

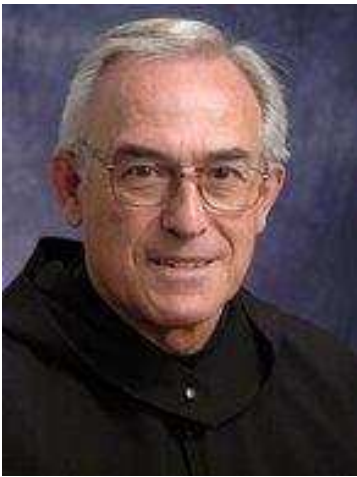
# The Oblate

*News Magazine of the Oblates of Saint John's Abbey*

October 2016

Volume 60, Number 3

## Fall Day of Reflection — November 20, 2016



### Monastic/Muslim Dialogue: What Might that Involve?

Using the final part of “Strangers No More,” the documentary film on Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, I will comment on the various issues that are raised (as well as on some that are not raised) and the special contribution that a “monastic” approach to dialogue can have in Christian/Muslim relations.

**Fr. William Skudlarek, OSB**, a native of central Minnesota, is Secretary General of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, an international organi-

zation of the Benedictine Confederation that promotes and supports interreligious dialogue at the level of spiritual practice and experience among Christian monastic men and women. He serves as a consultor to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican.

He entered Saint John's Abbey in 1957 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1964. He has a PhD in Homiletics and Liturgics from Princeton Theological Seminary and taught undergraduate and graduate theology at Saint John's University for more than twenty years. He also served as Dean of the School of Theology and Rector of the Seminary.

In 1985 he entered the associate program of the Maryknoll Missionary Society and was assigned to Brazil for five years, where he ministered primarily to sharecroppers in the state of Minas Gerais. In 1994 he was asked to become a member of the priory of Saint John's Abbey in Japan and served there for a total of ten years. During this time he began Zen training with the Sanbō Kyōdan in Kamakura and was invited to

join the North American Commission for Monastic Interreligious Dialogue. In 1999 he was made a knight of the Order of the Southern Cross by the Brazilian government in recognition of work on behalf of Brazilians living in Japan.

He has written, edited, and translated about twenty books in the areas of homiletics, spirituality, and interreligious dialogue, plays cello in community orchestras and ensembles, and is a translator for the Ethnological Museum of the Vatican Museums.

*Registration is necessary for our preparations, and it is easy: simply inform the oblate office that you will attend.*

*Email: [oblates@osb.org](mailto:oblates@osb.org)*

*Phone: 320-363-2018*

### Cost: Free-will offering

9:30 Arrival in Great Hall

10:30 Community Eucharist

11:30 Lunch in Q264

12:45 Group *Lectio Divina*

1:30 Fr. William's Conference

2:30 Discussion and Prayer

3:00 Departure

## Message from Abbot John



The Congress of Abbots meets every four years in Rome. Thanks to improved technology, each abbot was equipped with a portable device allowing simultaneous translation in English, Italian, French, German, and Spanish.

Our main task this year was the election of the Abbot Primate for an 8-year term. Earlier in the year, each congregation had identified major issues facing the worldwide confederation and identified possible candidates from their midst. In our preparation for the election, we were able to get to know the full slate of candidates, assess each one's experience, specific strengths and challenges. The sequenced steps of preparation were a vast improvement over past elections. By election time, the congress could vote with confidence that the individuals on the slate were the right ones. Abbot Gregory Polan (from Conception Abbey in Missouri) was elected and there was great rejoicing and good feeling, about both the process and the outcome of the election.

A moment charged with emotion for all of us was Abbot Primate Gregory renewing his profession of faith. On a simple stand rested the Saint John's Bible, open to the Gospel of John. With his hand on the first page Abbot Primate Gregory read the profession of faith, surrounded by the assembly of some 250 abbots. It was made more significant for us at Saint John's because of the illumination from John.

