



Oblate
Membership
in the
Community
of the
Gospel

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(Adapted from the Handbook for Directors of Benedictine Oblates)

From the life of Saint Benedict, as told by Saint Gregory the Great, it appears that Oblates were received by Benedict already at Subiaco, before he founded his monastery at Monte Cassino. Apparently, however, these were only boys who were offered (Oblate means "one who is offered") by their parents to be educated for the monastic life. Saint Gregory's narrative seems to warrant the conclusion that some adults living in the world also put themselves under Saint Benedict's direction and visited his monastery occasionally for spiritual instruction and guidance.

Confratres

The term "oblate," as applied to adults, does not appear to have been in use before the eleventh century. But as early as the ninth century we meet the term "confratres," which is the name sometimes used for Oblates in the English Congregation of Benedictines, and we have evidence that many monasteries had such "confratres" before the eleventh century.

Thus we find a monk of that time writing, "There are a great many of the faithful, both poor and rich, who request confraternity with us. We give unto all of them participation in whatever good is done in our monastery, be it by prayer or almsgiving. Let us make special prayer for them, both while they live and after their death." These words well describe the relation that still exists in our own day between Oblates and the monastery to which they belong.

In the course of time lay people asked to be associated with the work of the monks and nuns, without however leaving their homes, families, and occupations. These people, too, were received, offered themselves to God, became "oblates" of a monastery or convent, and promised to regulate their lives according to the spirit of that monastery or convent. They applied the teachings of the Community to their lives in the world, in their family circles, in their places of work, and in their civic and social activities.

Today, throughout the world, there are thousands of oblates praying and working in spiritual union with Religious of various communities, and receiving spiritual strength and inspiration from their association as oblates.

(Adapted from the Handbook for Directors of Benedictine Oblates)

General Guidelines for All Oblates include:

- They strive to be loyal and active members of Christ and the Church
- They strive for their own continued Christian renewal and improvement
- They strive to be men and women of practical spirituality
- They strive to be men and women of prayer
- They strive to be men and women of Christian virtue
- They foster a spirit of Community
- They are men and women of peace

Responsibilities of the Community to its Oblates:

- The Community remembers all Oblates in prayer
- The Community supports the Oblate's formation
- The Community includes each Oblate in communications as appropriate
- The Community views Oblation as a valid vocation within the Church
- The Community welcomes the presence of Oblates at Community gatherings

Oblates, in turn:

- are committed their Community, its values, culture and prayer.
- build their own Rule of Life based on Prayer, Study, and Service
- are representatives of monasticism to the "outside world"
- pray for the Community including other Oblates

Value of Oblates to a Monastic Community

(Adapted from the Handbook for Directors of Benedictine Oblates)

1. Oblates bring spiritual strength to the Community and to themselves.
2. Oblates expand the presence of and participation with the work and prayer of the Community.
3. Oblates serves as a link between the religious community and parishes.
4. Oblates and the Community provide mutual affirmation of the commitment to the Monastic way of life.
5. The Community is enriched by the interaction with Oblates.
6. Oblates bring culture and insights (and expertise in many areas) to the Community.
7. Oblates remind the Community of its goodness and uniqueness.
8. The witness of the Oblates living monastic charisms in the secular world strengthens Community members' love and appreciation for the monastic way of life.
9. Oblates bring professional and personal talents to the Community.
10. Oblates help spread the word of monastic spirituality.
11. Oblates help dispel myths about monastic life and help educate the public about the benefits and value of religious life.

The Purpose of the Oblate Program is...

...to help you be who God made you to be so that you can fully know, love and serve the Lord. Therefore, it is a *PATH* for seeking union with God, and a *RESPONSE* to His love for us. Oblates are Christian men or women, partnered or single, who join a Religious Community for support and guidance, dedicating their lives to Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The Objectives of the Oblate Program are to:

- Continually reflect on your true self and your relationship with God
- Demonstrate a regular, daily prayer life
- Explain the relationship between monastic living and Baptismal vows
- Develop and live by a Personal Rule of Life
- Demonstrate an understanding of our Customary and Constitution
- Explain our charism of prayer, reflective study and service
- Understand the impact and implications of living a monastic life as an Oblate
- Discern that Oblation continues to be a call

The Key Tools used to help you achieve these include:

- Holy Scripture
- The Daily Offices
- Personal Rule of Life
- The Eucharist
- Our Community
- Baptismal Vows
- Your Church Community
- Your service to others
- Readings and other studies
- Reports to/Discussions with your Formation Guide
- Convocation and Retreats
- Spiritual Directors, Soul Mates and Others

The Postulancy for the Oblate is essentially the same as the Postulancy for the Vowed path. This provides the same initial experience for all members entering the Community.



Once the Postulancy has been completed, the Oblate would make promises of Prayer, Reflective Study and Service for the coming year. These would be renewed annually.

Comparison Table

A rough comparison of the Oblate membership is provided in the table below, which is NOT all-inclusive of the possible differences.

	VOWED	OBLATE	FRIEND
Levels	Postulant, Novice, Professed	Postulant, Oblate	None
Prayer Life	1 – 4 sessions of the Office each day; use of other prayer methods strongly encouraged.	1 – 2 sessions of the Office each day; other methods encouraged.	No requirements; but to pray for the Community
Rule of Life	Required	Required	Not Required
Formation Activities	Assigned book readings, DeMello exercises, Safe Church Program, retreats	Suggested reading list and other tailored activities	Not Required
Formation Reports	Monthly, usually by phone or in person	Quarterly, at Embertide, written or by phone	Not Required
Reflective Study	Expected; various methods can be used	Expected; various methods can be used	Not Required
Service	Any employment, volunteering or private prayer life that reflects Christ's teachings	Any employment, volunteering or private prayer life that reflects Christ's teachings	Not required
Spiritual Direction	Team must be assembled and used regularly	Should have a spiritual director	Not Required
Convocation	One required by time of Profession; annual attendance strongly encouraged.	Annual attendance suggested, but not required.	Invited, but not required
Community Decisions	Have voice and vote at Professed level; Voice only at Novice level	Have voice, but no vote	No voice or vote
Affiliation	Any Christian denomination	Any Christian denomination	Generally will be a Christian
Celebration Vestments	Professed: white alb, rope cincture, neck cross, and brown hooded scapular	White alb, rope cincture, & neck cross, hoodless scapular after 2 years	None
Financial Support	Budget share, only if personal resources permit	Token contributions, as resources permit	None expected, but accepted