



# Benedictine Oblates of Nebraska

September 2004

## OBLATE ASSIGNMENTS & ORIENTATION

### LINCOLN CHAPTER

**Orientation Sessions:** Sunday, Aug. 29, 7-9 p.m., North Commons Cafeteria, Madonna

and Monday, Aug. 30, 7-9 p.m., Flanagan Room

**First Sessions: Sun., September 12, 2004** 7-9 p.m. North Commons

**Mon., September 13, 2004,** 7-9 p.m. Flanagan Rm. Text: Path of Life, Ch. 1: Listening, pg. 1-14

*New books General Assembly and Cells available at orientation sessions!*

**HASTINGS CHAPTER,** St. Michael's Church, Family Room

**Sat., September 11, 2004,** 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Orientation of new members presented by all members.

*New Books for Cells will be available.*

**STEINAUER CHAPTER,** Banquet Hall, across from St. Anthony's Church

Monday, September 6, 2004, 7-9 p.m.: Orientation for new members presented by all members. *New books for General Assembly and Cells will be available.*

### OMAHA CHAPTER

**Orientation,** Tuesday, September 14, 2004, 7:30-9:30 p.m., St. John Vianney Catholic Church, 5801 Oak Hills Drive OR Tuesday, September 21, 2004, 7:30-9:30, All Saints Episcopal Church, 9302 Blondo, Omaha.

**First Session:** All Saints Episcopal Church, 9302 Blondo Tuesday, September 28, 2004, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Text: Preferring Christ, Interlude II, pg 46 and beginning of Monastic Virtues.

Chapter 5: Obedience and Chapter 6: Restraint of Speech, pgs. 47-51.

## NEW BOOKS FOR LINCOLN CHAPTERS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLIES AND CELLS:

You can stop by and get them at the orientation sessions scheduled above or you can make arrangements with me (Sister Phyllis). New books will be available at the first meetings at Hastings and Steinauer

## GREETINGS TO ALL OBLATES, NOVICES AND INQUIRERS:

What a wonderful summer we have had in this part of the country! Here it is near September and we have not had the tense heat. Only one of the many things that we can be grateful for! It has been a wonderful summer for me. I attended the annual summer Monastic Institute at St. John's in Collegeville on Lectio Divina and it was inspiring/helpful.

The "faith-sharing" that we do at our monthly General Assembly meetings would also be considered "lectio." There were a large number of Oblates attending and I do want to encourage you to consider attending this next summer. You can find it at [www.csbsju.edu/sot](http://www.csbsju.edu/sot). The Oblate retreat at the monastery was attended by 52 Oblates and Father Justin gave outstanding conferences. He noted that Benedictines have a culture of beauty, exemplified through the liturgy, the arts, writing and the environment. Let's keep that in mind as we make our daily decisions. We also had our first regional "Upper Midwest Oblate Director's Meeting" at the Schuyler Retreat Center attended by Oblate Directors from five states. While we share the great Benedictine traditions and characteristics, we also have great respect for the autonomy of each local monastic community and oblate groups.

## WORLD CONGRESS FOR OBLATES IN ROME - September, 2005

Thank you all for your interest in the World Congress of Oblates opportunity. For those of you who may not know, **Carol Olson** has been chosen as our representative for Sacred Heart Monastery and has happily accepted the honor. **Marti Fritzen** has been chosen as the alternate. I am most grateful to the many of you who said you would be willing to assist in this expense. I will be visiting with you in more detail about this. The year, 2004-2005, will be exciting for us as we prepare for this wonderful event for Oblates, world wide. If you wish to know more, see [www.oblatesworldcongress.com](http://www.oblatesworldcongress.com).

**BUDDY SYSTEM:** For those of you who do not have email, I would like to recommend that we have a "buddy system." There are times when something important comes up and there is no easy way to reach those without email. I do not expect that this will be used very often. For instance, if we have a special event that comes up or when one of our Oblates died, I wanted you all to know. If each of you without email would ask someone with email to be your buddy or someone with email might also invite someone to be their buddy.

**HOME BOUND MINISTRY:** I learned that some Oblate programs have a Home Bound Ministry. I would like to suggest that we consider doing this. I believe there are times when it would be appropriate for us to visit another Oblate in time of illness or crises. If several of you would be interested in starting, organizing and being the coordinators of such a ministry do let me know. Then we will get back to you with more details.