This congress marks the confederation's *operational* awareness that the Benedictine order is truly global and Sant' Anselmo, in its processes and governance, must reflect this richness and complexity. Thus, the assembly urged Abbot Primate Gregory to form an advisory council that is truly representative of the global Benedictine order. One abbot from Africa noted the value of thinking of and appreciating beauty, order, and integration. However, we also have to be able to appreciate ugliness, confusion, and disintegration in our world. He was clearly speaking out of his experience of Africa, but we can also relate to these qualities in other parts of our world.

## Message from Father Michael



On August 24<sup>th</sup> eleven CSB/SJU students, a sister from Saint Benedict's Monastery, and I had the opportunity, along with 2 1/2 million young people, to attend Sunday Mass with Pope Francis at World Youth

Day in Krakow, Poland. Everyone arrived Saturday afternoon, so we spent the whole night sleeping on the ground of Campus Misericordia to hear the Holy Father's message to us at Sunday Mass the next morning.

He challenged all of us saying, "My friends, Jesus is the Lord of risk.... Jesus is not the Lord of comfort, security, and ease. Following Jesus demands a good dose of courage, a readiness to trade in the sofa for a pair of walking shoes and to set out on new and uncharted paths."

Pope Francis was calling us to discover that the new blessing is outside our comfort zone. What this takes is humility to respond. Benedictine values claim that humility is one of the greatest of human virtues. Humility is being empowered to use my gifts, which God has given me, and offering them for the greater good. Humility is the path to happiness because we remember just how connected and interdependent we are with God and with one another.

In Philippians 4:13, Saint Paul writes: "I can do all things through Christ who loves me." Christ empowers, and he does so with the greatest force in the world: Love! This love is intimate and personal – "who loves *me*." Saint Paul was empowered by Christ's love to offer his life for the world. What is your "all" that you can do through Christ?

Jesus is the Lord of Risk. A pilgrimage to Poland for World Youth Day was a blessing way outside my comfort zone. I'd never done anything like that before. So I offer you something to really think about: literally, just say over and over and over in your head and heart, "The blessing is outside my comfort zone." In humility, then, let's all take some risks outside our comfort zone.

The blessing awaits us.

## July 2016 Oblate Retreat

July 16, 2016 was a fruitful day for oblates. As pictured at right, Father Michael enrolls Dennis Adams and John McKnight as candidates. From North Carolina they found us by searching on the internet for the abbey web site and then began a monthly correspondence with Father Michael.

Pictured below are (L-R) Jerry Liddell, Sally Haik, Alex Duval, and Richard Jessen with Father Michael and oblate retreatants witnessing their final oblation during Vigil of Sunday. Not pictured: Abbot John and the monastic community welcoming them.



The retreat, led by Sister Christian Morris, OSB, was well received, as evidenced by the following comments.

◆ My first retreat. Couldn't have been better. ◆ Appreciate the setting; Sr. Christian's excellent conferences; prayer with the monks; sacrament of reconciliation. ◆ It was life-giving and really gave a boost to my spiritual life. ◆ Strengthened my reflection, study and practice of RB. I get how it ties to my spirituality in the Episcopal faith. What a journey. ◆ Pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Kateri Tekakwitha was nice addition. ◆ Fr. Michael is most appreciated in his role as

oblate director. ◆ The opportunity to spend extended time in community, both with fellow oblates and members of monastic community. ◆ The schedule worked well for a group event. ◆ I like that the oblates are being regarded much like a parish ministry (Family Ministry) of the monastic community. Especially appreciated are the increased opportunities for volunteer service by oblates to and with the community. ◆ I am peaceful with prayer here. ◆ Would like more time for group lectio. ◆ It might be a good idea to gently remind people that you accept donations.

*Editor's note: Yes, we do gratefully accept donations.*

The night I learned I had cancer, after the doctor who tested the fluid in my lung telephoned and said that the markers were for ovarian cancer, before I even met with the oncologist I wrote this prayer in a document titled “cancer diary”:

Let me fall into it—the need for care and the offer of care from others, the helplessness, let me let go when needed.

