

STATUTES OF THE BENEDICTINE OBLATES

OF MOUNT ANGEL ABBEY

CHAPTER 1: THE OBLATE

- I. Oblation is a free act of self-offering to God, recognized by the Church (cf. the Code of Canon Law, can. 303; 677 §2) whereby individual Christians establish a bond of intimate union with a particular Benedictine community. The act of oblation is a true offering and brings about a true belonging, though it is different in nature from that bond which unites a monk to his community; it does not bring about a change in the individual's status in the Church.
- II. Oblates are Christians, lay or ordained, who, committed to the living of their faith and while continuing to live their own state in life, desire to make their own the values expressed by Benedictine monastic life. With the monks, they also look to the Holy Rule of St. Benedict as a pattern for their living of the Gospel message. They undertake to pursue the path of Benedictine spirituality through the guidance of the Holy Rule (RB 3:7) and in the spirit of the community of Mount Angel so as constantly to renew their baptismal consecration.

CHAPTER 2: OBLATION

- I. If a candidate for oblation is not already known to our community, he or she is normally asked to spend some months as an "inquirer." This time is provided so that the necessary affinity shared between monastery and oblate candidate may mature in keeping with the serious step that is being proposed.
- II. Once the application for oblation has been accepted, there follows a period of formation (the novitiate) in order that candidates might gain a clear understanding of the commitment they are preparing to make (RB 58:12). This oblate "novitiate" is to last for a full year. It begins with a ceremony, normally conducted by the Director of Oblates, during which the candidate is presented with a copy of the Holy Rule and receives a blessing. By way of exception, and with specific permission, others may be permitted to receive candidates into the oblate novitiate for grave reason. If it is deemed necessary, the period of formation may be extended, though it should normally not exceed two years. Novice oblates are asked to read through the Holy Rule at least three times. They are to be encouraged to establish a habit of daily liturgical prayer, *lectio divina*, and reflection upon the Holy Rule.
- III. At the end of their period of formation, novice oblates come to the Abbey to make their final oblation. Only in exceptional circumstances may the reception of oblation be delegated to a priest or monk outside the monastery of Mount Angel.
- IV. The text for the rite containing the form of oblation is to be found in the Oblate Ritual. For purposes of study and reflection, the form of oblation is also found in the Novice Resource Guide. The Rite of Oblation ordinarily takes place at the conventual Mass of the Abbey. The form of oblation is essentially a reflection

of the monastic vows (RB 58:17), being a promise of the reformation of one's life according to the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict, in so far as one's state in life permits. At the ceremony of final oblation, an oblate name is received. This oblate patron is chosen from among the canon of saints; it is inclusive of all who are proclaimed by the Church to be among "the blessed in heaven." The oblate completes and signs a Monastic Oblation scroll, which in turn, is signed by Father Abbot, or his designate, and placed on the altar. The original is given to the oblate, and a copy is then preserved in the monastery's archive. Father Abbot blesses St. Benedict medals as part of the Rite and invests the new oblates with them.

- V. In order to make a valid oblation, the candidate must be at least eighteen years old, and may not be a member of a Third Order, or be a member of another Religious Institute.
- VI. It is normally assumed that Mount Angel oblates, like Mount Angel monks, will be Roman Catholics, or Catholics of other rites, who have received the sacrament of confirmation. Nevertheless, members of other Churches and ecclesial communions may be received as oblates. They must, however, accept the discipline of the Catholic Church regarding sacramental communion. However, because we share a real, if limited, communion in virtue of our shared baptism, non-Catholic oblates should be encouraged in the practice of spiritual communion so that they might authentically participate in the Church's sacred liturgy.
- VII. The act of oblation has the character of a solemn promise to God, although it is not in the nature of a vow. It is not intended to be a burdensome obligation, but rather a stimulus and help to the oblate in his or her following of Christ. Should it happen that for some serious reason an oblate becomes unable to fulfill the exterior practices recommended for oblates, the oblate promise can still be kept so long as the desire for conversion of life and spiritual union with the monastic community of Mount Angel remains.
- VIII. Benedictines take a vow of stability. In accordance with this element of Benedictine life, oblates are affiliated to one particular monastery and not directly to the Order (the Benedictine Confederation) as a whole. However, if for good reason an oblate wishes to transfer to the lists of another Benedictine house, it is not necessary to make a new act of oblation. When the consent of the Abbots or Oblate Directors of both houses has been obtained, the name of the oblate can be removed from the lists of the one community and registered in the lists of the other.
- IX. The act of oblation establishes reciprocal bonds between the oblate and the monastery. Either party can break these bonds by giving notification in writing.
- X. Oblation is made with the intention that it should be for life. Consequently, it is made once and for all. Nevertheless, oblates can laudably express their "perseverance in stability" (RB 58:9) by frequently renewing their commitment in their hearts. In addition, just as monks formally make an annual renewal of their vows, so oblates are encouraged formally to renew their oblation annually, either as a group or privately, and so strengthen their sense of dedication. This may be done on a Benedictine Oblate retreat at the Abbey:
 - A. On July 11, the Solemnity of our Blessed Father, Saint Benedict;
 - B. On the anniversary of one's final oblation; or
 - C. On any day of personal significance to the individual oblate.

