

From Sister Anita

Dear Oblates,

While New Year's Day is still a couple of months away, many of us consider the late summer and early fall to be a time of new beginnings. I think it stems from the many years we spend in school, starting a new school year in August or September. I know that's true for our sisters, many of whom taught for many years! And it holds true for you, as an Oblate community, as the August picnic signals the ending of one year and the rite of reception of new candidates in September begins a new year.

We sisters end our summer community meetings with a ceremony of missioning. It's a time to be sent for a new year into our life of prayer and service. At each missioning ceremony, the prioress shares a reflection with the aim of setting the tone for the coming year. At this year's missioning ceremony, I reflected upon the second half of our community's mission statement: "By our life and work, we commit ourselves to be a presence of peace as we join our sisters and brothers in the common search for God."

I shared with the sisters, and I'd like to share with you, that Peace is one of the main mottoes of Benedictines. Many of you, along with others who come to visit or spend time at our monastery, comment on the peacefulness of our monastery and grounds. This can only be so because of our intention of being a presence of peace and offering Christ's peace to all who come to our monastery.

Peace, though, seems quite fleeting. Mass shootings continue to occur in our country, and wars rage in Ukraine, Israel, Palestine, and multiple other nations. Polarization seems to be "just the way it is" in our society, in politics, and even in the church. Anyone who thinks or looks or acts differently is turned into the other...even the villain.

St. Benedict, too, lived in an age filled with violence. It was out of the turmoil of his time that the Rule was born. Through the Rule, St. Benedict established a different way of life, a Gospel way of living together that called for unity, peace, and listening. Through his Rule, St. Benedict calls us to act differently from the world's way.

I call on you, our Oblates, to join with us sisters in focusing on how we can be an intentional presence of peace: in our families, our communities, at the table, and in all our interactions. Our world needs us to be examples of Christ's peace. St. Benedict, we ask your intercession with God to help us be peacemakers. May peace reign in our hearts, our homes, and in our world.

Have a good year!

Sister Anita Louise Lowe, OSB
Prioress

A Anita Louise Lowe, OSB



From Our Oblate Director

Welcome to the newly reinstated newsletter for Oblates of Monastery Immaculate Conception! I'm sure we are all grateful to be returning to a more normal routine after the disruptions of COVID and its long aftermath.

Personally, I know that the isolation period emphasized the importance of being connected with other human beings. And that connection is always better in person. Virtual hugs just aren't as good. But, if in person isn't possible or safe, sitting down to talk on FaceTime or Zoom or to write a text or an email (or even a snail mail letter), helps invoke a feeling of connectedness with others. And we were so fortunate to have had Sister Brenda and an Oblate Advisory Board who embraced technology way before COVID forced everyone else to catch up.

As we move forward now in our commitment to The Rule, we recognize the importance of remaining connected to our fellow oblates, and, most importantly, the Sisters of our chosen Monastery. We are each a part of Monastery Immaculate Conception and our vow to support its mission and its Sisters is the driving force behind the plans being made for the next several years.

As COVID made us all look at our lives and reassess our priorities, the religious members of the Order of St. Benedict around the world are looking at ways to expose others to the Wisdom of The Rule. With diminishing numbers and heavy workloads, Oblates can support this effort in a real and visible way outside the physical boundaries of the walls where our religious brothers and sisters live.

Using the example of our Sisters in prayer, whether through Liturgy of the Hours, lectio divina, praying the Rosary, or any of its many other aspects, we continue our spiritual formation. The presentations that are planned will offer us concrete suggestions and thoughts on this development. As with all human endeavor, practice makes perfect.

*From left to right: Shirley France,
Sister Betty Drewes,
Stephanie Smith
and Lynn Belli*



How we live out our spirituality is what will bring others to the Benedictine way of life; just as the example of the Sisters brought us to the Benedictine way of life. It is obvious when someone is living the tenants of The Rule. Example: On my way to the NAABOD conference, I had a connecting flight in Denver. When I boarded the plane there, everyone was doing that frantic hustle to stow their carry-on, get their seat and get settled in. And the whole time, the flight attendants are admonishing folks to move as quickly as possible. Mothers are consoling crying children, friends are trying to rearrange seats and get seated closer together. I was just trying to shut out the noise and get the chewing gum out of my jeans pocket before takeoff.

Amidst this commotion, a woman was calmly moving to accommodate her seat mates and smiling. It was the smile that got me. It was genuine and it was kind. And I just knew she was also on her way to NAABOD. And she was. She was able to put aside her momentary discomfort to create a better experience for everyone. The hospitality of Benedictine life. The receiving of each as Christ. Just the smallest gesture can make a difference when it is treating others with kindness. We have what we need to continue being and increasing this kindness in our world.

The Sisters have blessed us with the wisdom and energy of Sister Betty to assist us moving forward as their Oblates. With all that she has to do, she still successfully juggles all the balls. She is always here for Shirley, Lynn, the council and me. She keeps us on our toes to ensure we don't get "lost in the weeds" or go astray. As our liaison, we are in frequent contact individually and as a group. All of the materials that we use or present to you have her approval and include any of her suggested revisions. Sister Betty, of course, is keeping Sister Anita Louise involved as well.

