

Summer Issue

July 2018

Dear Oblate Directors,

I hope you are able to take some “just be” time during this hot summer. I imagine many of us have had to take some time away from our daily routine to be present for community retreat and chapter meetings. If you are like me, the sacred ministry of service to the Oblates is constantly on your mind. How necessary it is to plan “pondering” time to be effective formators for the Oblates. But as I say this, it dawns on me that they are genuine formators for us also. They are truly gifted with the desire to seek God and to live and share the Benedictine values of prayer, community, ministry, and hospitality.

I recently picked up Brother Benet Tvedten’s book, How To Be A Monastic And Not Leave Your Day Job. I have read this book many times, but my eyes caught the following passage in which Sister Antoinette Purcell, Oblate Director of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, Indiana participated on an Oblate panel at the 2000 American Benedictine Academy Convention. The theme of this conference was “*Reading the Signs of the Times: The Good News of Monastic Life*.” She shared that the “*good news is that we all have a purpose*.” The following quote she shared struck me about our purpose:

*“Together we can be one voice that speaks of how to be in relation to self, God, and others just by being who we are called to be in the place where we are.”* Pg. xii

As I peruse other monastery oblate websites, I am truly amazed at the enthusiasm expressed in the desire for both Oblate Directors and Oblates to faithfully grow in this “*school for the Lord’s service*.”

May we pray for one another daily as we continue this awesome journey with our Oblates.

*Lovingly in St. Benedict,*

Sister Priscilla Cohen, OSB NAABOD President

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Sacred Heart Monastery

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## North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors

### Mission Statement

The North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors provides assistance to and ongoing formation for directors of oblates. It provides a forum for discerning needs and issues associated with this formation activity and guidelines for leadership and the oblate way of life.

## NAABOD 2019 Biennial Meeting Conference

*Save the Date* July 5-10, 2019

Schuyler, Nebraska

*“Continuing the Sacred Tradition: Benedictine Spirituality Today and Tomorrow”*



# Saint Benedict Center



Plans are in progress.

Registration information will be sent out in January 2019. Thank you to Father Volker Futter, Oblate Director of Christ the King Priory, Father Thomas Leitner, Director of St. Benedict Center, and all the St. Benedict Center staff for their willingness to host our conference.

Website at <https://christthekingpriory.com/sbcabout/>



## NAABOD Executive Council Meeting



Left to right-Sister Linda Larkman, Secretary; Sister Celine Schock, Vice President; Sister Priscilla Cohen, President; Sister Bonita Gacnik, Immediate Past President and current Webmaster

The NAABOD Executive Council met at Sacred Heart Monastery, Cullman, Alabama May 23-25, 2018. Sister Bonita Gacnik shared her past six years of experience and insights in her role as President. She has agreed to mentor the new council for this year. We are grateful to her for this service.

Agenda for the meeting included the following:

- ◆ Reviewed Constitution and By-Laws, Job descriptions, and Financial report
- ◆ Reviewed 2017 NAABOD Biennial Meeting/Conference Evaluations
- ◆ Discussed initial planning ideas for the 2019 NAABOD Biennial Meeting/Conference (Schuyler)
- ◆ Discussed a DVD on Shared Leadership by Rev. William Wilson, Oblate of St. Meinrad
- ◆ Discussed revisions and updates needed for NAABOD website
- ◆ Discussed items to be included in the NAABOD newsletters.

*And, of course, time for a little fun!!!*

## NAABOD Annual Membership Dues

If you have not yet paid your Monastery's \$50.00 membership dues for 2018-2019, please send to Sister Priscilla Cohen, OSB

916 Convent Road NE  
Cullman, Alabama 35055

## NAABOD Regional Meetings

If you have not yet scheduled your 2018 NAABOD regional meetings, please try to do so. If your region is not meeting and you need assistance for this, please let me know.

When your region does meet, please send me a summary to post in the upcoming newsletters.

*priscillacohen@hotmail.com*

## Oblate Chapter News

### *What exciting things are happening with your Oblates?*

*Please send any news you wish to share in this newsletter by September 24, 2018 for the Fall Newsletter.*

Please send content to Sister Priscilla Cohen— *priscillacohen@hotmail.com*

*“Oblate programs need to be the backbone, the ripple, the life design and the support of the monasteries to which they belong—*

*a call to community that is so rare in a world of isolates.*

*They need to extend the outreach, the depth, and the breadth of monasteries that built the last era and, now smaller, must begin to build again.”*

~Sister Joan Chittister, OSB

From her keynote address at the Fourth World Congress of Benedictine Oblates

*Let the Call Be Heard*

## *News from Oblate Directors*



**Sister Brenda Engleman, Monastery Immaculate Conception, Ferdinand, Indiana** shared an article from her Oblate newsletter regarding Oblates that attended the 2017 World Congress of Oblates in Rome.

