



Benedictine Oblates of Nebraska

Living by the Spirit of The Rule of St. Benedict + Associated with Sacred Heart Monastery
www.nebraskabenedictineoblates.org + info@nebraskabenedictineoblates.org + **December 2015**

A Word from St. Benedict's Rule

PRAYING IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

"We believe that the divine presence is everywhere and *that in every place the eyes of the Lord are watching the good and the wicked* (Prov 14:3). But beyond the least doubt we should believe this to be especially true when we celebrate the divine office.

"We must always remember, therefore, what the Prophet says: *Serve the Lord with fear* (Ps 2:11), and again, *Sing praise wisely* (Ps 46(47):8); and, *In the presence of the angels I will sing to you* (Ps 137(138):1). Let us consider, then, how we ought to behave in the presence of God and his angels, and let us stand to sing the psalms in such a way that our minds are in harmony with our voices."

Source: *The Rule of Benedict*, RB 19:1-7

A WELCOME TO NEW OBLATES

On Sunday, November 8, 2015, the members of the Nebraska chapters celebrated their annual Oblation Ceremony. Around sixty oblates and family members joined Sr. Penny Bingham, Sr. Patricia Heirigs, and Sr. Phyllis Hunhoff for the occasion, followed by a reception in the Sheridan Room at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital, Lincoln. Those oblates unable to attend the Oblation Ceremony will be able to sign Renewal Certificates, or, for novices, Initial Enrollment Certificates, at their chapter meetings. The deans will contact individuals to share options for making their final oblations.

A number of individuals made their initial oblation:

Lincoln Chapter

- Bill Abbott
- Lylaine Abbott
- Paula Sayker
- Mary Shada
- Louise Tollefson
- Linda Turner-Minchow
- Lilla Revesz.

Several oblate novices who made their final oblations with Sacred Heart Monastery:

Lincoln Chapter

- Amaechi Izeogu
- Doreen (Boots) Primavera-Wailes
- Christy Roehrich
- Jessica C. Stoner
- Donna Woudenberg
- Kimberly S. Graeve.

In addition, the Lincoln Chapter welcomed Barbara Michaels, oblate, as a transfer from Our Lady of Peace Monastery in Columbia, Missouri.

Sr. Penny's Address to the Oblates

Today we have solemnized the initial oblation and the final oblation of members of this Oblate community, and we've witnessed the transfer of one member into this chapter, and have heard the renewal of oblation by all. So let's think a little about that word oblation. It means "an offering, or a gift, to God." You are offering the gift of yourself, your life, as associated with this Oblate community and with Sacred Heart Monastery in Yankton. You have heard a call to shape your Christian way of life by living it as interpreted by St. Benedict. You have responded to that call these past years, devoting

CHAPTERS	DEANS	LOCATIONS
Hastings	<i>Julienne Bryan</i> , julienne.bryan@nebraskabenedictineoblates.org	<i>Family Room, St. Michael's Church, Hastings</i>
	<i>Carol Barry</i> , majorcarolb@yahoo.com	<i>Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital</i>
	<i>Steve Blum</i> , steve.blum@nebraskabenedictineoblates.org	<i>Sheridan Room</i>
Lincoln	<i>Carol Olson</i> , carol.olson@nebraskabenedictineoblates.org	5401 South St.
	<i>Jim Rea</i> , jim.rea@nebraskabenedictineoblates.org	Lincoln
	<i>Mary Schroer</i> , mary.schroer@nebraskabenedictineoblates.org	
Steinauer	<i>Marcia Borchert</i> , marcia.borchert@nebraskabenedictineoblates.org	<i>Banquet Room, Convent House B&B, Steinauer</i>

time to study of the Rule, to prayer, to gathering with other Oblates—and today you have made that offering, that oblation of yourself in a new way.