Let me not worry about all the outside for which I’ve been so responsible.

Let me let go, move away from all that if only for a little while. For this time.

Let me walk with grace through it, the indignities and pain and need, whatever bad food or lack of appetite.

In the middle of the night,

let me have hope and peace and love.

One thing that has surprised me the most in the eighteen weeks of chemotherapy, and the eight weeks now waiting for the surgery, is the peace I’ve felt, and the gratitude.

So many people have been praying for me, so many people telling me they love me and about their hopes for me, that I have been able to “fall into it” and stay in the present, an important thing for people being treated for a terminal illness. I am not a particularly grateful person, and various gratitude practices, like daily writing down three things you are grateful for, seem to make me more sour. But right from the beginning of this diagnosis and treatment, I have felt tremendous gratitude.

I heard and was warned about the loneliness and isolation of treatment. But I really didn’t feel that at all. It seemed like every day there were presents, cards, including postcards from a friend in Dubai! There were Facebook messages and phone messages and e-mails. So many people from throughout my life checked in and just let me know they were thinking of me and praying for me.

In my cancer diary I continued to write about what to pray for: peace of mind, good sleep, the ability to tolerate the chemotherapy, its efficacy to wipe out all the cancer present, no more surprises, no more bad news, and the spirit and energy to follow the treatment plan. People were asking if there was something specific they or their prayer group could pray for, so I suggested specific intercessions: for a great oncologist; the

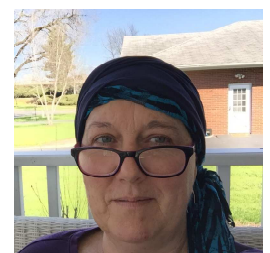
removal of obstacles to treatment or recovery; relief from side effects, particularly neuropathy, and strength to do a book event plus a conference where I was a speaker.

During this time, someone gave me Deanna Thompson’s memoir *Hoping for More* about her own cancer journey. Deanna is a theology professor at Hamline, and in her book she says that what surprised her was her inability to pray for herself during her cancer treatment. (I thought this was a big confession for a theology prof in a spirituality memoir!) Yet it was the thing that has resonated the most with me. I couldn’t pray “for” myself. I couldn’t find a way to Jesus or Mary or any saint to “talk to” or ask to intercede for me. But at all times I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit, the presence of God. I saw God in others very clearly, and was buoyed up constantly by the love and prayers of others. But when I said prayers *to* God, it felt oddly hollow. At Mass, I sang, and one song during the Easter season made me cry, but I felt mostly like a receptor, sitting in the pews receiving, than my usual feeling as an active member of the Body of Christ. Of course, that is probably the point of being a member of the Body of Christ. The church around me sustained and supported me, and not just during Mass.

When people find out you have cancer, pretty much the first thing they say is: “I’ll pray for you,” or “You’ll be in my prayers.” Or even: “I’ll send light and love to you,” “You’ll be in my thoughts,” or “Sending good mojo for all that lies ahead.” I’m happy to take it all, the prayers and the mojo. And throughout I have considered what it is I need most—how people can pray for me in a way that is helpful in that moment.

Ann Lamott identifies three types of prayer she calls “Help Thanks Wow” in her book by the same title. The one that has evaded me in these days, and where others have picked up the slack, is the “help,” the intercessory prayer. And that has left me with two other prayers: “Thanks and Wow.” And to live in that gratitude and with that awe has been the biggest surprise about cancer.

Susan Sink is an oblate of Saint John’s Abbey. She has been writing about cancer at [susansinkblog.com](http://susansinkblog.com) where she used to just write about growing vegetables, cooking, and watching movies.



## A Distant Oblate: Murray McDonald

I was reading the winter edition of the Abbey Banner today and the thought occurred to me that I may be the Oblate who lives furthest from Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota.

My wife and I live in a small town 25 miles north of Edinburgh in Scotland. We have two adult daughters and two grand-daughters. I worked in Customs Investigation for 30 years and then retired early for health reasons.