January 2018

### **Reflections on the Fourth International Oblate Congress 2017**

**Reflection by Oblate Stephanie Smith**



*Sister Joan Chittister and Oblate Stephanie Smith are having a hearty laugh. Apparently Stephanie spilled some wine on Sister Joan's lap. To say the least, Stephanie was quite embarrassed.*

Attending the International Benedictine Oblate Congress was an amazing experience on several levels and much more fulfilling than I had even anticipated. The participants were so different in geography, language, and culture but united in their Benedictine values that it was a simple process to communicate with each in spite of those barriers. The organizers had done a masterful job of anticipating the difficulties of putting so many people together and getting them from Point A to Point B on time during a packed schedule. They also gave a lot of thought to planning how to enhance understanding by printing materials in multiple languages and providing translation services. And, all of this was done after being given less than two months notice that the original venue was no longer available. It was a real testament to what can be accomplished with a bit of dedication, commitment and a lot of prayer!

Much attention was given to opportunities for prayer, from group Lectio Divina each morning to Compline at the end of the day. Although English was the official Congress language, participants had pamphlets with the Divine Office in their own language and readings alternated amongst the most common languages of English, Italian, German, French, Portuguese, and Spanish. There was a lot of singing in Latin and the Korean delegation choir sang at each Mass. Mass was primarily in English but the Our Father was recited by each person in his/ her native tongue. It was an awesome sound to hear so many different voices and different sounding languages expressing the same faith.

Meals were in a large common area and served family style at small tables of six or eight. While Sister Kathy, Shirley, and I always ate together, we often had a group of new friends join us for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Everyone was welcoming and happy to be there and the atmosphere was extremely relaxed; so different from work-related conferences I'm used to attending where everyone is stressed and checking their phones and texts every 5 minutes!

We had opportunities almost every evening after Vespers and before dinner to congregate in the main lobby area where we could view the posters and see items from other delegations. Shirley was able to sell a large number of rosary bracelets made by the Sacred Sisters Monastery of the Heart group. We saw beautiful cloth and other items from the African delegation displayed for sale.

The American delegations held two special meetings on their own to plan ways to facilitate communication among American Oblate communities. The New England and Midwest groups began talking about setting up social media sites or attending Oblate Conferences here in the U.S. in between the time of the International Congresses.

The emphasis on the role of Oblates by the Benedictine leaders, the Abbot Primate, former Abbot Primate, and Sister Joan Chittister was inspiring. All of them talked about the future of Benedictinism being closely tied to the commitment and growth of the Oblate community as our professed communities decrease in size. Maintaining and promoting the philosophies of Saints Benedict and Scholastica rest as much in our hands as in those of our professed partners. I would encourage everyone to add the International Benedictine Oblate Congress Facebook page to their own pages and see and hear just a sample of what we were able to enjoy during our time in Rome. God bless!



*Oblate Shirley France, Sister Kathy Huber, and Oblate Stephanie Smith certainly reflect the amazing time they shared with one another in Rome.*



*Sister Benita Coffey, St. Scholastica Monastery, Chicago, Illinois*



For Earth Day April 2018, Sister Benita Coffey presented a program for her Oblates entitled “*Beyond a Throwaway Culture: Reduce Waste—Grow Community.*” The theme of the program was “all about plastic, how we use it, how it is harmful when thrown away, and what we can do about it.

In continuing the Earth Day theme, Oblates gathered at the Monastery with Sister Benita Coffey, OSB, to help beautify and clean up the Monastery.



*“Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.”* Pope Francis *Laudato Si'* 19





*Father Volker Futter, Christ the King Priory, Schuyler, Nebraska*

## Oblate Pilgrimage to Germany, Austria and Switzerland

Father Volker will be leading the above pilgrimage:

**WHAT:** 2019 Benedictine Pilgrimage with Fr. Volker Futter and Benedictine Oblates of Christ the King Priory

**WHO:** Open to Oblates, Friends of St. Benedict Center, Anyone! Feel free to share this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with your friends and family!

**WHERE:** GERMANY, AUSTRIA AND SWITZERLAND including Münsterschwarzach, Salzburg, Innsbruck, Chiemsee, Stams, Einsiedeln, Lake Constance, Freiburg, Heidelberg, Rüdesheim, Cologne, Neuss, Düsseldorf, and more.

**DATE:** June 17– July 2, 2019

**COST:** Approximately \$4,790.00 per person, double occupancy, (single supplement: \$400.00) Official cost coming August 10. Required deposit: \$500

More details are available on the following link:

<https://beingbenedictine.com/2018/07/07/2019-benedictine-pilgrimage-opportunity-germany-austria-and-switzerland/>

**All who are interested can reach Father Volker either by email: [frvolker@benedictinemissionhouse.com](mailto:frvolker@benedictinemissionhouse.com) or by Telephone: 402-352-4191 He will send the final flyer.**



*Jodi Gehr, Oblate, Christ the King Priory, Schuyler, Nebraska*

Jodi has written a few reflections on Being Benedictine, a blog/website that she started about a year ago. She keeps it updated with personal reflections, lectio divina insights from her oblate group and reviews of other blogs/podcasts.