The widow of Zarephath in our scripture reading (1 Kgs 17:10–16) also made an oblation. Not only did she offer a bit of bread to the holy man Elijah, but she offered her very self. That bread was what she believed to be the final meal for her son and herself; there was no more flour, no more oil. Elijah encouraged her not to be afraid, and to trust that God would supply her needs until the rains returned. So, from her meager resources, she shared bread, she shared her very life.



Sisters, Novice Oblates, and New Oblates

Back Row (left to right): Sr. Patricia Heirigs, Kimberly Graeve, Lilla Revesz, Christy Roehrlich, Doreen (Boots) Primavera-Wailles, Jessica Stoner, Amaechi Izeogu, Donna Woudenberg, Barbara Michaels, Paula Sayker, LyLaine Abbott, Bill Abbott, and Sr. Phyllis Hunhoff.

Front Row (left to right): Sr. Penny Bingham, Linda Turner Minchow, Louise Tollefson, and Mary Shada.

You too have made an oblation, have offered the gift of yourself to our loving God. One of the best things about life lived according to *Benedict's Rule*, I believe, is that we do it together—we pray together, we live together, we discern and decide together, we go to God together. As an Oblate, you also do this together— together with these Oblates and together with us Sisters in Yankton. You are supported in your life as an Oblate, and you offer support to your Oblate brothers and sisters—and to us Sisters in Yankton, through prayer and presence and assistance. Even though you offer the unique gift of yourself—individually—you do it together with others who are striving to live a

Gospel life, in the spirit of St. Benedict. We go to God together.

Thank you for being part of us at Sacred Heart Monastery through your oblation. Let us continue to pray for one another and support each other as—together—we seek God.



Sr. Penny Bingham Blesses New Oblates

Pictured (left to right): Sr. Phyllis Hunhoff; Steve Blum, Lincoln Dean and Vespers Leader; and Carol Olson, Lead Dean.

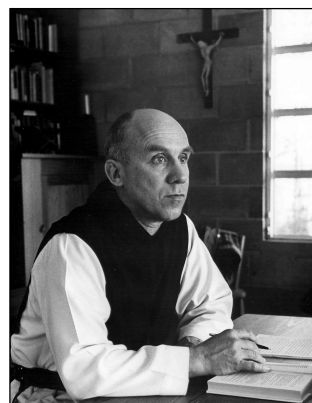
Online Gallery:

www.nebraskabenedictineoblates.org/albums/.

OMAHA OBLATES JOIN THE LINCOLN CHAPTER

Beginning this month, the members of the Omaha Chapter of Oblates will merge with the Lincoln Chapter. We welcome our Omaha members to Lincoln!

Reflection



OBLATES GATHER FOR RETREAT ON THOMAS MERTON

On October 30 and 31, six Benedictine Oblates from the Lincoln Chapter attended a retreat at St. Benedict Center in Schuyler, Nebraska. Entitled “Thomas Merton and Proven Spiritual Tools of the Monastic Tradition,” this retreat was given by Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, OSB. Sr. Meg is from Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, Indiana. She provided excellent teaching in relating portions of Merton’s contemplative wisdom,

discussing his life as a Trappist monk, and identifying teachings from John Cassian that Merton used in his writings.

Thomas Merton was born January 31, 1915; thus this year of 2015 has been the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth. Merton was born in France where his mother and father were both artists. His mother, an American woman, died when he was only five; and his father, from New Zealand, died when he was fifteen. Orphaned at a young age, Merton went on to study at Cambridge in England and Columbia in New York City. He was probably on his way to being a literary genius, when he converted to Catholicism in his early twenties and entered the Cistercian Abbey of Gethsemani in Louisville, Kentucky, at the age of twenty-six. Merton lived the remainder of his life as a contemplative, served as novice master at Gethsemani, and became a prodigious author. Merton died unexpectedly of an accidental electrocution in Thailand at the age of fifty-three.

