

Mission Statement: *We, the Oblates of St. Benedict Monastery, Oxford Michigan, are Christian men and women sharing a common commitment to grow in the understanding of the Rule of St. Benedict in order to live it in the secular world, while maintaining a spiritual union with the Benedictine community in its spiritual life, prayers, and good works.*

The Director's Corner

Dear friends,

On a recent bike ride one “cooler than average” August morning, I caught the trace of something in the air. There seemed to be the vague hint of autumn on the wind and it took me back to a time twenty years ago when I decided that autumn was my favorite season. (Since then I’ve decided not to have a favorite season – in Michigan they’re all exciting and beautiful!). But at that time autumn was my official favorite season and I began to reflect again on why.

In autumn there’s a certain energy in the air, a freshness, a vitality. Not the vitality of springtime, exploding with new life. But there is something crisp and new, an energy that gets you moving, perhaps an energy that calls one to prepare for the inevitable winter chill. I think St. Benedict might even say something like this: “Autumn is the season of impending death”. I know that’s not a particularly cheery thought, but after all, it was Benedict who advises us in his Rule to “keep death before our eyes daily.” During autumn nature has a way of keeping death before our eyes as it prepares for the “death” of winter. And nature does this is with such quiet grace – and even a flash of color!

Over the course of a lifetime we are confronted with many “deaths”: the summer that has past, a season of our lives that may be passing, and certainly the people we have known and loved who have passed from our lives in different ways. Autumn has the power to teach us that we can also go forward with confidence and grace through the changes and “deaths” in our lives. Not without remembering and certainly not without mourning – but not without hope either. We can see how the crispness of the autumn air approaches the death of winter with peace and determination – and even with joy. And we learn that we can do the same. So that’s why autumn is still a favorite season!

God’s blessings on this and all the seasons of your life,

Fr. John

The Rule of St. Benedict

Comments and quotes below are taken from – The Rule of St. Benedict – A commentary in light of world Ascetic Traditions (Mayeul de Dreuille, OSB)

We know that St. Benedict wrote the rule as a guide for monks on how to live the monastic life as well as how to draw closer to God in all we do. But, how many of us realize how full of scripture the Rule is? Shown below is an example from the very beginning of the Rule. *“Note the impressive list of quotations or allusions to Scripture contained in these few lines. They show how the thought of the author is entirely impregnated with the Bible, an impression confirmed by the entire text of the Rule.”*

This short passage divides into three clear parts: an invitation to listen, a description of the spiritual combat and a prayer.

Prov. 1:8 ; 4:1	<i>Listen, my son, to the precepts of your master and incline the ear of your heart.</i>
Prov. 6:20	<i>Willingly accept and effectively carry out the advice</i>
(Deut. 6:4)	<i>of your loving father.</i>
Matt. 22: 9-10	<i>so that, through the toil of obedience you may return to him from whom you have separated by the sloth of disobedience.</i>
Luke 15: 11-32	<i>To you, then, whoever you may be, my words are addressed who renouncing your own will to do</i>
(Matt. 27:37)	<i>battle under the Lord Christ, the true King take up the strong and bright weapons of obedience.</i>
(2 Tim. 2: 3-4)	<i>First of all when you begin any good work, beg of him with most urgent prayer to bring it to completion.</i>

The scriptural references are in the left hand column; those in brackets being passages which are alluded to, without being directly quoted.

Things to Do in October

Both our monks and oblates have many opportunities to get together this fall, particularly in the month of October. It all starts with our annual fundraiser which takes the form of a Benefit Dinner / Raffle held on October 3rd at the Lake Orion Knights of Columbus. It’s always a wonderful evening with good food and fellowship – and the excitement of a reverse raffle! You can find the details under “Fall Events” below.

The following weekend we are reviving our annual “oblate field trip” by holding our monthly meeting on October 12 at St. Frances Retreat Center in DeWitt Michigan. You’ll find the address and more info below. Margaret Realy, a very gifted writer, gardener and one of our oblates, will speak to us about the contribution of the Benedictine Order to European agriculture (St. Benedict’s influence on so many aspects of culture is very noteworthy). There is also a beautiful collection of fall flora to admire on the retreat house grounds.

October wraps up with our annual retreat the weekend of October 22 -24. The retreat bears the very original title: “Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home - St. Benedict Meets Pope Francis”. Fr. Mark Stengel, the oblate director at Subiaco Abbey in Arkansas will prayerfully guide us through the Holy Father’s most recent encyclical helping us to understand how the Church’s teaching on stewardship and the environment are reflected in how St. Benedict teaches to care for and respect all persons and possessions.

Please consider joining your fellow Benedictines on some or all of these occasions that God has gifted us with during the month of October!

