



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 people of practical spirituality
- They strive to be people of prayer
- They strive to be people of Christian virtue
- They foster a spirit of Community
- They are people 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.
- adopt the Common Rule 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 Vocation is...

...to help you be who God made you to be so that you can fully know, love and serve the Lord in your own, unique way. 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 Vocation are to:

- Continually reflect on your true self and your relationship with God
- Demonstrate a regular, daily prayer life
- Continue studying the Gospels and related material
- Serve one's local community in the spirit of the Gospel
- Explain the relationship between monastic living and Baptismal vows
- Adopt and live by the Common Rule of Life
- Demonstrate an understanding of our Customary and Constitution
- Explain our charism of daily prayer, reflective study and service
- Understand the impact and implications of living a monastic life as an Oblate
- Discern whether Oblation continues to be a call

The Key Tools used to help you achieve these include:

- Holy Scripture
- The Daily Offices
- Common 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, Clergy, supportive friends, etc.

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

Postulancy

Approx. 6 - 12 months



Key Discernment Activities:

- Explore other Communities
- Spiritual Autobiography
- Read and complete study guide on a monastic book
- Understand CG Charism
- Speak with CG members
- Discuss with family & pastor
- Read CG Constitution
- Read CG Customary
- Monthly formation calls
- Common Rule exercises
- Common Rule reflections
- Discernment process

Once the Postulancy has been completed, the Oblate makes promises of Daily Prayer, Reflective Study and Service for the coming year. These are renewed annually.

NOTE: The Oblate vocation is not a path to Profession. While some of the formation material is similar to that in the Novitiate, these are different paths with different purposes. Oblates wishing to enter the Novitiate must do so from the beginning.

Key Components

This chart explains the foundational activities and descriptions for the Oblate Vocation. Other projects and activities may be included.

	Component	Notes
Rule	Oblates must adopt the Common Rule of the Community which is based primarily on the Gospels.	Oblates may develop their own Personal Rule of Life as a response to the Common Rule
Prayer Life	1 – 2 sessions of the Daily Office each day minimum	Oblates may use various Prayer formats based on their own temperament.
Reflective Study	Usually Gospel-based material; but can include other theological topics as well.	1 – 2 book reviews from CG Reading List is suggested; but college classes or seminars can be included. Try to relate all study back to the Gospels. Oblate works with Formation Guide to establish a plan for the year.
Ongoing Local Service	Any employment, volunteering or other service life that reflects Christ's teachings	Oblate's employment will often be considered service if the intent is there to use it to practice and model a Gospel-centered life.
CG Community Service	Service that contributes to the strength and awareness of the Community of the Gospel.	This can come in many forms. Oblates engaged in occupational or local services are ambassadors for the Community – but there are things to directly help the Community as well.
Community Support	This refers to the financial support needed by the Community.	Traditionally, there are no dues or fees for being an Oblate. But donations to help support the Community from those that are able are gladly received.
Reports	Oblate needs to report on activities periodically.	May be monthly or bi-monthly, in writing or by phone, at Formation Guide's discretion
Spiritual Support Team	Should have a spiritual director at a minimum; other team members could include counselors, priests, therapists, etc.	
Convocation	Annual attendance strongly encouraged. Should plan and work toward attendance at least once every 5 years.	
Community Decisions	Have voice but no vote.	
Celebration Vestments	CG Neck Cross and hoodless scapular awarded at Rite of Reception. Approved alb and cincture provided by the Oblate.	

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
Common Rule	Required	Required	Highly Recommended
Formation Activities	Assigned book readings, DeMello exercises, Safe Church Program, retreats	Suggested reading list and other tailored activities	Not Required
Formation Reports	Professed - Embertide, usually by phone or in person	As required, 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	Required by time of Profession; annual attendance strongly encouraged.	Annual attendance recommended.	Invited as room is available
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 Christian
Celebration Vestments	Professed: white alb, rope cincture, neck cross, and brown hooded scapular	white alb, rope cincture, neck cross, and brown hoodless scapular	None
Financial Support	Budget share, only if personal resources permit	Contributions as resources permit	None expected, but accepted