According to Sr. Meg, "The genius of Merton is that he's not a saint, nor did he want to be a saint." It appears that countless people around the world can identify with the humanness of Merton. However, he did write over seventy books, thousands of letters, poetry, and has been the subject of over 400 doctoral dissertations. Merton remained keenly interested in the social issues of his time and was continually concerned about social justice. He was a critic and had a critical mind, but those who knew him well also speak of his compassion for humanity.

Sr. Meg shared with the participants at the retreat that Merton had an expansive view of the world, he used his voice to inspire others, and he found his voice through his vocation. Gethsemani proved to be an ideal place, an ideal container for Merton. Sr. Meg helped us understand what an extraordinary human being he was and how his influence seems to be growing exponentially in our world today. In order to understand Thomas Merton better, Sr. Meg recommended the following books authored by Merton: *Seven Storey Mountain*, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, and *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

Sr. Meg concluded the retreat on Saturday afternoon by connecting the teachings of Thomas Merton to Origen, John Cassian, and St. Benedict. She provided an excellent review of afflictions of the Christian life and associated antidotes.

Borrowing from her own writings contained in her books, *Thoughts Matter* and *Tools Matter*, she helped participants understand the need for renunciation of thoughts when they lead to afflictions. Afflictions, arising from our thoughts, lead to desires, habits, compulsions, and ultimate captivity of the soul. Good thoughts are considered virtuous and bad thoughts lead to vice. If we choose not to deal with our thoughts, then afflictions become obstacles to living our true vocations. She believes much of the *Rule of St. Benedict* provides "antidotes" to afflictions as we choose to live our lives in a manner that is virtuous and renounce thoughts that lead to afflictions.

Sr. Meg's presentation was punctuated with simple tunes she played for us on her small wooden recorder, and her understanding of Thomas Merton and what he has to offer our world today was inspiring. The retreat concluded with a mass at 4:00 p.m. at St. Benedict Center.

Charlotte Liggett, Lincoln Oblate

Worship

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRAYING THE DIVINE OFFICE

Oblates gather every **Friday morning at 7:30** in the Ryan Memorial Chapel at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital, 5401 South St., Lincoln, Nebraska, to pray **Morning Prayer**. Everyone is welcome.

Two of the Lincoln cell groups begin their gatherings in the Ryan Memorial Chapel with Morning Prayer. Everyone is invited to pray with them. This month, **Morning Prayer** will be held at **8:00 a.m. on two Saturdays—December 12 and 26**. Please consider adding this prayer office to your spiritual life.

Two cell groups hold their gatherings on the fourth Sunday of the month—**December 27—at 7:00 p.m.** in the Ryan Memorial Chapel by praying **Evening Prayer** together. Everyone is invited to share this time for praying the Divine Office.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SHORTER CHRISTIAN PRAYER

Advent marks the beginning of the Liturgical Year. Sunday, November 29, 2015 is the first Sunday of Advent. We begin with Evening Prayer 1 on Saturday night, p. 37 in *Shorter Christian Prayer*. At the Reading, turn to p. 356. Weekdays in Advent are on pp. 358–376, and are repeated each week during Advent.

On Sundays in Advent, note that the Advent Antiphons are shown in red in the Psalmody. There is a selection of Advent hymns on p. 578. If you would like, you can substitute the “O Antiphons” on December 17–23 for the Magnificat antiphon. On Christmas Eve Day, Morning Prayer, turn to p. 378. Christmas Day prayers start on Christmas Eve with Evening Prayer I on p. 380.

During the Christmas Season, for weekdays after Christmas, see pp. 392–395. Continue following the prayers for the Christmas Season until the Feast of the Epiphany.

We wish you a joyous season of preparation as we anticipate the birth of our Savior!

