A Message from Michaela Hedican, OSB  

**This is the irrational season when love blooms bright and wild.**

*Had Mary been filled with reason there'd have been no room for the child.*

*After Annunciation* by Madeleine L’Engle

Succinctly and brilliantly, Madeleine L’Engle conveys the summons of Advent—make room for Christ. Benedict doesn’t speak of Advent in the *Rule*, but the centrality of Christ throughout the *Rule* urges us to make room for him as he comes in the guest, the pilgrim, the sick and in whoever needs us.

Our love is to bloom bright and wild as we care for those who are lonely, discouraged, depressed or find this time of year difficult for a variety of reasons. Amidst all the celebrations, those who are suffering experience this as an irrational season. How can they be filled with joy when life is so heavy for them? Mary witnessed for us what we are to do in this season—reach out to others. After the annunciation, she went to be with her cousin, Elizabeth. What family member, co-worker, neighbor, member of our parish or congregation are we called to be with during these days? It may not seem reasonable when there are so many things to which we must attend! It is, however, the way we make room for the Christ who comes in this irrational season. May your Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season be filled with grace upon grace.

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**Benedictine Promises for Everyday People**

*Staying Put, Listening Well, Being Changed by God*

With warmth and wit, Rachel Srubas, OblSB, shared her reflections on oblates living daily their oblation and the profession that is made by monastics. Her insights were applicable to monastics as well. Tending and befriending what is happening in our lives helps us stay put. Listening to what we want to say before we say it and paying attention to the kicks and nudges in our lives that are often experiences of God changing us were all broadening ways to view our Benedictine life.

One of our oblate candidates and two of our oblates reflect on how they were touched by Rachel’s presentation. Read the reflections on page 3. Here is a link to a YouTube video of Rachel’s presentations: [https://youtu.be/dALhMZD-78c](https://youtu.be/dALhMZD-78c).

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Reflection: Anniversary of the Consecration of Sacred Heart Chapel, October 24, 2019, at Saint Benedict’s Monastery

We are the living temples of our God filled with the grace of living water and the Spirit commissioned to go out and spread the Good News of salvation and the living presence of the Spirit in our world. We are called to follow Jesus and cross barriers of diversity, exclusion, separation, neglect, injustice. Jesus broke the boundaries, the barriers of cultural and social walls. We are called to reach out to one another in witness to love and peacemaking in our world—a world that so often reveals the opposite—hatred, division, selfishness, greed, superiority, intolerance and violence. All are invited to receive the living water of God’s gift of grace. Integrity and honesty of heart is what God seeks in worship, relationships, commitment and service to one another. This is church, the people of God, the living temples of the Spirit within and among us. May we be welcoming people breaking down barriers that divide us. May we become the one people of God, true brothers and sisters to one another, learning from our diversity.

Oblate Renewal Day – September 21, 2019

Rejoicing in the call of St. Matthew as we celebrated his feast day, eight oblate candidates answered God’s call and made their oblation at Eucharist on Oblate Renewal Day. The monastic and oblate community welcomed Steven Chase, Dorothee Ischler, Kathleen Kjolhaug, Suzanne Koenigs, Bethany Lane, Robert Padden, Kathleen Schmidt and Joanne Thibault. Eileen Smith, who was awaiting a bone marrow transplant, made an oblation at her home the previous Sunday. Sisters Laureen and Michaela, as well as Eileen’s husband, were with her for the ceremony.

Alisa Kasmir was welcomed as an oblate candidate at Morning Prayer. Along with her welcome, a blessing was given to Almut Furchert, Rita Meyer and Christina Uribe Nitti as they continue their process of candidacy.

An Invitation to Oblates

Benedictines for Peace and Social Justice, a group to which some of our sisters as well as other friends of the community belong, has issued an invitation to our oblates to join them in the ministry of justice and peace. The group meets monthly at the monastery and keeps the community informed on upcoming events and social justice activities, both locally and nationally. They have a section on the Saint Benedict’s Monastery website. Here is a link to the most recent update: https://sbm.osb.org/ministries/peace-and-social-justice/#tab-id-1.

Please contact Sister Bernadette Weber at bweber@csbsju.edu if you would like to join Benedictines for Peace and Social Justice or if you have further questions. Even if you live at a distance and can’t attend the meetings, they will keep in contact with you about their activities and what you can do or be in your local area.
Thoughts on "Staying Put"

Francis de Sales said, "Bloom where you are planted" in the late 16th century. Four hundred years later, Mary Engelbreit illustrated this phrase in a whimsical print. A lace-collared lady waters a window box trailing with morning glories and English ivy. In Rachel Srubas's morning presentation at Oblate Renewal Day on Benedictine Promises for Everyday People about "Staying Put," I was touched by the thought that blooming is a commitment, and that it requires something more than effort or show. It requires the courage of kindness.

