About the Oblates of St. Benedict

What is an oblate?

The word “oblate” comes from the Latin *oblatus* – an offering, someone or something that is given. Oblates have a long history: In St Benedict’s time (d. 547 A.D.), young children were offered to monasteries where they were educated and introduced to Benedictine life. Often, these oblates became full members of that monastic community as adults.

Over time, other adults who yearned for a spiritual life more deeply rooted in God asked to be associated with a specific Benedictine monastic community, in order to strive to live the spirit of the Rule of St Benedict while remaining in their homes and adapting it according to their family situation and work.

Why be an oblate?

To be an oblate is a “vocation,” a response to a call from God. It is a means of living a life of reciprocal blessing, between a person in the world and the monastics who have “left the world.” It is also a life of witness, carrying the values of monastic life (which are, at heart, the values of the Gospel itself) into the world by applying the teaching of the Scriptures, as interpreted in the Holy Rule, in their daily lives.

St Benedict’s primary intention, which infuses the Rule he wrote, was to “seek God.” In order to facilitate this, he emphasized a life lived in moderation, with a balance of prayer and work, supported by life in a community of like-minded disciples. It is this idea of moderation and balance, grounded in stability and mutuality, that most often draws people to explore Benedictine life, either as a monk/nun or as an oblate. At times, it may be the emphasis placed by St Benedict on peace, or hospitality, or the daily offering of worship in union with the whole Church that attracts people to explore this ancient, Orthodox way of life.

Who may be an oblate?

Any Orthodox Christian in good standing, male or female, lay person or ordained, married or single, who is at least 16 years of age is welcome to explore life as an Oblate of St Benedict.

Aspirants should have a sincere desire to deepen their Christian observance and life of prayer, and a willingness to accept the challenge to “prefer nothing whatsoever to Christ himself” (from the Rule). They must be willing to devote time and energy to learning the distinctive values and practices that give shape to monastic and oblate life, and be willing to place the things that pertain to their oblation under the guidance of the monastic Superior.

While it is not an absolute requirement for those who live at a great distance from the Monastery, the aspirant should have the intention of, whenever possible, spending time with their monastic community, especially for an annual retreat.
How does one become an oblate?

A person becomes an oblate by asking to become an oblate! The Prior will then send out this information packet and an Application form. The aspirant returns the form to the Prior and this begins the process.

Once the application is accepted, the aspirant is invited to be invested as a Novice⁴ Oblate. The investiture is a time when you express your intention to try: to seek God as best you can; to learn about St Benedict and the *Holy Rule*, and explore how it might apply to your own life; to grow together in prayer and communion with the monastics and with the other oblates.

One is a novice for a year. During that time, your goal is to develop an idea of what it means to be a Benedictine and an oblate. Thus, the novice studies and reflects upon one Lesson from the Handbook per month. Each lesson concludes with Reflection Questions. At the end of each month, a copy of your responses to those questions should be sent to the Prior, who will acknowledge receipt; he may or may not, in turn, comment on what you have written.

At the end of the novitiate year, and upon completion of all twelve lessons, the novice may apply to make oblation, and profession of the three promises. The Prior may then schedule the Rite of Oblation. As with the Investiture as a Novice, it is preferable that this be conducted by the Prior in the monastic Oratory; however, when necessary, the Prior may delegate a priest to celebrate the Rite.

The Rite of Oblation is a time of public commitment to the values, disciplines, and fellowship of the Benedictine family. Subsequently, oblation is renewed annually by means of a signed statement of renewal. This is done on the Feast of the Presentation (Entrance) of the Virgin Mary in the Temple – a very fitting time for renewing our own self-offering, especially since the Blessed Virgin Mother of God is, under her title of Our Lady of Glastonbury, the heavenly Patroness of our Benedictine community.