O ANTIPHONS: ANTIPHONS FOR THE MAGNIFICAT DEC. 17–23

- 17** *O Sapientia*: “O Wisdom, O holy Word of God, you govern all creation with your strong yet tender care. Come and show your people the way to salvation.”
- 18** *O Adonai*: “O sacred Lord of ancient Israel, who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain: come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.”
- 19** *O Radix Jesse*: “O Flower of Jesse’s stem, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; kings stand silent in your presence; the nations bow down in worship before you. Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid.”
- 20** *O Clavis David*: “O Key of David, O royal Power of Israel controlling at your will the gate of Heaven: Come, break down the prison walls of death for those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death; and lead your captive people into freedom.”
- 21** *O Oriens*: “O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.”
- 22** *O Rex Gentium*: “O King of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart; O Keystone of the mighty arch of man, come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust.”
- 23** *O Emmanuel*: “O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of the nations, Savior of all people, come and set us free, Lord our God.”

MONASTERY AND CHAPTER GATHER PETITIONS

If you would like to send your prayer requests to the monastery, please use Sacred Heart Monastery’s prayer request form.

On the Web:

www.yanktonbenedictines.org/PrayerRequest.php.

You may also send petitions to Marcia Straatmeyer at mstraat@neb.rr.com or by using the Prayer Request option on the chapter’s Web site.

On the Web:

www.nebraskabenedictineoblates.org/contact/.

WORSHIP COMMITTEE MEMBER NEEDED—LINCOLN CHAPTER

The Liturgical Committee is in need of a new member. This committee, headed by Marti Fritzen, chooses Scripture passages, hymns, antiphons, and readings from the Rule of Benedict for use during Vespers at the Lincoln Chapter’s monthly gathering. We meet through e-mail—no travel required for meetings! Current members are Marti Fritzen, David Frye, and Carol Barry. If you are interested in joining the worship planning committee, please contact Marti Fritzen or any of the deans.

Chapter Gatherings

HASTINGS

The Chapter Gathering will be Saturday, December 12, 2015, 9:30–11:30 a.m., in the Family Room at St. Michael’s Church.

The topic is *Lectio Divina*.

- *Facilitator*: Kathy Schroder
- *Reflection*: Tana Skarniak
- *Prayer Leader*: Jeanette Nordhues.

LINCOLN

The Chapter Gathering will be held on Sunday, December 13, 2015, in the Sheridan Room at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital at 7:00 p.m. The chapter will reflect on and discuss Chapters 12–16 from *Preferring Christ* by Norvene Vest.

Following the discussions, everyone will gather in the Ryan Memorial Chapel for Evening Prayer.

LINCOLN CHAPTER RIDE-SHARING

Do you need a ride in order to get to the Lincoln Chapter gatherings? Are you able to give someone a ride? We’d like to match you up! Contact Carol Olson, Lead Dean, 402.486.0864 or carol.olson@nebraskabenedictineoblates.org, if you would like to be put on a list for ride sharing.

STEINAUER

The Chapter Gathering will be held on Monday, December 28, 2015, from 7:00–9:00 p.m., in the

Banquet Room at Covenant House across from St. Anthony's Church. The chapter's reading is Chapters 12–16 from *Preferring Christ* by Norvene Vest.

Consider Joining a Cell

Have you considered joining a cell group? The Hastings and Lincoln Chapters offer cell groups, small groups of oblates that meet monthly for study and fellowship. These small group meetings are considered supplemental to the monthly chapter gatherings. The small group format enables us to support one another in our spiritual journey as Benedictine Oblates. The Nebraska Cell groups are currently studying *Discernment Matters* by Sr. Mary Margaret Funk.

Please see the listings of cell groups below. The Hastings Chapter has cell groups in both Hastings and Grand Island. The Lincoln Chapter offers various cell groups, meeting at different times and days. Information about the new Omaha cell group will be available soon; it starts its gatherings in January 2016.

Cell groups are reserved for those who have made their Final Oblation in affiliation with Sacred Heart Monastery, unless other arrangements have been made. Please see Carol Olson, Lead Dean, for more information.

Cell Groups

READING FROM DISCERNMENT MATTERS

All of the cell groups across Nebraska—except Lincoln's Subiaco Cell—share the same plan of scheduled readings for reflection from September through May.