- XI. According to a decree of the Sacred Penitentiary, dated 5 May 1975, a plenary indulgence may be obtained by Catholic Benedictine Oblates, provided that fulfilling the usual conditions (confession, communion, prayer for the Holy Father's intentions), they pronounce or renew, even privately, the oblate promise:
- A. On the day of enrollment as a novice oblate and the day of final oblation;
 - B. On the feast days of St. Benedict (March 21 and July 11); SS. Maurus and Placid (January 15); St. Scholastica (February 10); and St. Frances of Rome (March 9);
 - C. On Mount Angel's patronal feast: the Solemnity of the Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael and all Holy Angels (September 29); and the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (December 8): the patroness of the Swiss-American Benedictine Congregation; and
 - D. On the 25th and 50th anniversaries of oblation.
- XII. Oblates of Mount Angel Abbey do not use a post-nominal designation (OSB, ObISB, OSBObl), or wear any form of monastic habit apart from the Benedictine medal itself.

CHAPTER 3: OBLATES & THE MONASTERY

- I. Our oblates are accepted as members of the wider family of the Mount Angel community of Benedictines. They rightly regard the monastery as their spiritual home. While remaining faithful to its identity as a contemplative community, the monastery for its part desires, through appropriate means, to assist the oblates in their spiritual, doctrinal, and liturgical development.
- II. Oblates share in the life of the monastic family first of all through union of prayer with the community. As frequently as their state of life permits, they visit the Abbey in order to participate in the Holy Eucharist and the celebration of the Divine Office with the monks. Oblates are encouraged to stay at the Abbey for more extended periods of retreat as part of an organized oblate retreat or privately. They may also offer practical assistance and advice to the community, as lies within their competence.
- III. Oblates are committed to pray for the community's needs. This support in prayer and love is what the community most values in its oblates. Oblation does not bring with it any financial obligation to the monastery. Oblates of Mount Angel Abbey are invited annually, as part of their *bona opera*, to make a contribution toward the sustenance of the oblate association. Oblates may choose to support the good works of the monks of their own free will, as an act of Christian charity.
- IV. The formal participation of oblates in the prayer of the monastery is expressed by their inclusion in the commemoration of absent brethren at the end of every office. In addition, our oblates are considered friends and benefactors of the community, and as such, are included in the intention of the daily conventual Mass of the monastery. A Mass is said at the Abbey for a deceased oblate on notification of death, with an annual remembrance thereafter on All Souls' Day.
- V. The Abbot has charge of the oblates, either personally or through a delegated monk called the Director of Oblates.

- VI. The primary motive guiding candidates for oblation should be a sense of spiritual affinity with the community at Mount Angel. Geographical distance can present difficulties in maintaining a close bond between an oblate and the monastery, indicating that particular care should be exercised in accepting oblates who reside at a great distance. Nevertheless, the monastic community values the connection with oblates who reside in distant places, even overseas, and with those who, perhaps because of age, are no longer able to make regular visits to the monastery.
- VII. Oblates are encouraged, though not obliged, to meet together in a spirit of friendship and common belonging and to share in prayer. Although oblate groups have no apostolates in and of themselves, like all Christians it is fitting that oblates share in the charitable works of the Church. This they may wish to do as a group. Oblate groups vary in type, some being primarily prayer groups, while others are study or even social groups. Reading of the Holy Rule and praying some part of the Liturgy of the Hours appropriate to the time of meeting will typically characterize any meeting of Benedictine oblates.