I had always been very interested in, and read a lot about, the monastic life. I became an oblate of Fort Augustus Abbey on the shores of Loch Ness (the one with the monster!). Sadly, due to declining numbers and the age of the monks, the monastery had to close.

My thought then was, "What do I do now?" There are no other Benedictine monasteries in Scotland and it was impractical to travel to England. I researched the OSB websites and found that most were in the USA. From among these I was attracted most to Saint John's as it seemed to be a very vibrant community with much oblate activity. After exchanges of e-mails with Father Don, who was then the oblate director, I transferred my final oblation to Saint John's in 2011.

As I knew I would never visit the Abbey I was worried that I would feel isolated. Quite the opposite turned out to be the case. I receive the Abbey Banner by post and the Oblate Newsletter online. I also correspond with a couple of fellow oblates.

Becoming an oblate at Saint John's has made me feel part of a community. Although thousands of miles away, I feel I am in touch with the Abbey. As I am retired, I have time to pray the Daily Office (Lauds, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline). This, in itself, makes me feel part of the monastic community.

Finally, if any of my spelling seems strange, remember George Bernard Shaw's words that "We are divided by a common language!"

## From a Monk and Poet

*("I will walk the way of perfection." Psalm 101:2)*

I have had it with perfection.  
I have packed my bags,  
I am out of here.  
Gone.

As certain as rain  
will make you wet,  
perfection will do you  
in.

It droppeth not as dew  
upon the summer grass  
to give liberty and green  
joy.

Perfection straineth out  
the quality of mercy,  
withers rapture at its  
birth.

Before the battle is half begun,  
cold probity thinks  
it can't be won, concedes the  
war.

I've handed in my notice,  
given back my keys,  
signed my severance check, I  
quit.

Hints I could have taken:  
Even the perfect chiseled form of  
Michelangelo's radiant David  
squints,

the Venus de Milo  
has no arms,  
the Liberty Bell is  
cracked.

"Perfection, Perfection" by Kilian McDonnell, OSB, from *Swift, Lord, You Are Not*. © Saint John's University Press, 2003. Reprinted with permission.

The situation seemed impossible! It had started out as a morning excursion to a nearby site, The Springs, in the Judean Desert. Since we had an average temperature of over 100 degrees for the last two months, The Springs drew us with visions of “cool, clear, water.” Little did we realize the road, then the trail, then the rocky inclines and declines would leave us sitting in a dried up wadi under a thorny skeleton of an acacia tree.

Ahead of us was an incline. Behind us lay an even steeper decline. The one ahead had a forty-five degree curve about one third of the way up. Jim tried it. The engine roared. He tried it again and again and again and spun out every time. I prayed to El Shaddai, the Hebrew God of mountains and wind. I stretched out my arms as Moses did for victory in the time of battle. I sang aloud so El Shaddai would hear me. I pleaded with Abraham who had walked in this Israeli desert. Nothing. Nothing but the wind.

My mind reminded me of the gentle breeze that spoke to Elijah in one of the caves surrounding this same desert. Nothing. I asked God to send at least two angels to help us. Nothing. We started walking.

It was 1:30 PM, the hottest part of the day. Avoiding the road that had not a single tree offering shade, we trekked down the wadi conserving our water and resting often in the scattered shade of dried out trees.

Somehow, my heart never faltered. God would not have brought me to Israel to die in the desert. I thought of Abraham who went forth as God called. He has been my guide for the three summers I've volunteered in Israel. He “went out, not knowing where he was to go.” This experience in the same location helped me realize the strength of Abraham's faith. Did he have enough water? Did he have enough food? He was not only responsible for himself, but for the entourage of people and animals traveling with him.

Over and over, the Scripture passage says, “by faith”! What is faith? “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.” Abraham, the great father of multiple religions was the man of faith, par excellence.