Discernment Matters: Listening with the Ear of the Heart, Sr. Mary Margaret Funk

- **December:** Chapter 2, cont.—“Breakpoints When the Ascetical Practice Becomes Prayer and Cautions at This Stage in the Practice”: pp. 125–132.

Full Schedule: www.nebraskabenedictineoblates.org/cells/

GRAND ISLAND CELL GROUP

Brother Lawrence Cell

This cell meets Monday, December 28, 2015, 4:30–5:30 p.m. at the First Christian Church, 2400 W 14th St., Grand Island.

HASTINGS CELL GROUP

St. Scholastica Cell

This cell meets Saturday, December 19, 2015, 9:30–10:30 a.m. in the Library at St. Michael's Church. This gathering is one week early, due to Christmas.

LINCOLN CELL GROUPS

Beginners' Cell

- Leader: Marti Fritzen
- Meetings: Monthly on the fourth Sunday at 7:00 p.m., beginning with Vespers in the Ryan Memorial Chapel at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital. The group then moves to the Platte Room for its discussion.
- This month: December 27, 2015.

The Rule of Benedict (RB 73:8) says that the rule is for beginners; we are all beginners and all are welcome to this cell.

Hildegard von Bingen Cell

- Leader: David Frye
- Meetings: Every other Saturday beginning at 8:00 a.m. with Morning Prayer in the chapel at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital.
- This Month: December 12, 2015. No gathering on December 26.
- December 12: **Discernment Matters**
Morning Prayer: leader to be determined
Group *Lectio Divina*: Matthew 6:5–8, “When you pray ...,” leader to be determined.
Discussion: *Discernment Matters*, leader to be determined.

Pax Christi Cell

- Leader: Lorene Ludy
- Meetings: The fourth Monday from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. at Mary Lu Long's house, 1615 Brent Blvd., Lincoln.
- This month: December 28, 2015.

Preferring Christ Cell

- Leaders: Paul Blotkamp and Charlotte Liggett
- Meetings: The fourth Sunday of every month at Madonna, 7:00 p.m.
- This month: December 27, 2015.

Subiaco Cell

- Leader: Tim Fisher
- Meetings: Every other Saturday beginning at 8:00 a.m. with Morning Prayer in the chapel at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital. Then this cell for men moves to a designated room for conversation.
- This Month: December 12 and 26, 2015.

OMAHA CELL GROUP

Omaha's new cell group will begin its gatherings in January 2016. Watch the next newsletter for details.

Retreats

SACRED HEART MONASTERY ADVENT RETREAT

"TOUCHED BY THE SOUNDS OF ADVENT"

Saturday morning, December 5, 2015, 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. in the Benedictine Peace Center at Sacred Heart Monastery. Ponder the unfathomable mystery of God's own Son, sent to dwell with us. Let music, prayer, presentations, and silence speak to your heart and embrace you in the gentle sounds and powerful scriptures of the Advent season.

Several Benedictine sisters on the Peace Center staff— Sr. Mary Jo, Sr. Doris, Sr. Jeanne—will serve as retreat leaders for this reflective retreat. Enter deeply into the season of waiting.

We appreciate a \$15 donation for this half-day retreat. Registration is requested by Dec. 2.

Registration: BenedictinePeaceCtr@mtmc.edu or 605.668.6292.

Details: www.yanktonbenedictines.org.

SACRED HEART MONASTERY'S CHRISTMAS VESPERS

Once again, Christmas Vespers will be performed on Sunday, December 6, 2015, at both 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. in Bishop Marty Memorial Chapel. Tickets are needed to attend. Please call for tickets indicating which performance you want to attend.

Tickets: 605.668.6000.

Details: www.yanktonbenedictines.org.