As Benedictines, we are called to stay put, to remain in place, to "tough it out so that God can renew" us. This is the essence of a life rooted and grounded in love. As Rachel expressed, "We may come to love better by staying put." The blooms of stability are perseverance, endurance and the patience to wait on the Lord, which is the ability to cultivate the blessings inherent in disappointment.

It is precisely our commitments that help us remain rooted. While it is easy to see our commitments as burdens, our commitments are also where we turn in times of stress if we resist the impulse to fight or flee, and instead hunker down to "tend and befriend." When we need comfort, where do we turn but to our families, our communities, our friendships, and even to our own bodies' hungers? A commitment to nurture (rather than to abuse or forsake) our dear ones and our own "God beloved self" is always an act of love.

Because of this presentation, I am beginning to imagine stability—staying put—differently. I had been experiencing a deepening commitment as a kind of giving up or letting go, a decrease in mobility, a restricting of options. But now I am envisioning "staying put" as an acquisition, an increase in internal and external stillness. Staying put is a way to welcome and receive more grace and more love. Like a tree planted by the water, I shall not be moved.

Thoughts on "Listening Well"

Obedience as a fence—a short reflection.

I wonder:

If obedience, if listening, is a fence, what about a gate?

Jewish tradition says that there is a fence around the Torah. The fence both protects and highlights what is within it. It reminds us that we are guests on holy ground.

So it is with obedience. To listen is to begin to acknowledge that the one before you is a mystery. To listen is to be willing to be present to this mystery.

I wonder:

Maybe the gate is hiding—in plain sight, as things often do—in the second half of the sentence, "Listen with the ear of the heart." Maybe the heart is the gate. Maybe when the heart listens, it reveals that there is a gate, a threshold, where you stand before the mystery, on holy ground.

I am not sure we ever meet the mystery of the other, but perhaps listening with the ear of the heart helps us to acknowledge it, respect it, stand in awe of it, while, at the same time, suspecting it contains a hidden oneness.

Maybe obedience is one way we learn to walk in the dark, in a perpetual question mark (paraphrase from Hineni: In Imitation of Abraham).

Thoughts on "Being Changed by God"

I was touched by...

God loving me
First, before I would or could
Constantly, while I bobbed and weaved
Continuously, while I hesitated and shied away
Generously, while I withheld and shunned
Openly, while I barred and blocked
Then I was touched by his call, knocking on my heart
And the ear I didn't know I had, listened and I was changed, by God!
Oblate Advisory Team 2019–2020

Special thanks to these oblates for serving on the Advisory Team. Much gratitude also to those who returned their survey and volunteered for a variety of services.

The term for serving on the Advisory Team has been three years with no renewal, as it has been for sisters serving on community committees. The community has now moved to the possibility of renewal for another three years. Given that we are looking to expand the involvement of oblates, the term for serving on the Advisory Team now has a possible renewal of another three years. Hence, Lynda Gradert has agreed to serve another three years and Ann O’Connor will extend her term for one more year in order to complete some of our planning. She will then step down so someone else can move into leadership.

Oblate Advisory Team Update

I am most grateful to the Oblate Advisory Team for their dedication to planning as we look to the future. Special thanks to Mary Baier who has graciously offered to facilitate the planning. – Michaela Hedican, OSB

As we anticipate Advent, I am thinking of Mary and Elizabeth. Both were vessels of God to carry the message of salvation. Both were asked to make life-altering changes to their lives. Who of us can imagine being Elizabeth, probably considered at retirement age, finding she is carrying a child? Being in my sixties, I would be more than a little anxious and feeling denial would be a good path to take. Yet, Elizabeth accepted God’s will and opened herself to His wisdom. Now, that is faith!

How would you feel if an angel appeared and said you will be pregnant with God’s son? Besides being a virgin and betrothed to another man, this would be quite a revelation. My dear Dad, who is now in his heavenly home, would have been a little concerned about my mental state or think I was fabricating a lie on how I became pregnant. Yet, Mary accepted God’s will and remained faithful. This was not only a life-altering change, but a sorrowful outcome for her. She lost her only Son to the cross so he could save us. Yet, she never wavered in accepting this challenging role.