She has written the following posts on the 2017 World Congress (direct links to posts):

<https://beingbenedictine.com/category/oblate-congress-2017/>

1. [Rome: Confessions, Truths and Carpe Diem](#)—planning for the Oblate Congress
2. [4th World Congress of Benedictine Oblates, part 1](#)—summary of the first few days of the Congress
3. [4th World Congress of Benedictine Oblates, part 2](#)—summary of Joan Chittister’s keynote speech
4. [4th World Congress of Benedictine Oblates, part 3](#)—small groups, Judith’s article excerpts and link
5. [4th World Congress of Benedictine Oblates, part 4](#)—Pilgrimage Day, Pope Francis and Sant’ Anselmo
6. [Rome: Packing and unpacking can be a lot of work](#)—Personal reflections
7. [Rome—Layers Like Lasagna](#)—Sacred sites and history, personal reflections



*Sister Linda Larkman, St. Benedict's Monastery, Bakerstown, Pennsylvania submitted the following article by Oblate Kathy Reed*



### **Listening with Gentle Presence**

Forty years ago I found a spiritual home at St. Paul's Monastery and Retreat House when I sang in the folk choir and was on the team that provided youth retreats. At that time liturgical folk music guided my prayer life. One of the lyrics that often came to me was from the song "Listen" by the Benedictine Monks of Weston Priory. The opening line "listen, and gently be present, to all you've ever kept close in your loving heart" became a mantra for me. In those days I found it anguishing to be gentle with myself. It was often very difficult for me to be present enough to listen fully to what someone else was saying.

Like so many of us, my coping strategies for childhood wounds contributed to the development of many unhealed edges, especially in my thinking and in the ways I would speak. I thought I needed to know how to do everything without learning first; I thought I always needed to be right; and I had no room for mistakes or confusion. These perspectives did not foster peace.

Much healing occurred over the years through my spending a lot of time in nature, working with victims of trauma, growing with spiritual teachings, and being in psychotherapy. Healing grace yielded gentleness toward myself and others. The healing journey also taught me to trust Divine guidance as it emerges in my prayer, relationships and work.

Five years ago when the Benedictine Sisters moved to their home in Bakerstown, a friend and I visited the new monastery. When I walked through the front door I felt like I was home. I began attending the Spiritual Spas. Over time I became aware that I needed to be more formally connected to this Benedictine community. I began to explore becoming an Oblate and was struck by the opening sentence in the prologue of the Rule: "listen carefully...with the ear of your heart." This idea of learning to listen with my heart was inviting me forward. I have been taking steps on this spiritual path for the past two years.

Every time I come to the Monastery I am greeted with caring hospitality and attentive listening. Whether I gather with the Sisters, with my fellow Oblates, or for Centering Prayer on Sunday afternoons, I notice that my heart opens more and I am at peace. I feel so grateful and blessed, and my growing peace expands into my daily life. St. Benedict teaches "always we begin again." There is always room for the mistakes I make each day. In every moment I am invited to be gentle with myself and begin again, knowing that God is faithfully present and patiently waiting for me to listen with the ear of my loving heart.

..... the silent, sacred whispers of God

Humility

What is it?

Where do we find it?

Who is humble?

The one who willingly takes the last place in line,

The mother who loves, forgives and endures all things,

The innocent child who forgets insult, injury, cruelty and injustice,

The tired dad who unselfishly, without complaint, meets the needs of his family,

The one who has nothing to give, but gives the greater gift, a kind word,

The poor widow who gave all she had,

The one who secretly performs random acts of kindness,

The saint who prays and praises, and no one knows, except God,

The heart that loves purely, without pay, ulterior motive or thought of gain,

The one who knows that all our thoughts and actions are known to God, ever present,

The person who chooses God's will over his/her own will,

The disciple who is obedient to the Word of God,

The heart that is patient amid hardship and unjust treatment,

The one who reports his/her faults to the Lord,

The one who is content with the lowest rank, the menial tasks,

The one who sees himself/herself as insignificant before Almighty God,

The soul that sees itself as being the least of his/her brothers and sisters,

The person who follows God's laws, the general rule and example of spiritual leaders,

The one who controls his/her tongue and remains silent, unless called upon,

The one who is reverent, deliberate and respectful, not given to loud, distracting noises,

The one who speaks gently, modestly, briefly, and reasonably,

The one who bows the heart/body before the Lord at all times, in all things,

Humility can take many forms, and often found in unexpected places,

With much practice, it becomes natural, pure and simple, without effort or strain,

All done out of love for Christ.

Through the Holy Spirit, Humility can become a good habit in us, a worthy virtue,

Manifesting itself in those who serve Him with honest and sincere hearts.

Are there humble people in the world today?

Yes, at times God's people humble themselves before the Lord.

God searches the world over to find His own, those after His own heart.

When He finds a true and faithful servant,

He tells him/her so...

He stands at the door and knocks.

If we listen and hear His voice, open the door, and He will come in...

"I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

Christ will be the honored guest at our table.



*Submitted by Oblate Sylvia Castro*  
**Monastery of Christ in the Desert**  
**Abiquiu, New Mexico**