In addition to the time of the Prioress and our Sister Contact, the other sisters have been so thoughtful and supportive. As Shirley has talked with individual sisters about presentations, they have been incredibly generous of their time in learning about our goals and preparing materials that address and expand upon the themes that will help our growth. And Shirley has spent a great deal of time talking with the Sisters and others about formation. She has done a yeoman's job in laying out a solid three-year program.

And then there's Lynn. She has received assistance and support from many of the departments and the Sisters who direct those departments. Marketing and Mission Advancement have been keeping our website updated and providing us with help in creating new (or reinstated) projects. They have also included us in projects being created for the Sisters to see if we might wish to participate. Lynn herself has met deadline after deadline for organizational details, working with our volunteers and tackling every problem cheerfully and with positive results.

Because of all the above, I am the most blessed of all with an incredible team of enthusiastic, hardworking oblates which includes not only Shirley and Lynn, but each of you. When a call goes out for volunteers, you respond. The participation at our gatherings has been wonderful; I hope the energy you all brought on Picnic Day stays with us always!

The Oblate leadership team poses for a picture on the last day of the NAABOD conference in Schuyler, NE. From left to right: Shirley France, Stephanie Smith and Lynn Belli



I know that some of you have been reaching out to oblate brothers and sisters near you to get together for coffee or socialization. We have had a steady attendance for the Zoom rosary groups. Our book club should be kicking off soon as well. Engaging our oblate brothers and sisters in our daily lives not just at our gatherings is key to being a strong Oblate Community. And the number of Sisters who engage with each of us and attend our gatherings to be engaged with us is, I believe, our greatest blessing.

I am confident that we have all we need to move forward to expand our community and build on a very strong foundation to strengthen our own spiritual formation. After all, we have YOU.

God's blessings and peace on each of you and your loved ones.

Stephanie Smith, Oblate Director

Oblate Reflections

When I first contacted Monastery Immaculate Conception, it was through an email asking guidance for beginning a practice of praying the Liturgy of Hours. I had been captivated by that dynamic balance between work and prayer, during a day visit to a Cistercian Monastery in Iowa. At that time, I had no knowledge of Oblates. A year later, Sister Carlita reached out and invited me to come and see. While there, I did some spiritual reading from Esther De Waal's book, "Seeking God: The Way of St Benedict." What spoke volumes to me at that time, and still does, is that while life pulls me apart, I am strengthened at the core. Within that rhythm of work and prayer life happens, and we grow with it. After that exposure to monastic life, I was confident that, as it says in Psalm 27:13, "I will come to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." The question was why didn't my life look like that?

I made my oblation to the Monastery Immaculate Conception in 2008. Moving forward life happened: I was diagnosed with a degenerative condition of the retina; I retired from work; my husband, Don, died. At my core, I was strengthened by prayer and a knowing that every detail of my life was in God's plan. Becoming an Oblate was part of God's providential care for me. I live a distance, most of the time unable to be present at MIC. I call my state in life as being on the "Away Team," going where the Sisters cannot be, living out Benedictine Values to the best of my ability. I do this by getting to work in the community I live in, through a loving obedience to the needs of others and God's call. After Don died, I dug into the humus of life and joined the Garden Club, HA. It's about growing, and I was beginning a new relationship in life. In my garden, I sunk my roots deep into Christ and affirmed my faith through parish life, becoming a part of teaching the Confirmation Class and joining the beginnings of a Women's Bible Study, known as "Walking With Purpose." I look for ways to sow seeds of faith and hope, starting a card club for homebound. We call ourselves the "It's OK Girls" after an AGT golden buzzer star, Nightbirde, who said you can't wait until life is okay before you decide to be happy. In my flower garden there is a sign that says "We plant the seeds, God does the rest." God continues to surprise me.

I am forever grateful for the life lessons that I am learning through being an Oblate, for the dedication of the Sisters and Oblates to growing community using technology. I pray for the opportunity to bless others with the same blessings which I have received, thanking God always for you.

Ellen Stanton

Peace, Oblates!

Such a delight to share this first e-newsletter with you! It was so energizing to experience such enthusiasm with you and the Sisters during the August picnic. In September we welcomed the new candidates: Rebecca Byrd from Newburgh, and Doris Mohr, Lisa Kaszynski, and Sue Yochum, all from Ferdinand! Thanks to all who said “YES” to being their companions on their Benedictine journey this year. Sister Rebecca Abel’s presentation on the monastery artworks with Visio Divina was enlightening.

In the Rule of Saint Benedict, it states “your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else.” (RB 4:20-21) This means of course preferring nothing to Christ. (RB 72:11) As oblates, we engage in daily prayer, especially lectio, encourage one another in love to live the Gospel, and excel in living the Benedictine Way by listening with the ear of our hearts.

As we continue this journey together this year, let us engage in prayer, encourage one another (especially Sisters and Oblates) with support, and excel in good zeal with peace for our world. May Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica intercede for us “as we progress in this way of life with our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love” RB Prologue 49.