CHAPTER 4: OBLATE SPIRITUALITY

- I. "The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and everyone of His disciples of every condition" (LG 40). Oblates wish to respond to this universal call to holiness. They also wish their response to be identified with that of the monastic community. They share the aspiration of the monks to live the Paschal Mystery by death to sin and rebirth to new life in Christ.
- II. The monks of Mount Angel and their oblates are "Benedictines" because they accept the Rule of St. Benedict as their guide (RB 3:7). This Rule, firmly rooted in Scripture and Tradition, had a formative influence in the history of the Western Church. Although written in the sixth century for a community of Italian monks, it manifests a practical wisdom that has value for any Christian in any age. Lay people today can find in it, and in the rich tradition it has engendered, a source of inspiration which will help them to "put the love of Christ before all else" (RB 4:21); to see their Christian life as a harmonious whole; and to make the Gospel a reality in the midst of the world in which they live.
- III. Following the teaching of St. Benedict, monks and oblates alike "seek God" by way of a "conversion of life" (cf. RB 58:7 & 17). No less than professed monks, oblates are called to conversion to Christ, though in a way adapted to their own vocation and state in life.
- IV. The oblate promise of "reformation of my life" is a ratification of baptismal consecration and a renewed commitment to cooperate with Christ's grace in fully living the priestly, prophetic, and kingly character of Christian baptism. It is also a statement that the oblate wishes, by entering St. Benedict's "school of the Lord's service" (RB Prol. 45), to make progress in the Christian life, especially through prayer, *lectio divina*, work, and the practice of the virtues.

A. PRAYER

1. The Benedictine way is a life of prayer. St. Benedict urges that we "give ourselves frequently to prayer" (RB 4:56). He calls the public prayer of the monks "the Work of God" (*opus Dei*) to which "nothing is to be preferred" (RB 43:3). A primary reason for becoming an oblate is the desire to deepen, strengthen, and intensify one's life of prayer.

2. In accordance with the Holy Rule, Benedictine oblates will seek to nourish their prayer from the most authentic spiritual sources: the liturgy, the sacraments, and meditation on the Word of God. They should seek intimacy with God also through regular private prayer, both meditative and devotional.
3. Daily Mass and communion is the center and heart of the monastic community's life of prayer. Oblates also find in the Mass the "source and summit" of their Christian life (cf. LG 11). Through the Eucharistic Sacrifice, monks and oblates alike unite their self-offering with the sacrificial offering of Christ (cf. SC 48).
4. The life of the monk revolves around the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, which, as the prayer of the Church, is also truly a participation in the prayer of Christ. Through the Divine Office, time is sanctified. When oblates celebrate this Work of God with mind and voice in harmony (RB 19:7), they exercise their royal priesthood and offer to God an acceptable sacrifice of praise. While there is no juridical obligation, our oblates are expected to celebrate at least part of the Liturgy of the Hours each day, conscious that Lauds and Vespers are the "two hinges on which the daily Office turns" (SC 89). When they offer this sacrifice of praise, our oblates express and strengthen their bond of unity with the monastic community.
5. The monks of Mount Angel sing the Marian antiphon each evening as an expression of their devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Our oblates also should not neglect devotion to the Mother of God. Their spiritual union with the community can be expressed through the prayer of the Rosary or other devotions accepted by Church practice.

B. SPIRITUAL READING

"*Lectio divina*" helps to form the mind and gives it food for prayer. It is a fundamental element of monastic spirituality and should be embraced by oblates. By this term is meant a serious, ruminative, and well-ordered reading that instructs and deepens the spirit. It implies, above all, regular reading of Sacred Scripture. But *lectio* can be extended also to include the writings of the Fathers, the Saints, and other authors who reflect faithfully the teachings of the Church (cf. RB 9:8; 73:2-5). The aim is to achieve not the erudition that comes from much study, but an attentive listening to the Word of God in a climate of silence and recollection (cf. DV 25). The monastery desires to help oblates in this by making good spiritual books readily available in the Abbey library and through the Abbey bookstore. Upon entering the oblate novitiate, one is invited to obtain a complimentary library card.

C. WORK

1. After prayer and *lectio divina*, the third essential element of monastic life according to the Holy Rule is ordinary work. St. Benedict teaches that "idleness is the enemy of the soul" (RB 48:1) and that "in all things God may be glorified" (RB 57:9). Benedictine life has traditionally been summarized with the motto "*Ora et Labora*" ("Pray and Work"). Oblates, therefore, live according to the spirit of the Rule not just when engaged formally in prayer, but in all their daily activities, especially their work. They should strive to serve God in all that they do, putting the whole of their life at His service.