Fall Meetings and Events

Saturday September 12, 2015

3:30 – 5:00 pm **Book Study Meeting**

Lessons from Saint Benedict pages 121 -139

5:30 pm **Vespers** followed by a light meal

Saturday, October 3, 2015

Annual St. Benedict Monastery

Benefit Raffle and Dinner

Lake Orion Knights of Columbus Hall

\$125 Ticket includes dinner for two

and chance to win Grand Prizes up to \$2,000

Order tickets through **Br. Mark** at **248-628-**

2249 or via email at

giftshop@benedictinemonks.com

Saturday, October 10, 2015

“Benedictine Gardens: Labor and Love”

9:00 am – 1:00 p.m.: Presentation and tour by

Oblate and Author **Margaret Realy** at

St. Francis Retreat House: 703 East Main

Street, DeWitt, Michigan 48820

Coffee, donuts and lunch are included.

Please RSVP by September 30 to

oblates@benedictinemonks.com.

Friday – Sunday, October 23– 25, 2015

Annual Oblate Retreat: “Laudato Si’ –

On Care for Our Common Home: St.

Benedict meets Pope Francis”

at **St. Mary’s Retreat House,**

775 West Drahn Rd. Oxford, MI 48371

(Please see flyer on page 7 of this newsletter)

Saturday, November 14, 2015

3:30 – 5:00 pm **Book Study Meeting**

Lessons from Saint Benedict, pages 141 - 158

5:30 pm **Vespers** followed by a light meal

Saturday, December 12, 2015

8:00 am Conventual Mass followed by

Group Lectio Divina (optional)

Refreshments, 9:30 am Formation Meeting

“Practice, Practice, Practice . . .”

Presented on DVD by **Sr. Macrina**

Wiederkehr, O.S.B.

Ypsilanti Chapter

Saturday September 19, 2015

8:00 am Mass at St. John the Baptist Church

Followed by light breakfast at FOTM House

Located at 616 Washtenaw Ypsilanti, MI

9:30 am Book Study Meeting - Lessons from

Saint Benedict, chapters 7 & 8

Saturday October 17, 2015

8:00 am Mass at St. John the Baptist Church

located on Cross St. in Ypsilanti

Followed by light breakfast at Friends of the

Master House located at 616 Washtenaw

Ypsilanti, MI

9:30 am - Oblate Meeting – Topic TDB

Saturday November 21, 2015

8:00 am Mass at St. John the Baptist Church

Followed by light breakfast at FOTM House

located at 616 Washtenaw Ypsilanti, MI

9:30 am Book Study Meeting - Lessons

from Saint Benedict chapters 9&10

Prayers Offered and Answered

- In thanksgiving for the teaching and example of holy men and women in ages past and in our present day.
- For God’s blessing on Br. Mark Orcutt as he professes his solemn monastic vows.
- That our government leaders may be informed by the God’s wisdom and guided by God’s Spirit.
- In gratitude for the gift of life and the wonder of God’s creation.
- For the protection of all human life, especially the unborn and the vulnerable.
- That those who are incarcerated and those imprisoned by addiction may come to know God’s healing and mercy.
- For our family members and Benedictines monks and oblates who have died, especially Fr. Michael Malawy, an oblate of our monastery who died on July 24th.

When an Oblate Dies

An inquiry was made several years ago by one of our oblates about what would be expected at the funeral of an oblate in terms of involvement by the monastery, etc. As part of my response I worked with then Prior Fr. Dan Homan to establish some guidelines. Having looked at them again with our present Prior, Fr. Mike Green, I would like to offer at this time these important principles for all of us to be aware of in making funeral plans:

- 1) Funeral ceremonies are essentially a parish function. In fact we have not had a funeral Mass at St. Benedict's for anyone other than members of the monastic community. However, it is entirely fitting for representatives of the monastic and oblate community to be present at both the wake service and parish funeral Mass of a deceased oblate. For this reason, **the first and most important step** is to make sure the Oblate Director is contacted by the family so that the announcement of death and all the funeral arrangements can be communicated to the monks and oblates. Preferably, this notification should be made by phone and not via internet.
- 2) If the oblate would like a representative of the monastery to lead a service at the funeral home, this would be very appropriate as it gives the monks and oblates an opportunity to join once again in prayer with and for their deceased brother or sister. Because of our tradition of Benedictine prayer, we highly recommend that the service include a portion of the Liturgy of the Hours.

- 3) To recall his or her commitment to living the gospel in the spirit of St. Benedict, the deceased oblate may wear some form of the Benedictine medal or Benedictine crucifix medal around his or her neck.
- 4) The monastery and oblate representatives who attend the funeral may assume special roles (e.g. concelebrating the Mass, proclaiming the readings, bringing up the gifts, distributing Holy Communion, etc.) as desired by the deceased and with due respect for the participation of the oblate's family members and the policies of parish in which the funeral takes place. The deceased oblate may also request that one of the priests of St. Benedict Monastery preside at the funeral liturgy as long as this is properly arranged with the pastor of the church.