Faith and hope are brother and sister. In the desert, we “walked by faith and not by sight” as our water dwindled. The hope that an angel would rescue us



also dwindled as the sun moved westward casting shadows ... delicious shadows. The inner core of my strength weakened and I began to be afraid we would be trapped by the night.

Yes, the wadi was full of animal tracks, signs both consoling and frightening. Somehow, I still had tracks of hope in my heart that God would send help. I prayed with every step. I became aware of my breathing. Stop and rest. Stop and rest. I ate a few dried blossoms from a tree. They wet my mouth. There were no cell phone connections. Only God! Somehow, we trekked on.

At 6:30 we found Hwy 227 and sat on roadside rocks. A car going in the opposite direction stopped. Evidence of faith? They poured water into Jim's empty container. Ah! Our first angel but still no rescue! There were no cars going in our direction at all. Dusk was falling.

God, another angel, please? An old truck with a red flag standing straight up in back, stopped. A ride, please? A ride? Hope rose! Our second angel gave us more water and it was cooler.

Would God send a third angel? We continued to walk. According to a road sign, we had twenty kilometers to go. Darkness. Piercing my exhaustion, a tiny glimmer of hope survived. God's sheltering hand was still hovering over us. Through the darkness, I spied a truck with a red flag off the road about fifty feet. The Bedouin driver was on his knees, head touching the ground. He was praying. As we walked past, he stood up and waved. My mind called out, "Yes. Hello! And thank you for the water!"

But then, he got into his truck and drove out to us! He signaled us to get in. He spoke no English. He got out and opened the back door for me. A gentleman! A big smile. God sent our second angel back to us! All I could say was, "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" When we arrived back, I pressed shekels into his hand, but he pressed them right back into my hand. "No, no." Jim handed him American dollars, receiving the same response. God bless this Muslim Bedouin, this son of Abraham, who saved two Christians who were trusting in the same God

who just has a different name.

The next day after showers and gallons of cold water, we were strengthened. But the ordeal was ongoing. Our vehicle was still resting under an acacia tree in that deep wadi. Faith and hope still stood in my heart. Whom to call? Who spoke English? Where to get phone numbers?

At noon, finally a connection! And God sent a third angel. This time, Jewish. We finally contacted an Israeli park ranger. His dark good looks were heightened by a smile and open attitude. He spoke beautiful English! He drove us back to our "waterloo." Would his 4x4 truck be strong enough? Again, faith and hope joined hands in my heart. I prayed as he towed us up that steep incline, slowly, slowly, slowly! Alleluia! Success! Success! Thank you, God! God of the mountains. God of the wind. God of the wadi. God who keeps promises.

*Our flimsy faith and hope were rewarded. God watched over us as promised again and again and again.*

The ranger said he wasn't supposed to do this, but.... All he accepted was our thanks.

We were not prepared for this experience. It came like a "thief in the night." We didn't expect to be stranded in 100-plus heat with no cell phone service and only about two liters of water between us. The situation seemed impossible. We were in desperate straits!

Our flimsy faith and hope were rewarded. God watched over us as promised again and again and again. What do we need to fear? God, help me remember who you are!

Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.  
RB Prol 48-49

When I first heard about the Divine Office, it sounded quixotic and strange. Pray the book of Psalms? At fixed hours? All 150 of them? What for?

The Book of Psalms, in my opinion, needed work. I could not visualize myself praying, "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth" (Ps 58:6) or "Do I not hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee?" (Ps 139:21). The Bible says that I am supposed to love my enemies; the psalmist seemed to have skipped a page or two.

But one day I happened to obtain a copy of *The Book of Common Prayer*. It contained "offices." Purely in the interest of theological inquiry, I prayed through one of the offices and felt a powerful connection with a praying church worldwide that felt quite significant. It seemed that what needed work was *me*, not the Book of Psalms!

So I looked into the matter, and found out some things that anyone wishing to pray the hours definitely ought to know. First off, I learned that when the Book of Psalms was written, it was considered *virtuous* to wish harm on your enemies. Jesus would come and change all that, but the psalmist(s) lived a long time before Jesus was born. Revelation is progressive; God doesn't tell you everything at once. He doesn't microwave, He *marinates*. Very likely the average psalmist, if briefed about our modern scruples concerning enemies, would want to know: "Hey, whose side are you on, anyway?"

