like it,
I overflow with Joyful, Blessed Assurance
Arising from this sacred sojourn—
The discovery of my truest sacred self.*

*Here, within the structure and constructs
Of a fully lived Benedictine Spirituality,
I find peace, truth, and
Astounding, Quiet, Splendor!*

*Here, I experience a synchronicity,
I am totally free to live within this soulful obedience,
Offered to those who “listen with the ear of their heart”.*

*Here, I access my spiritual family history,
As well as
The framework to fully live out life, and ministry.*

*I can await the Everlasting --
with
Patience and Promise.*

*Margo Hays
Benedictine Oblate Institute
Mount St. Scholastica Monastery
Atchison, Kansas
July, 2018*

The inspiration for “Found!” flowed from a reflection led by Judith Valente, at our recent Oblate Institute. She concluded with a rendition of , “I have been Found”, from the musical, “Dear Evan Hansen”. I was so overcome -- touched at the deepest level with authentic truth. The words immediately poured out during the subsequent time for meditation.

Later that night, as I re-read “Found”, I understood more deeply why I was so moved, and why the words had flowed so enthusiastically, and authentically earlier that afternoon. These are my insights from the night’s reflection.

”Now I understand why I am at home here in Benedictine Spirituality! With these Oblates I am at ease and free. They get Lectio, the urgency of social justice, care of the earth, and ongoing, evolving, spiritual conversion. Here, I find smart, amazing individuals of quiet peace.

I believe these individuals have a deep intimacy with you, Lord. They bring it to every action and environment and their Benedictine spirituality is deeply embedded in every encounter.

These are not perfect individuals, but they value wisdom, knowledge, relation, community, and the sanctity of each life, with all of these stemming out of their relationship with You.

Here, my Catholicism makes sense, and I find the constructs for stillness. I can relax and be more fully present within each individual encounter.

This, in combination with a desire to allow only the thinnest layer of humanity to remain enshrouding Your Blessed Quiet Splendor indwelling in all of us, calls me every more deeply to You and to a more responsive, less reactive, connected, purposeful life”

Amen!

Submitted by Oblate Margo Kays
Mount St. Scholastica Monastery, Atchison, Kansas



Oblate Retreat Weekend

Sacred Heart Monastery, Cullman, Alabama

October 12-14, 2018



Sister Betty Drewes, OSB (Monastery Immaculate Conception, Ferdinand, Indiana) led the annual retreat for the Cullman Oblates. The theme for the retreat was *Benedictine Path of Grace: Steps of Humility*. Sister Betty set the tone for the retreat as a journey of living the twelve steps of humility. She guided the Oblates on each step with Scripture passages and rule references, that if faithfully taken to heart, will deepen the quest for God.

Sister Betty offered the following wisdom: *"As a Benedictine Oblate, are your steps of humility leading you to a deeper and more fulfilling life? How are these twelve steps in the Rule of Benedict Chapter 7 enriching your spiritual journey? The steps to be explored are one's relationship with God through openness, listening, acceptance, and your relationship with others through honesty, forgiveness, and freedom. When you practice these steps with its twists and turns, you create a new dance of life! How will you perfect the dance of humility as you live the daily in an extraordinary way as a Benedictine Oblate?"* Time for personal reflection as well as group sharing was provided to share how to live faithfully the Benedictine path of grace.



Submitted by Judith Valente, OblSB (Mount St. Scholastica Monastery, Atchison, Kansas)
Communications Director, 2021 International Oblate Congress

2021 International Oblate Congress Will Explore Benedictine Spirituality for the 21st Century

The planning committee for the next Oblate International Congress has chosen “*Moving Forward: Living The Wisdom of The Rule*” as the theme of the 2021 Congress.

The International Oblate Congress takes place every four years and draws Oblates from across the world representing their respective monasteries. It is a great way to build fellowship among the worldwide Oblate community and to learn about the many ways Oblates in various countries are providing service and helping to pass on the Benedictine values of listening, community, hospitality, humility, prayer and work.

The dates of the next Congress are November 6-12, 2021. The venue is the Fraterna Domus convention center outside of Rome, the site where the 2018 Congress was held.

The 2021 theme underscores the importance of *The Rule* as a living tradition for the 21st century. The upcoming Congress will build on progress made at the 2017 Congress in which nearly 300 delegates adopted a five-point Vision Plan culled from several small group discussions about the future of Oblates life across the world.

Among the topics the 2021 Congress will address are Oblate formation, appropriate roles for Oblates within their monasteries, the challenge posed by the shrinking number of professed Benedictines, and effective ways in which to evangelize Benedictine values in the 21st century.

The planning team consists of more than 20 Oblates representing a dozen countries across four continents. Many of the 2021 team members also helped plan the previous Congress in 2017.

Father Benoit Allogia, a French-born monk of St. Vincent Archabbey in the United States, currently assigned to Sant’Anselmo Monastery in Rome, is in charge of the overall planning. He is being assisted by Father Pachomius Okogie of Nigeria, also currently in residence at Sant-Anselmo. Father Allogia succeeds Father Edward Linton of St. Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana, who has a new assignment at the Institute for Continuing Theological Education in Rome.

At the Congress planning committee meeting, Abbot Primate Gregory Polan announced that he and the superiors of several Benedictine monasteries are considering establishing an Oblate Commission. Abbot Gregory described the proposed commission as recognition of the increasing number of Oblates across the globe, and the important role they will be playing in passing on the Benedictine charism.

For the first time in history, there are more Oblates than monks and sisters – 25,000 Oblates compared to 22,000 professed Benedictines. Those numbers date back several years and likely undercount the actual number of Oblates today.

The planning team will keep Oblates informed of developments related to the Congress, such as ways to register and the selection of keynote speakers through social media updates and a quarterly newsletter. An Oblate Congress 2021 Google Docs page is in the process of being set up. Until then, Oblates can seek further information about the International Congress from their monastery’s Oblate directors, or by contacting the 2021 Congress communications director, Judith Valente at jvalente17@msn.com.



2021 World Congress Planning Committee