I'm hopeful that having these policies in writing will help affirm our unity as a Benedictine family and give a stronger sense of the relationship that each oblate has with the monastery. I encourage you to save a copy for your reference.

May God bless us all in our continued striving to do his will as followers of Christ and as monks and oblates of St. Benedict Monastery!

Peace and blessings,
Fr. John

N.A.A.B.O.D. 2015

From July 10th through the 15th the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors (NAABOD) met at Subiaco Abbey in the warm, sunny town of Subiaco Arkansas.

The gathering takes place every two years and is hosted by one of the member communities. This year's event drew a total of 70 Benedictine oblate directors and their oblates from monasteries around North America. Our own St. Benedict's Monastery was represented by Fr. John Martin Shimkus who was accompanied by oblates Brian and Mary Beth Balaze.

Mary Beth was particularly touched by being "surrounded the whole time by others who just seemed to live the whole experience of being 'Benedictine' in their talk, their manner and their attention to caring for all things."

The conference was themed "Nurturing Benedictine Spirituality: From Theory to Practice" and featured several keynote speakers. Brian provided this insightful description of these gifted men and women who have both studied and lived the Benedictine life for decades:

"Fr. Jerome Kodell is a former abbot of Subiaco and a world renowned scriptural expert. He had experience and wisdom seeping out of him and spoke in a grandfatherly way, eyes twinkling, passionate and kind. "

"Next was Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr, a nun from St. Scholastica's Monastery in Fort Smith, AR, about an hour from Subiaco. Well in her late sixties or early seventies, she had the energy and curiosity of a woman in her twenties – kind of like a favorite aunt. She was an absolute joy to we do dully, unless we do it deeply.....and we seldom do'. I have spent more than a little time pondering that."

"The author of The Benedictine Toolbox, Jane Tomaine, was our next speaker. She was tall and graceful. She almost walked in a contemplative manner and in her calm and gentle way she suggested that we could give things that we're wrestling with to God. Both Sr. Macrina and Jane Tomaine have websites that contain all sorts of good things including blogs. They're great places to spend some time the next time you're online."

Fr. John shared that among the most appreciated aspects of NAABOD gathering "was the opportunity to experience the kind of hospitality that Benedictines are known for. Meals together, trips to nearby Mount Magazine, St. Scholastica Monastery and Post Winery, along with the daily rhythm of liturgical prayer offered us a time of grace-filled renewal that better prepared us to help strengthen the spiritual life of their own Benedictine communities." Perhaps Brian summed it up best by saying, "All in all, it was a wonderful four days spent with people that inspired me to be better. You can't ask for more than that!"



A Celebration with our Benedictine Family

Our Oblates from both the St. Benedict Monastery Chapter and the Ypsilanti, MI Chapter gathered in the chapel at St. Benedict Monastery on Saturday, July 18, 2015, to celebrate the Solemnity of Our Holy Father St. Benedict, which falls on July 11th.

The day began with Mass celebrated by Fr. Gregory-David Jones. Following the homily our Prior, Fr. Michael Green, accepted the final oblation of Oblate Phyllis McCaffrey. Among those present to witness Phyllis' long-awaited oblation were her children and grandchildren.

Following the ceremony, those present who had already made their oblation renewed their commitment following in the way of St. Benedict. We congratulate Phyllis and assure her of our continuous prayers.

Following Mass the group moved across the drive to Subiaco Retreat House and were joined by the monastic community to continue the day with the annual Oblate Picnic. The oblates brought the side dishes and other treats while the monastery provided the hamburgers and hot dogs grilled to perfection by the oblates' "Master Griller" Al Knasinski. A good time was had by all and if anyone left hungry it was their own fault!



Reflections from the Annual Oblate Retreat at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota

One of our oblates, Jim O'Brien, attended a retreat at St. John's in July. He was deeply touched by these words of Fr. Meoska, O.S.B.

"So our lives are a continual process of coming and becoming; we have not yet reached the end! Soren Kierkegaard once said that no one can say he or she is a Christian, only that he or she is becoming a Christian . . .

What Kierkegaard says of Christianity in general is true of our individual vocations, in particular:

No one can say he is a monk or priest in the fullest sense; only that he is becoming a monk or priest. No one can say that he or she is a spouse in the fullest sense; only that he or she is becoming a spouse. None of us can even say that we are fully human, fully alive only that we are (hopefully, by grace) becoming more human, and more alive.

So, until the moment we die, we are constantly growing into our given vocation, actualizing the graces given, and overcoming the diminishing effects of Original and personal sin. . ."