TOUCHED BY GOD'S MERCY

- Sophia Spirituality Center, Atchison, Kansas
- Friday, January 22, 2016, 10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.
- Presenter: Sr. Bridget Dickason, OSB.
- Fee: \$55 with \$10 deposit.
- Registration Deadline: January 1, 2016.

Contemplate the joy of having been touched by God's mercy. Ponder what it can mean for us to become witnesses of God's mercy. Pope Francis has designated this year as a Jubilee Year of Mercy. We will explore together what this Year of Mercy can mean for us individually and as a church.

Details and Registration: www.sophiaspiritualitycenter.org.

LECTIO DIVINA: LISTENING WITH THE EAR OF THE HEART

- Sophia Spirituality Center, Atchison, Kansas
- Saturday, February 13, 2016, 10:00 a.m.– Sunday, February 14, 2016, 2:00 p.m.
- Presenter: Sr. Micaela Randolph, OSB.
- Fee: \$115 with \$20 deposit.
- Registration Deadline: February 1, 2016.

Lectio Divina is what our ancestors in the faith named the kind of reading that enters the soul, feeds us, inebriates our whole being, and results in holiness and wisdom. This ancient art of prayerfully reading Scripture leads to a contemplative attitude and changes our perspective on life. Come and experience a time of sharing, silence, solitude, and reflection.

Details and Registration: www.sophiaspiritualitycenter.org.

NATIVITY SCENES

- St. Benedict Center, Christ the King Priory, Schuyler, Nebraska
- November 29–December 13, 2015, and January 2–5, 2016
- Daily, 8:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.
- Free admission.

Everyone is invited to make a pilgrimage to St. Benedict Center at the beginning of the *Year of the Family*, to view very beautiful nativity scenes from the Holy Land, from Africa, Asia, South and North America, and Europe and to pray for our families.

View God's Love made visible in the Child of Bethlehem as expressed in these diverse nativity scenes from around the world.

Details: www.stbenedictcenter.com.

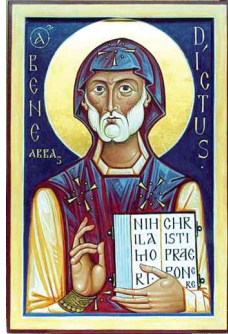
PODCAST: THE RULE OF BENEDICT

Fr. Mauritius Wilde, OSB, Prior of Christ the King Priory in Schuyler Nebraska, presents a podcast on the *Rule of Benedict*. With host Kris McGregor, Fr. Mauritius provides commentary on various verses from chapters of the Rule.

Web: www.discerninghearts.com.

“KEEP THIS LITTLE RULE”—SHAPING A PERSONAL RULE FOR THE OBLATE LIFE

- Saturday, March 12, 2016, 12 noon–3:00 p.m.
- Serenity Acres, Bennet, Nebraska
- Presenters: Mary Schroer and David Frye, oblates.



Our oblate handbook suggests that one of the ways an oblate can grow in his or her practice of the oblate life is to create a personal rule that helps to focus one's practice of Christian discipleship.

The presenters have been working together for over a year to shape and refine their own personal rules. Based upon this experience, they have some guidance and suggestions to share to build upon the basic material included in the handbook.

The retreat will provide resources and offer ample time for retreatants to pray for guidance and to begin crafting—or refining—their own personal rules.

The retreat will begin with Midday Prayer and end with Evening Prayer.

Watch for more details about registration and directions.

General Announcements

SNOW POLICY

It seems timely to restate our snow policy.

1. Should we have three to four inches of snow, we will cancel the meeting without notice. The meeting will not be rescheduled. The next month's meeting will occur as scheduled with that month's assignment.
2. Should we have a snowstorm that seems hard to judge, an e-mail will be sent. For those without e-mail, please call someone with e-mail. In all cases, use your best judgment: Be Safe!

CHANGE OF E-MAIL ADDRESSES

When you update your e-mail address, please send a message to:

info@nebraskabenedictineoblates.org.

This will assure that you continue to receive notices about the release of newsletters and other important chapter messages.