If I could not visualize myself praying "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth." I *could* visualize myself praying:

*Be ye sure that the Lord, He is God:*

*It is He that made us, and not we ourselves.*

*We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.*

Reading those words, I realized that I would never, ever get tired of hearing them.

Some people I know feel that it is wrong to "recite" prayer (even the Lord's Prayer) and say that prayers in the Bible are meant only as models, framework. We must always use "our own words." But consider: Are you saying that God does not *know* what you

are going to say, whenever you speak with Him? Face it: To God, it's all repetition. Some things we say in our own words and some things we say in unison as the Church. There's nothing wrong with that; there's something right about it.

The Divine Office built structure and much-needed discipline into my life of prayer. It introduced me to the eternal dialogue of holy souls with the Lord of Life, resounding through the ages. It taught me that the words "pray incessantly" mean *pray without giving up*. It was what I needed to know and needed to do. It amazes me to this day that God would take a perfectly ordinary man, full of silly ideas, and fill his hands with gold.

~~~~~  
RB 19:

*We believe that God is present everywhere and that the eyes of the Lord behold the good and the bad in every place (Prov 15:3). Let us firmly believe this, especially when we take part in the Work of God. Let us, therefore, always be mindful of what the Prophet says: "Serve the Lord with fear" (Ps 2:11). And again, "Sing wisely" (Ps 47:8). And, "I will sing praise to You in the sight of the angels" (Ps 138:1). Therefore, let us consider how it becomes us to behave in the sight of God and his angels, and let us so stand to sing, that our mind may be in harmony with our voice.*





## Remember the Deceased



**Chuck Seashore, ObISB**, age 83, died unexpectedly on June 27, 2016. The oblate community benefited from Chuck's abilities, interests, and contributions, which were many. He was an accomplished engineer, a soldier,

a prolific writer of technical papers, an athlete and for 30 years a coach of girls and boys basketball teams. Saint John's Abbey welcomed him and his wife, Dolores, as oblates in 1999. Both were generous members of the advisory board, where Chuck's no-nonsense chairmanship kept us on our toes. A Benedictine to the end, Chuck's funeral Mass was celebrated on July 11, the Solemnity of Saint Benedict, when monks make profession and celebrate jubilees.

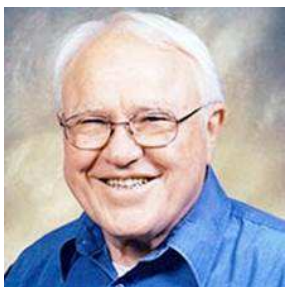
+++++



**Father Mike Tegeder, ObISB**, age 67, died peacefully July 9, 2016 with his family by his side. He was the nephew of our former confrere, Father Vincent, and was an oblate since the 70s. Those who knew Father Mike from his

parishes speak highly of his outstanding pastoral heart—a life of Gospel values par excellence! Kevin Bellin wrote: "Father Mike is a hero. He led with his heart and head; a gentle soul with a deep conviction and voice of reason."

+++++



**John C. Massmann, ObISB**, age 84, died unexpectedly with family by his side on Monday, August 29, 2016. John was born on October 1, 1931 on the family farm in New Munich. He graduated from St.

John's University, Collegeville in 1954 with a Bachelor's Degree in Social Science. John was an oblate of Saint John's since January 30, 1955.

**Obituaries of monks:** <http://www.saintjohnsabbey.org/monastic-life/history/obituaries/>

**Brother Paul Fitt, OSB**, 8 December 1945—2 June 2016

**Father Martin Rath, OSB**, 9 June 1922—16 August 2016

*In 1971, then-Brother Martin Rath contributed an article entitled "Poverty in the Church Today" to the Symposium volume on Monastic Poverty published by the monks of Saint John's Abbey. The following is an excerpt read at Father Martin's vigil service.*

Probably the most civilizing virtue of our great age is not its stylistic art and music, or its dynamic scientific progress, nor its probes into outer and inner space, but its almost universal compassion for the poor. Only a part of Judeo-Christian civilization can explain this ethical thoughtfulness ... despite the veil of failure covering the Christian institutions. Is not this the great scandal of our times that Holy Mother Church has not been able to inspire her people to do great things, to make great sacrifices for the poor as she once did during the first three centuries of her existence?