Both women are examples of accepting God’s way and following whatever may happen in the future. I am sure there were times when they mourned their old way of life and wished God had asked someone else. All humans have those times.

How does this story relate to the journey we are currently taking as we discern the future of our monastery and how it will affect our dear sisters and us oblates? Each of us must reflect on this question as we travel this path.

Each of you received a letter from the Oblate Advisory Team highlighting the results of the input gathered at the Oblate Renewal Day. The input mirrored the sisters’ in many ways and demonstrates shared ideas, thoughts and concerns about the future. The Oblate Advisory Team will be meeting in November and continue to discern the input from all of you. The hope is to develop a three-year plan to address the four themes that were shared. The themes were: Ongoing formation for oblates; Oblates assisting with the “work” of the sisters; Oblates living at the monastery; Ongoing discussions on how we view oblates as sisters and brothers.

When the plan is ready for review, we will share it with all of you for further discussion. We cannot do this work alone and hope you will stay involved and supportive of our efforts. We will continue to keep you updated.

Prayers,
Mary Baier, Oblate Advisory Member
Cambodian Twin Brothers Reunite After 42 Years

A reflection by Andrew Jilani, OblSB, from Cambodia. He is an oblate of Saint Benedict’s Monastery.

On a sweltering hot day in April 2018, Fr. Unly Son (Son) was hurriedly getting ready to welcome his twin brother, Unly Sat (Tao), to Cambodia after 42 years. He was constantly on phone with Tao to determine approximate time of their crossing from Thailand to Koh Kong, Cambodia. I was part of the group which accompanied Son.

Son and Tao are short. Son appears a bit older and outgoing. Tao is shy and has an incessant smile. They were born on October 6, 1961, in the village of Chamkar-Tieng in Takeo. Later, the family moved to Kop-Thom village in 1962, near Thai border. An uncle bought a farm and married a local woman. Son helped on the farm and recalled, “Our family was not rich, but we had enough to live by.”

Fleeing Cambodia during Khmer Rouge

When Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia in April 1975, they also captured the village of Kop-Thom and ordered 1,000 families from the village to cut wood and build huts in the forest. Son remembered being scared at the sight of Khmer Rouge with guns: “I and Tao were only 14 years old then.”

In Khmer Rouge camps, Son said, “As a family, we were separated and often hungry.” As a result, families would form small groups to find food. One day, Son joined a small group of people which gradually grew to 10,000 and eventually escaped to Aranyaprathet, a Thai village. Son got separated from his parents and Tao in 1975 and recalled, “I was very sad.”

Son becomes a Buddhist Monk in Thailand

An older brother who was a monk in NAKKORN SAWANN pagoda in Thailand encouraged Son to become a monk. The possibility of a stable life appealed to Son and he joined the pagoda in 1976. Son said, “I prayed, chanted, collected food and cleaned the pagoda. As a monk, I followed Buddha’s teaching on nonviolence, meditated and showed gratitude to others.”

While Son was at the pagoda, his uncle encouraged him to move to a refugee camp in Aranyaprathet so he could move to another country. Son, his two brothers and their wives applied, and their applications were accepted in July 1979. On January 20, 1980, they left for Montreal, Canada. They left with no information about Tao, their parents and sister.

Son settles in Canada and becomes a Catholic priest

Son did not like Canada: “It was cold, and I did not understand the culture of French.” He continued, “I longed for warmer weather and food; not knowing about Tao was not easy.” The family was determined to “make it” in Canada where a Catholic family sponsored them. In March 1981, Son’s parents and younger sister also arrived in Canada. The parents told Son that they could not find Tao and thought he was lost. Hearing this, Son was very sad.

Son regularly attended the local church where a Cambodian priest encouraged him to become a priest. Son studied for a year in France. In 1992, he studied in Battambang Seminary for 6 years and was ordained a priest by Bishop Emile in Phnom Penh on December 9, 2001.

Tao makes Thailand home

In 1979, war broke out between Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge. Tao did not know where his parents were. Someone told his father that they had seen Tao in Sisopan. Upon hearing news about Tao, he rushed to Sisopan and brought him back to Neameat. Tao said, “I was very happy to see my parents and sister.” As the war intensified, four of them escaped to Thailand.

In Thailand, a farmer offered Tao a job. Tao recalled, “I enjoyed farm life and learned the Thai language.” One day while removing a fallen tree, he saw a Thai woman (Dao) with two buckets fetching water from a well. Tao helped Dao; the two became friends, and Tao fondly recalled, “Our friendship blossomed into marriage.” They married in 1982.