Because of the promise of stability that must be made to the Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence, the person may not be an oblate of another Benedictine community.²

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¹ A beginner, whose task is to learn what will eventually be embraced and professed.
² It is possible, with the blessing of both superiors, to transfer one’s oblation to another monastic community. Also, if the community of one’s oblation has ceased to communicate with the oblate, has become inactive or has been dissolved, the Superior of MOLSL may accept a unilateral transfer of stability.
The Six Duties of an Oblate of St Benedict
Of the Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence

1. **The Divine Office** (the Hours). Oblates shall pray, *on a daily basis*, those portions of the Divine Office, specified in their personal rule, agreed upon with the Prior before the Rite of Oblation. This is to include at least one of the “major” Offices of Matins/Lauds or Vespers. The Office (Hours) may be prayed according to the Rite used in an oblates parish church or any canonical Orthodox Rite approved by the Prior. In addition, oblates commit to remember the Monastery and their fellow oblates daily in their intercessory prayers.

2. **The Rule of St Benedict**. Oblates shall read daily from the *Rule of St Benedict*. The *Rule* sets forth the basic Gospel teachings and Christian disciplines that we follow to help us grow in the love of Christ.

3. **Lectio divina**. Oblates should practice *lectio divina* each day. This is meditative, holy reading of the Sacred Scriptures or other Orthodox writings. It is intended to help you be attentive to God’s presence in your daily life. The presence of God in this form of reading, as in daily life, works two ways: you seeking God; God seeking you.

4. **The Holy Sacraments** (Holy Mysteries). Oblates should participate frequently in the Sacred Liturgy, make regular confession to their priest, and, when properly prepared, receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord in Holy Communion.

5. **Christian Stewardship**. Oblates are to be regular in financial support, according to their means, of their parish, of the Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence, and of the poor and those in need. In some cases, other means of support for the monastic community may be accepted by the Prior, in lieu of monetary donations.

6. **Accountability**. Oblates (but not novices) are expected to communicate, by letter, or email, or phone call, with the Prior at least four times per year, at the Embertides.

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The Three Privileges of an Oblate
of the Priory of Our Lady and Saint Laurence

1. **Prayer**. To be remembered by name in the regular intercessions of the monastic community.

2. **Participation**. To attend the annual retreat for oblates at no charge. Also, to attend other events sponsored by the BFSL or the Monastery at a reduced charge or, sometimes, at no charge.

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3 Groups of days (Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday) of prayer and fasting, occurring after the first Sunday of Lent, Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Cross (Sept 14), and the feast of St Lucy (Dec 13). [Old English *ymbrendǣg*, from *ymbren*, or *ymbryne* a (recurring) period, from *ymb* around + *ryne* a course + *dǣg* day]
3. **Presence.** To be present at, or make extended stays at, the Monastery and take part in the worship and *horarium* of the monastic community at any time, provided space is available.

**The Three Promises of an Oblate of the Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence**

1. **Stability of Heart.** Monks, nuns, and oblates commit themselves to the monastic family they are joining. It is through commitment and perseverance – our stability of heart – that we shall be saved. A sense of purpose, of guided meaning in life, is the first fruit of stability.

2. **Ongoing Conversion in the Spirit of the Holy Rule.** As we continually seek God and strive for proper balance in the elements of our lives, we make progress in our fidelity to the spirit of monastic life. Each oblate, in consultation with the monastic Superior, must adapt the values and disciplines of the *Rule* (which are those of the Gospel), to the circumstances of his or her daily life.

3. **Obedience to the Will of God.** Obedience to the will of God, or active listening, is not a project we take up. Rather, it is a way of being in the world. God’s will is not a puzzle to be solved, but a mystery to be lived! For the Benedictine monk, nun, or oblate, listening and living is achieved through an attitude of contemplation, of joyful “listening with the ear of the heart” to the voice of God in every aspect of our lives. As members of a monastic fellowship, we also listen for the will of God in the voice of the Superior. His admonitions, concerning the *Rule* and Benedictine life, should carry great weight in our discernment.