Only by the saving grace of the saints in our ranks from age to age has the Church been able to survive all the corruptions and power thrusts that surround and harass her. These disciples of Christ caught the imagination and ideals of the youth of their age and did something about it. Maybe this is the one thing lacking in our modern apostolates, the true spirit and the nature of discipleship.

Would that I, too, could reach and teach a multitude or even a few disciples who would both practice and preach a few lessons that commonsense teaches us about supply and demand, namely: (1) There is food and goods enough in the world for everyone if each one shares what he/she has. (2) Nature is very bountiful, but people in their greed wasted the land, poisoned the water, and polluted the air. It is time for us to reverse this process. (3) [Twenty-first] century people must re-learn how to eat, drink and be moderate in all things. (4) We all know it is better to give than to receive, but how many of us practice this pious and grace-rewarding instruction?

Dorothy Day was a Christian woman and oblate of Saint Benedict, a woman of conviction, compassion, constancy and action. She may best be known for co-founding the Catholic Worker Movement and her dedication to social justice causes especially for the homeless and the American worker.

Some of our Saint John's monks and others of our oblate community met her and heard her speak on occasion. She was friends with Virgil Michel, OSB, one of the Abbey's most well-known workers for liturgical reform and founder of Liturgical Press. She also was close to Thomas Merton, OCSO, and many other notables in the Benedictine/Cistercian community who shared her love for God and social justice.

Her life was a convoluted path of loves and losses, failures and dead ends, discoveries and triumphs. Her eventual conviction to a life of seeking God and doing the work of God is a worthy example of the oblate life. While her way of living her oblation may not be the same as ours, there is much that we can learn from her in the ways that she lived her oblate promises.

### Oblate Promises

At the time that we make our final oblation and one or more times each year we recite the following:

"Peace, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, amen. I make/renew my oblation and offer myself to Almighty God and our Holy Father Benedict as an oblate of Saint John's Abbey, and I promise as my state in life permits:

Stability of Heart,  
Fidelity to the Spirit of the Monastic Life,  
and Obedience to the Will of God."

The meaning of these promises is dynamic, something to be discerned from the day we first make them and through our life as long as we choose to be oblates. Lawrence Freeman, OSB, writes:

*"Being an oblate is not a legalistic undertaking. The Rule of Saint Benedict itself is a highly flexible document that demands to be interpreted and has received very diverse*

*interpretations throughout its history. In the same way the life of an oblate is not bound to a set of rules and regulations. The Rule is a yardstick, a way of seeing the straight in the crooked. It is not in the Benedictine spirit to have a book of rigid rules."*

Given that there is no set definition of my oblate promises, I have found it helpful to recite them daily and to pray for discernment of God's meaning for them in my life. I invite you to do likewise.

At an earlier time in my life as an oblate, I didn't pay them much attention, thinking that they were poetic words with lofty meanings that didn't relate much to my daily life. I have come to believe that they are important, immediately relevant words that state a promise that I have made. They are not merely good intentions implying "I could or I should" but "I will" by the grace of God. The phrase "as my state in life permits" is not a cop-out or excuse for not taking these words seriously but a clear invitation from God to apply them to where and with whom we live. I can and often have carelessly said "no, not now, maybe later" to God, but how much better to unequivocally say "yes."