Finding Tao

After 10 years in Canada, Son returned to a refugee camp in Thailand in 1990 looking for Tao. Son asked many people about Tao but got no information. In 1992, Son made radio announcements about Tao without luck. Son, relentlessly, continued his efforts to find Tao.

On January 7, 2017, Son got a call from a friend who had been with them in the refugee camp. He told Son that a common friend, Leang, had Tao’s phone number. Son recalled that “January 7, 2017, was the longest day in my life.” As soon as he got the number, he called Tao. Son said, “I was both anxious and happy as I told Tao that I was his brother.” Tao, instantly, recognized Son’s voice, and the twins talked for the first time after 42 years.
Cambodian Twin Brothers Reunite After 42 Years (Continued)

Son and Tao reflect on their reunion

Son was overjoyed after his reunion with Tao. He recalled, “We were separated in Khmer Rouge camps, lived with uncertainty in the refugee camp and struggled in Canada.” Now I want to share my life with Tao. I missed Tao a lot.” He also responded, “I do not want so much to share material things with Tao, but rather the message that God is for all.” Tao added, “I was able to be hopeful during the separation. My strength came from Buddha’s teachings to be kind. Now, I am no longer alone, but part of the bigger family in Canada, U.S., France and Cambodia.”

Fr. Son is a Catholic priest in Cambodia. Tao lives in Chanthapuri, Thailand. Andrew Jilani is from Pakistan. He has a doctorate from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and has worked in the Cambodian education sector for the last 5 years. He became an Oblate of Saint Benedict’s Monastery in 2010.

NAABOD Conference

Lynda Gradert, OblSB, Minneapolis, Minn.

Highlights from the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors Biennial Meeting Conference, July 6–10, 2019

“The fruit of other people’s lectio supports my life.” This was one of the inspiring quotes that I heard at the recent NAABOD meeting in Schuyler, Neb. The theme was Continuing the Sacred Tradition: Benedictine Spirituality Today and Tomorrow.

The conference consisted of keynote speakers, panels of oblate directors and oblates and a lot of conversation about the current state of oblate programs. There were also a lot of phenomenal people attending. I’ll first share a key or two point(s) from a couple of the keynote addresses:

“Continue the Sacred Tradition of Peace” – Sr. Rosann Ocken, OSB

“There is no doubt the world needs peace; there is also no doubt that Benedict has outlined a way of peace that can literally change the world. It is up to us to continue the sacred tradition!”

“How can oblates carry on the flame?” – Fr. Joel Macul, OSB

Being an oblate means to continually nurture the monk within, being faithful to a part of one’s humanity. Monkhood means being, not doing, seeking the wholeness of self, being fully present to each other and the world. An important Benedictine value is balance—the middle way. What element of the tradition gives you life now?

During these changing times, we need to allow the Holy Spirit room to move and change. The Holy Spirit helps us move forward. The Benedictine life is a charism and a gift. We can be transformed as we receive it and pass it on to others. What is the work that needs movement now?

Finally, some general sharing from conversations: All monasteries are struggling with knowing what place the oblate has in their community. All communities are experimenting to see what works for each community and their oblate group.

This is definitely an ongoing discussion. Many oblate programs have different structures with both lay and monastic leadership. Some monasteries are developing interesting programs. St. Meinrad Abbey (IN) is developing a program for families to help them teach Benedictine values to their children. All of the talks can be found on YouTube. Search for “2019 NAABOD Biennial Conference.”

I’ll conclude with a quote from Fr. Macul: “What matters is being faithful now and hope in God’s mercy will take care of the rest.”

Prayer Intentions

Please remember the following in your prayers:

+ Martin Clark, husband of Jan Clark, OblSB, died July 14, 2019
+ Donna (Doll) Schneider, OblSB, died July 21, 2019
+ Marjorie Allred, OblSB, died August 1, 2019
+ Douglas Coy, OblSB, sister of Barbara McGinnis, OblSB, died August 10, 2019
+ Suzanne Welch-Dachel, OblSB, died August 13, 2019
+ Margaret Schmitz, mother of Ann O’Connor, OblSB, died August 20, 2019
+ Lorraine Weber, mother of Mary Baier, OblSB, died August 29, 2019
+ Marie Klang, mother of Rosie Imgrund, OblSB, died September 7, 2019
+ Bill Sisterman, husband of Carol Sisterman, OblSB, died November 3, 2019
+ Eileen Smith, OblSB, recently had a bone marrow transplant

If you would like a prayer intention included, please contact: mhedican@csbsju.edu or (320) 363-7060.
Happy Birthday!