Annual Oblate Retreat
Friday, October 23 through Sunday, October 25, 2015

**“Laudato Si:
On Care for Our Common Home”
-St. Benedict Meets Pope Frances -**
presented by Fr. Mark Stengel, O.S.B.
Oblate Director of Subiaco Abbey, Subiaco, Arkansas

at St. Mary’s Retreat House
775 West Drahn Road
Oxford, MI 48371



Cost: \$160* per retreatant. Please make check payable to St. Benedict Monastery. Send name and payment to David Rose at 930 Holmes Apt. 1 Ypsilanti, MI 48198, by **October 16th** (to ensure an accurate count).

* As always, we don’t want financial constraints to prevent anyone from joining the retreat. If the registration fee is prohibitive for you, please contact Fr. John for help!

Retreat begins Friday, October 23
with sign-in and registration at 5:30 pm and dinner at 6:30 pm. The program starts at 7:30 pm.

Retreat ends Sunday, October 25
with 9:30 am Mass at St. Benedict Monastery

A Murder of Crows

A murder of crows swooped loud and large into the back yard. Their boisterous cawing drowned out the traffic noise from the other side of the house. The littler song birds flew away— in fear or possibly annoyance. Whatever morning peace existed departed with the winged invasion.

The crows, and there were maybe twenty, landed heavily in the top branches of trees. They hopped and cawed, spread their expansive wings, and bobbed their heads while raising a ruckus. Usually I'd smile at their arrival; they made me think of the rowdy laughter from a gaggle of adolescent boys.

Of late it sounded like mockery. The dark feathered devils seemed to call me out on my regrets and mistakes. They reminded me with each caw what I cannot forget.

By our very nature, regrets surface when mortality lands heavy on the branches of our maturing life. I've matured to the age where having a few health issues with my heart is not a surprise, nor am I filled with fear by the implications. What disconcerts me is the awareness of regrets that still darken my soul. Mistakes I've made that wounded others, for which I have apologized, ask for or gave forgiveness, and when needed, confessed before a priest. I assumed I had moved on from those mistakes, forgiving myself for what God had forgiven. Apparently not.

The gang of crows reflects their and my coarse behaviors. They evoked unwanted memories, and flew away—leaving me to my own questioning.

The black birds have gone for awhile. They will return—the brutes. And I will welcome them, sad and grateful. Saddened by the realization that I still have not fully forgiven myself and grateful for the knowledge of where the work of my soul still lies. I welcome those dark devils that lead me to turn toward God.

*Have mercy on me, God...
wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin...
My offenses truly I know them;
my sin is always before me...
you love truth in the heart;
then in the secret of my heart teach me
wisdom...purify me O God. (Psalm 51)*

Oblate Margaret Realy

St. Benedict Monastery

2711 Drahner Road
Oxford, MI 48370

phone 248-628-2249

www.benedictinemonks.com

oblates@benedictinemonks.com
prayer@benedictinemonks.com

Please pray for vocations

Odds & Ends

The Prodigal You Love, Inviting Loved Ones
Back To The Church
by Sister Theresa Aletheia Noble, FSP

Do you have family members or loved ones who don't go to church anymore? Sadly, most of us can answer yes to that question. Sister Theresa has written the book you have been looking for. She tells her story in the first chapter; how she was born Catholic, turned atheist at 14 and had a conversion 10 years later. The second chapter is devoted to humility, a subject dear to us Benedictines. She reminds us "like no two snowflakes are alike, neither are the reasons people leave or reject the Catholic Church". Some of the things she touches on are: how to recognize when silence is best, unhealthy motivation, learning from Mary and the Holy Spirit, relativism, individualism, saints, and evangelism.

It is available from amazon and Pauline.org
~Mary Andrews

The following website was extremely helpful to me as a novice in the program. The website is for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Their home page is: <http://usccb.org>.

You can access this site and be made aware of the readings of the day. This site is also very helpful with the Liturgy of the Hours. The website is filled with information to help us with our daily prayer life.

Blessings,

Oblate Phyllis McCaffrey

It was Christmas time when my father passed on December 6, 2004. My gift from my parents that year was a book, St. Gertrude the Great. Upon reading it I discovered her birthday was the same day as my father's January 6. That confirmed my decision to take St. Gertrude the Great as my name. Later as I told Father John I discovered that this was his birthday too.

~Mary Tremonti

A friend that I work with on RCIA in Lapeer, Vico Botello, recently published a book entitled "A Journey of Faith". It is available through all the major book stores and Kindle.

I may be a bit prejudiced, because I knew him while this was going on, but I think that this is an excellent read. Imagine being in your late 40's and learning you had only 6 months to a year to live.

This is a gripping story that demonstrates the power of faith and trust in the Lord. As I said, I know Vico and figured I knew the story. When I picked up this book, I could barely set it down.

Oblate Al Knaisinski