Sister Betty Drewes, OSB



On the Journey Together!

Taking vacations in Canada each year was the highlight for our family. Our parents enjoyed fishing at Lake Baptiste in Ontario, which had some of the best perch and walleye to be caught. We five stayed in a cabin with no electricity. It had an ice chest only big enough for milk and eggs. We got up when the sun rose and hit the sack once dark. Every day we ate the fish that my parents had caught early that morning. These family times away with my three brothers and my sister still hold some of the most treasured memories of my life.

Because it was about a 12 hour drive from Akron, Ohio to the lake, my Dad gave each of us jobs to do to help pass the time. Although none of us were qualified or skilled to do our assignments, Dad made sure we had on-the-job training in the car along the way. We weren’t always good at doing these jobs but it was fun to be responsible for the work we were given. It made each of us feel of value to the family.

One job was to calculate the average miles driven over a period of time. Another job was to manage the vacation budget with meals, gas expenditures and treats purchased at bathroom break stops. My job was to calculate the time it would take to get from one city to the next city by notating the speed our Dad could drive.

When summer vacation was over and I was back playing with friends who lived on our street, I asked them what jobs their parents gave them on the family road trips when on their vacations. My friends asked me what in the world I was talking about. You see, I thought every child got a job while in the car on the way to anywhere. My parents, at one time, were both teachers. They firmly believed that everything in life is a lesson and that all of life is on-the-job training. They taught us that we won't always get it "right" and that's ok. But it is our job to give it our best effort and to be open to learn. They recognized that every occasion is an opportunity to be formed, to think and act differently.

So, how will we continue to be formed as Oblates on our journeys? What will incline us to think and act differently? How will we distinguish ourselves in the world by the way we live our lives? How will we apply on-the-job life lessons to draw us closer to Christ, closer to each other and live out our Oblate promises?

Last January, Stephanie and I shared about the Four Pillars of Oblate Formation that were introduced at the Oblate World Congress in Rome in 2023. In workshops, Oblates from all over the world discussed ways to "be formed" using these pillars as the foundation about how to "Move Forward, to Live the Wisdom of the Rule," our Congress theme.

The Four Pillars of Oblate Formation



Intellectual Pillar:
preparing for a deeper understanding and appreciation for monastic history, including the theological and philosophical elements



Human Pillar:
developing virtues of honesty, integrity, transparency and accountability



Communal Pillar:
practicing and developing a growing awareness of charity, hospitality, and the needs of others



Spiritual Pillar:
experiencing with the other pillars, a life-long growth in holiness strengthened through prayer: Liturgy of the Hours, Lectio Divina and spiritual direction

Each pillar holds a rich instruction about how to live our Benedictine charism, how to be formed and apply on-the-job life training in our daily lives. For the next three years, our Oblate meeting presentations are planned as lessons rooted in these four pillars as our foundation. Let's ask ourselves these questions to prepare for our journey to move forward and live the wisdom of the Rule:

Questions for Reflection:

What have I done this past year to be formed as a Benedictine Oblate?

What Oblate Pillar of Formation do I need to learn more about to be able to live my promises with more intentionality?

What specific actions will I take to move forward in living the wisdom of the Rule in my ordinary, day-to-day life?

We all have work to do! We won't always get it right. That's ok. Saint Benedict teaches us to "Cheerfully receive and faithfully put into practice the advice of a loving parent, that by the toil of obedience you may return to God, from whom you have drifted by the sloth of disobedience."

Praise God! We're on this journey together at Monastery Immaculate Conception!
Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica, pray for us!

Blessings for the journey,

Shirley France
Oblate Formation Coordinator



Oblates Ann Ennis (left) and Shirley France (above) take time for fun at the 2024 August Oblate picnic, posing as Saint Scholastica



Congratulations to Sue Yochum, Rebecca Byrd, Doris Mohr and Lissa Kaszynski! Please pray for these Oblate candidates as they journey together with their Oblate companions.

Oblate 2024 - 2025 Season Scheduled Monthly Meetings

All meetings begin at 12:30 p.m. with Zoom sign-on starting at 12:15 p.m. For a Zoom link, please email oblates@thedome.org at least three (3) days in advance.

All times are **12:30 – 3:30 p.m. EST** in St Gertrude Hall, with the exception of Advent and Lenten Studies.

2024

October 20: *The Power of Touch* with Sister Mary Andre

November 16 - 17: Oblates Volunteer to Support Christkindlmarkt

December: Oblates Connect by Zoom (Date TBD)

2025

January 19: *The Human Pillar of Formation* with guest speaker Brother John Mark Falkenhain

February 16: *Spirituality of Food* with Sister Teresa

March 23: *Getting Real with God During Lent* with guest speakers

April: *Station of the Resurrection* (Date TBD)

May 18: *Liturgy of the Hours* with Sister Anita Louise

June - July: Oblate to Oblate Zoom (Dates TBD)

August: Activity with the Sisters (Date TBD)