Blessings on the day of your birth! May graces abound for those who celebrated this summer and those whose day is yet to be!

July
1 Bernadette Stein
2 Janet Schleper
3 Janice Kaylor
4 Judith Christenson
5 Janine Weber
6 Rosemary O’Keefe-Ebnet
7 Mary Stackpool
8 Elaine Willenbring
9 Suzan Koenigs
10 Bernard Franta
11 LaVonne O’Connor
12 Matthew Stergios
13 Megan Boyle
14 September
15 Joe Fitzgerald
16 Mary Novak
17 August
18 Wayne Landry
19 Georgia Goodell
20 Bonnie Marui
21 Karen Phillips
22 Lorraine Matusak
23 Marge Blenkush
24 Heather Klasen
25 Sheila Strong
26 Patricia Hackert
27 Jana Preble
28 Carol Sisterman
29 Dawn Tholke
30 Kevin Kluesner

October
1 Winnie Dehler
2 Jacklyn O’Brien
3 Christine Larkin
4 Kathryn Lee
5 Kristine Bach
6 Lee Kinball
7 Mary Foss
8 Eileen Grahek
9 Mary Voight
10 Anne Marrin
11 Marjorie Charbonneau
12 Katie Trafton
13 Judy Layde
14 Rita Gordon
15 Susie Roper
16 Mary Stommes
17 Liz Kuebelbeck
18 Suzanne Miller
19 Charles Preble
20 Cynthia Koziolek
21 Teresa Walker
22 Charlotte Klose
23 Sarah Wilkins
24 Clarey Mcnerny
25 Joanne Trafton
26 Joanne Thibault
27 Lucile Doffing
28 John Sweeney
29 Mary Smith
30 Bonnie Klatt
31 Ruth Lindstedt

November
1 Mary Camden
2 Shirley Carlson
3 Susan Zabel
4 Valeria Lehman
5 Patricia Gandolfo
6 Tami Kean
7 Mil Voelker
8 December
9 Mary O’Connor
10 Elaine Fernandes
11 Lynette DuBois
12 Theresa Lin
13 Juliana Howard
14 Christine Luna Munger
15 Margaret Schaaf
16 Annerose Schlaudraff
17 Martha Otto Honer
18 Carol Hyde
19 Kathleen Risler
20 Odila Myott
21 Helen Jean Thompson
22 Mary Baier
23 Cody Maynus
24 Phyllis Hayes

If you would like your birthday added to the list or if the date is incorrect, please contact Sister Michaela Hedican, director of oblates, at mhedican@csbsju.edu or (320) 363-7060.
Upcoming Oblate Events

Oblate Sunday: January 19, 2020
Rule of Benedict – Chapter 5, Obedience
Presenter: Mary Reuter, OSB
Monastery Dining Room | 1:15 – 2:30 p.m.

Saturday, February 22, 2020
Lenten Retreat for Oblates by Oblates
9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Oblate Sunday: March 15, 2020
Rule of Benedict – Chapter 6, On Restraint of Speech
Presenter: Josue Behnen, OSB
Monastery Dining Room | 1:15 – 2:30 p.m.
Invite a friend to join you for this Oblate Sunday.

Oblate Sunday: May 17, 2020
Rule of Benedict – Chapter 7, On Humility
Presenter: Karen Rose, OSB
Monastery Dining Room | 1:15 – 2:30 p.m.

Being Benedictine in the 21st Century: Spiritual Seekers in Conversation
This opportunity marks the first-ever gathering of professed Benedictines, oblates, staff, volunteers, friends and benefactors of Benedictine ministries and monasteries and any seeker who has read the Rule of Benedict and experienced a conversion. It will be a FACILITATED CONVERSATION among all participants about expanding how we live the Benedictine tradition now and into the future. Register at https://www.beingbenedictine.org/registration.

Oblate Renewal Day: Saturday, September 19, 2020
Benedictinism and Social Justice
Presenter: Anne McCarthy, OSB, Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Erie, Penn.

Sister Anne McCarthy is a member of the staff of Benetvision and Monasteries of the Heart, as well as a retreat leader and spiritual director. Long involved in peace and justice ministry, Anne serves on the board of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue internationally and in the U.S.