**CELLS:** The Lincoln Cell group leaders are preparing to begin their meetings again this fall. All of you may attend these gatherings, including all who started last fall. These smaller groups will enrich your Benedictine community life. If you have not attended and wish to do so, do let me know at 488-6731 or [phunhoff@ix.netcom.com](mailto:phunhoff@ix.netcom.com). The new members



starting this fall will be meeting with the Companion leaders; Marti Fritzen and Mary Lu Long,

**BOOK REVIEW: THOUGHTS MATTER** by Mary Margaret Funk, OSB: I am a new Oblate. My wife and I made our final Oblation in November of last year. Since that time I've been searching for and reading Benedictine books to try and understand more about the Rule and how it applies to me in my own secular life. Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, OSB, has written a great little book for beginners like me, and I suspect that Oblates of many years standing will find something in these pages to use for their benefit. *Thoughts Matter* is a slim book full of great advice. The first paragraph tells the story. "God is our heart's desire. According to John Cassian, a fourth-century monk, three renunciations are required of us if we are to be on this journey. First, we must renounce our former way of life and move closer to our heart's desire, the interior life. Second, we must do the interior work (of asceticism) by renouncing our mindless thoughts. This renunciation is particularly difficult because we have little control over our thoughts. Third, and finally, we must renounce our own images of God so that we can enter into contemplation of God as God." This book is about the second of the three renunciations, renouncing mindless thoughts.

There are groups of mindless thoughts that play on the loop running incessantly in one's mind, thoughts that impede spiritual growth. These are thoughts about food, sex, things, anger, dejection, acedia, vainglory and pride. Sr. Funk explains that thoughts, the random ones that run through your head while shopping or driving your car or walking the dog, follow predictable patterns or groups. They are recurring thoughts running through our consciousness, leading to desires, and ultimately to passions.

The ancient monks gave practical advice to spiritual seekers on how to deal with these clusters of thoughts. John Cassian taught his followers in the desert, men and women, to seek God by knowing their thoughts. "A mind at peace, stilled and available for conscious thinking at will is of major value for those who confront chaos, confusion, noise and numbness as we move into the third millennium." Thoughts alone do not equal salvation. Deeds alone do not equal salvation. Deeds must be accompanied by the right intentions, or thoughts.

The first layer of these thoughts is food, sex, things, anger, and dejection. The second layer of thoughts is thoughts about thoughts. They deal with motivation, purpose, meaning and intention. The purpose of moving into this second layer of thoughts is to move away from one's deluded self and toward God. If that happens, a relationship with God emerges.

These pages are too short to delve very deeply into Sr. Funk's book but the following are several examples. Thoughts of food, sex and things all pertain to the body. Thoughts of anger and dejection deal with the mind. And thoughts of acedia, vainglory and pride are evidence of spiritual sickness. So, these thoughts are as important to lay seekers today as they were to monks in Cassian's time. The Rule refers to Cassian's writings 146 times. This indicates that Father Benedict placed a great deal of importance on thoughts too. This is hard interior work, and must be done on a daily basis.

Sr. Funk says that thoughts about food are basic to human existence. The thoughts about food relate to our openness to fasting, allow us to practice moderation, and to eat when it is time to eat and fast when it is time to fast. Following these practices encourages a person to remain in balance, which is a Benedictine ideal. We are to eat what is given at the appointed time and in the appropriate location and the proper season. I recall my older brother's vow to give up fresh corn on the cob for Lent.

Thoughts about sex strike a very deep chord. Thoughts about sex do not usually focus on the beloved, but on physical or emotional needs he or she represents. The teachings on sex follow those on food, because the disciplines on fasting and silence that control gluttony also control lust. Sexual thoughts can dominate a person's consciousness and freeze him or her in endless thinking, about lust. Such a person cannot love God with his or her whole mind, body and soul, they cannot love anyone else either. Prayer is a great weapon in this battle. Chastity is heart work and one of the fruits of a chaste life is to be innocent. A soul is open and his or her heart is not divided.

Anger rises in everybody. Thoughts about anger are frequent. Sometimes they are habitual and even seem to be uncontrollable. Cassian advises us that we must reduce angry impulses, refrain from acting out in anger, and avoid even the thought of anger. Anger is a consequence of original sin. It diminishes a person's ability to gain insight. Even works of justice, like throwing the money changers out of the Temple, ought not be accomplished with anger. Of course, the first step is to recognize angry thoughts. Then the energy produced by the anger can be redirected to a more appropriate response.

I hope that you will read *Thoughts Matter*. I'll leave you with the strong recommendation that you take up this little book and begin to understand that thoughts really do matter.  
George Green, Oblate, Lincoln

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