**Stability of heart**—Dorothy Day lived this promise by loving God through her compassion and commitment to the poor, the homeless, and those seeking to earn a basic living. What does stability of heart mean to you?

**Fidelity to the spirit of the monastic life**—Dorothy Day had a love for the Psalms, for prayer and tireless work to benefit those who most needed help. In what ways do you live the spirit of the monastic life?

**Obedience to the will of God**—Dorothy Day once when she was asked about her goals, disappointed her interviewer by suggesting that there was no clever plan. "We just went with our hearts, and we prayed and prayed for direction from God and his Son." How do you discern the will of God? We need to discern God's will and share our particular gifts in the world. The potential results, God willing, are unlimited.



## *Rule of Benedict, Chapter 53: Hospitality, A Way of Life*

Saint Benedict's teaching on hospitality in Chapter 53 is becoming a life style for me. "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ."

I'm learning to smile at interruptions like door bells, a friend dropping in on a day that was already too busy, telephone calls, and change of plans. I have more patience waiting for an appointment or seeing the mess in the basement play area left for me, instead of the grandchildren, to pick up.

A Benedictine nun invited readers to be hospitable with the diminishment of aging. I'm learning to greet forgetting a name or paying a bill, having to say no to commitments, and accepting the discomfort of aches and pains with less angst. I believe I will grow old more gracefully, which is good news for everyone!

A new aspect of hospitality, for me, is learning to receive it from others. At the grocery store the clerk asks, "Can I carry your groceries to the car?" Usually I respond, "No, thank you. While I can, I will." My children offer to come up to help me. "No, I think I can do it." I want to grow in receiving.

A few years ago God blessed me with an experience of giving and receiving that continues to inspire me. One bitterly cold Sunday morning I heard a helicopter fly over my house and saw a woman standing alone in the deserted hospital parking lot across the street. I remembered my lonely, traumatic wait when my husband, John, was loaded onto the heli-

copter. My first response was to go to be with her. Then came hesitation: "Should I? I am a stranger." I did go and simply put my arm around her and said "It's so hard." Soon a car came speeding into the parking lot and as the young woman reached her mother, she said to me, "I prayed someone would be there with my mom." Hospitality given.

Eighteen months later I received a card in the mail from this woman who lived in a town 30 minutes from Melrose. She had been searching for my name so she could thank me. Hospitality received.

The following questions are part of my examination of conscience occasionally.

What could I do differently to become a more hospitable person? Is hospitality a set of actions or a way of life for me – or both?

Blessings, Peggy Stokman, OblSB



Elizabeth Welcomes Mary



**The Oblate**

THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED

NEWSLETTER OF THE OBLATES OF SAINT BENEDICT: *published three times annually (February, June, October).*

SAINT JOHN'S ABBEY, BOX 2015, COLLEGEVILLE, MN 56321

OCTOBER 2016

VOLUME 60, NUMBER 3

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Collegeville, MN 56321

## Looking Ahead

**November 20, 2016: Fall/Advent Day of Reflection**

**March 19, 2017: Lenten Day of Reflection**

**July 14-16, 2017: Annual Oblate Retreat**

**November 19, 2017: Fall/Advent Day of Reflection**

**Regular Chapter Meetings** at Collegeville, Red River Valley (Fargo), Joan of Arc (Minneapolis), and St. Paul Oblates.

See website for details: [www.saintjohnsabbey.org/monastic-life/oblates/reg/](http://www.saintjohnsabbey.org/monastic-life/oblates/reg/)



**Publisher:** *Abbot John Klassen, OSB*; **Oblate Director:** *Father Michael Peterson, OSB*; **Assistant Oblate Director and Editor:** *Father Donald Tauscher, OSB*; **Editorial Assistant:** *Brother Aidan Putnam, OSB*; **Layout:** *Josie Stang*; **Printing and Mailing:** *Mary Gouge*; **Circulation:** *Cathy Wieme*.

Contact Oblate Office: 320.363.2018   [oblates@osb.org](mailto:oblates@osb.org)   Website: [saintjohnsabbey.org/oblates/](http://saintjohnsabbey.org/oblates/)