2. The monastery does not impose any task on oblates under obedience. They, nevertheless, gain the blessing of obedience (RB 71:1) whenever they perform their work in response to duty (cf. RB 5:14-19).
3. Oblates should seek to do their work as well as they can. In this way they can make of it an act of worship of God. They will use their gifts and abilities, according to their opportunities and circumstances, for the service of others and the building up of the Kingdom. They should, however, remember that work is a means, not an end in itself, and that St. Benedict takes great care to guard his monks from excessive work (cf. e.g. RB 31:17-19; 35:3-5; 48:9).

D. THE EXERCISE OF VIRTUE

1. Oblates look to the Holy Rule not only as a major reference point in their spiritual formation and development, but also for guidance in the practical application of their faith.
2. In practical matters, oblates will usually have to interpret the text of the Rule, to a greater or lesser extent, in order to apply its teaching to their own particular circumstances. One long chapter, however, may be regarded as in a special way directly applicable to oblates. This is Chapter Four, on the Tools of Good Works. Some of the works of mercy commanded there, such as visiting the sick, may even be more easily performed by oblates than by individual monks who are restricted by enclosure. Oblates who are able should actively seek ways of carrying out the various Good Works listed in this Chapter.
3. St. Benedict gives great emphasis to the Christ-like virtues of obedience and humility, which he describes particularly in Chapters Five and Seven of his Rule. Linked to them also is the virtue of patience, through which we "participate in the sufferings of Christ in order that we may deserve also to share in his Kingdom" (RB Prol. 50; cf. also Col 1:24, Phil 2:8). Oblates exercise these virtues above all by generously accepting their necessary duties and sufferings.
4. Each of us is called to combat the evil that lies within and all around us (cf. DG II chapters 2 and 8). In their personal life, therefore, oblates should strive to develop a spirit of simplicity and detachment from the materialism of the secular world (cf. RB 33). In its place they will cultivate a certain austerity and penance in personal life (cf. RB 4:10-21). Such a spirit will enable the oblate to see Christ in others (cf. RB 53:1) and to treat all with reverence—especially those who are burdened with difficulties and trials (cf. RB 72:4-5).
5. The virtue for which the Holy Rule is praised above all in the Dialogues of Saint Gregory the Great is discretion, called by St. Benedict himself "the mother of virtues" (RB 64:19). As shepherd of the souls entrusted to him, he wanted "the strong to have something to yearn for," but was careful that "the weak have nothing to flee from" (ibid.). Oblates will, therefore, strive to follow the Benedictine ideal of sanctified common sense, marked by a warm humanity. They will not expect to be changed into saints at once, but will climb perseveringly the steps marked out by the Rule until they arrive at that perfect love which casts out fear (RB 7:67).

E. OBLATES IN THE WORLD

1. The Holy Rule prescribes the way of life for a Christian community. Oblates belong to many different forms of community, both within and beyond the community of the Church: the Parish,

the Diocese, the community of marriage and family life, the workplace, the street on which they live, and the nation of which they are a part. In all these circumstances, they will draw inspiration from the Holy Rule, and from its embodiment in the community of Mount Angel Abbey, in order that they might contribute to the establishment of Christ's Kingdom in their daily life and in the lives of others.

2. Animated by the "good zeal" to which St. Benedict exhorts us (RB 72), oblates will cultivate a spirit of caring, understanding, patience, self-forgetfulness, availability and service. Preferring nothing whatever to Christ, and intent on the goal of everlasting life (RB 72:11-12), they will be a leaven at the heart of the wider society, enriching it by lives lived according to the values of the Gospel.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

- I. All those who are called to faith through Baptism have a responsibility to bear witness in all things and at all times to Christ and His Gospel. Those called to monastic life proclaim the Kingdom through their vows, lived in community. Monks recognize that Christ calls them to "faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery until death" (RB Prol. 50). Oblates also, intimately united to the monastic family, respond wholeheartedly to Christ's call, following the "guidance of the Gospel" (Prol. 21). Supported and encouraged by the monastic community, they also bear steadfast witness to their faith. Then, with the monks and other oblates, they "hasten to reach the heavenly homeland," conscious always that they are among the "beginners" (RB 73:8) whom St. Benedict addresses as a "loving father" (Prol. 1). Confident in the sureness of His teaching, which over so many centuries has led so many people to God, they determine to "make progress in this way of life and in faith, running on the path of God's commandments with hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love" (Prol. 49).

Abbreviations

DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i>
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i>
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
RB	<i>Rule of Benedict</i>
DG II	<i>Dialogues of St. Gregory the Great, Book II</i>