

Being a Benedictine Oblate

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 monastery 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.

An oblate is, therefore, one who has offered their spiritual life and discipline to God, in union with the Monastery of their oblation, in order to apply the wisdom of the Benedictine *Rule* to their home, civic, and ecclesiastical lives.

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 prayer and 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 a Benedictine 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 in affiliation with our Monastery.

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 Abbot.

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 the Monastic Brotherhood, especially for an annual retreat. This is because oblation is meant to express a relationship between real persons, at a personal level.

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.¹ Oblates of another monastery are welcome to transfer their oblation to our Brotherhood.

How does one become an Oblate?

After reviewing and praying about this initial information, a person may submit the application form. The aspirant returns the form to the Director of Oblates and this begins the process.

Once the application is accepted, the aspirant is invited to be invested as a Novice² Oblate. The novitiate 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 and practice how the *Rule* can be applied to your own life; and to grow together in prayer and communion with the monastics and with your fellow 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 your mentor (assigned when one becomes a novice), who will acknowledge receipt; s/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 Abbot may then schedule the Rite of Oblation. As with the Investiture as a Novice, it is preferable that this be conducted by the Abbot in the monastic Oratory; however, when necessary, the Abbot 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 Brotherhood.

¹ 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.

² A beginner, whose task is to learn what will eventually be embraced and professed.

With regard to both novitiate and annual oblation, the following policies should be carefully noted.

The oblates fellowship is not primarily a social organization; rather, it is a body of people who have undertaken, with the blessing of the Abbot, specific obligations in covenant with the Monastic Brotherhood. Remaining an oblate is dependent upon fulfilling those obligations. Therefore, as specified in our Monastic Customary:

- A novice who has not submitted the required reflections to the mentor for three months will be placed on leave of absence for up to three more months; if s/he has not resumed regular reading and reflection or otherwise contacted the mentor by the end of the leave, s/he will be automatically released from the novitiate. Should former novices later believe their circumstances are more favorable, they are welcome to re-apply.
- A novice may request that the Director of Novices grant an extension of the novitiate for up to three months. If the necessary things have not been completed by the end of the three months, the novice will be released. Should former novices later believe their circumstances are more favorable, they are welcome to re-apply.
- An oblate who leaves the Orthodox Church, causes grave scandal, or fails to fulfill the Duties of an Oblate as spelled out below (*unless* specifically granted *economia* by the Abbot) will be dismissed or denied renewal by the Abbot, unless s/he has requested in writing, a leave of absence due to urgent circumstances. The Abbot may grant such a leave for up to six months, and it may be renewed once for up to a further six months.
- An oblate who recognizes that, due to circumstances, s/he is not in a position to automatically renew their oblation may consult with the Abbot and/or notify the Director of Oblates that renewal is not feasible at the present time. In this circumstance, the oblate can apply for reinstatement when circumstances are again favorable. S/he would then make their oblation as was done the first time, and subsequently renew in the usual manner.



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 Abbot. His admonitions, regarding the *Rule* and Benedictine life, should carry great weight in our discernment.

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 Abbot 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 oblate’s parish church or any canonical Orthodox Rite approved by the Abbot.
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 or other confessor, 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 Brotherhood may be accepted by the Abbot, in lieu of monetary donations.

6. **Accountability.** Oblates (but not novices) are expected to communicate, by letter, or email, or phone call, with the Abbot following at least two of the four, annual Embertides.³

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

1. **Prayer.** To be remembered by name in the regular intercessions of the Monastic Brotherhood.

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.

3. **Presence.** To be present at, or make extended stays at, the Monastery and take part in the worship and *horarium* of the Monastic Brotherhood at any time, provided space is available.



St. Henry II, Patron of Benedictine Oblates

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 *ymbrendæg*, from *ymbren*, or *ymbryne* a (recurring) period, from *ymb* around + *ryne* a course + *dæg* day]

**The Benedictine Fellowship of Saint Laurence
and
the Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence:
Orthodox Benedictine Monks and Nuns**

The Benedictine Fellowship

The Benedictine Fellowship of St Laurence is an independent, Colorado not-for-profit corporation (501.c.3), established to carry out religious and charitable purposes. Its mission is to promote spiritual renewal and worship according to the ancient traditions of Orthodox Catholic Christianity, and to establish Orthodox Benedictine monastic life on its 600-acre Fremont County campus. Taking inspiration from the classic monastic *Rule* of St Benedict (c. 542 A.D.), the Fellowship sponsors several ministries dedicated to promoting balanced Christian living through daily worship, study, prayer, contemplation, hospitality, and work.

The Fellowship is under the patronage of St Laurence, Archdeacon and Martyr of Rome, one of the early Church's most beloved saints. While associated in mission with the Orthodox Christian Church, the Fellowship, Press, and Retreat Center are not affiliated with any one bishop or jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church. An independent Board of Directors oversees our finances, facilities, and faithfulness to our mission.

While most of those who serve on the Board or live at the Retreat Center are Western Orthodox Christians *personally* affiliated with the Western Rite Vicariate of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, the Center is open and welcoming to Eastern Orthodox Christians of any jurisdiction and to all people of good will.

The Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence

The Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence is a small, canonical monastery for both men and women, under the jurisdiction of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, and is associated with the Western-rite Vicariate of that Archdiocese. The Monastery strives to model its life on the *Holy Rule* of Saint Benedict of Nursia (c. 542 A.D.), modified by a *Customary* developed by the founding Superior.

Our Lady of Glastonbury and Saint Laurence, Archdeacon and Martyr

Glastonbury is the legendary birthplace of English Christianity, believed to have been brought there by St Joseph of Arimathea. The story has it that Christ, himself, went there with St Joseph on a merchant voyage during the time before he began his public

ministry.⁴ Medieval writers also credit both St Patrick and St Brigid with time at Glastonbury, though there is no earlier documentary proof of their time there.

What is documented is that, at the time of the Saxon conquest, in the late seventh century A.D., there was already an ancient church there, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, around which there grew up a monastery. St Dunstan (later Archbishop of Canterbury) became Abbot there in 943 and introduced the *Rule* of Saint Benedict, under which the Abbey continued to flourish until it was destroyed by Henry VIII, who plundered and dissolved it and executed the last Abbot. It is now but a picturesque ruin.

In view of the arrival of an Icon of Our Lady of Glastonbury here at the BFSL Retreat Center (originally commissioned by a late member of the Board of Directors – who is now buried outside our Oratory – for a mission church and monastery in Canada), and the “Anglo” style and traditions of the Fellowship and resident monastics, it was decided to name the Monastery after the Virgin under her title of Glastonbury (Feast, August 15) and draw, prayerfully, not only on her intercession and protection along with that of Saint Laurence, but upon the rich heritage of ancient English Orthodoxy and monastic life as it flourished in Glastonbury for many centuries before the Great Schism.

The choice of St Laurence as our secondary Patron (Feast, August 10), quite naturally, honors our connection to the Benedictine Fellowship of Saint Laurence, on whose Rocky Mountain campus the Monastery is blessed to reside. It also provides inspiration towards self-sacrificial service, evangelization, and serves as a spiritual link to the ancient See of Rome as it existed in the first millennium of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of the Orthodox, prior to its schism from the four ancient Patriarchates of the East.



⁴ This legend forms the basis of a poem by William Blake, made popular in the film *Chariots of Fire*, the first two stanzas of which read: And did those feet in ancient time Walk upon England's mountains green? And was the holy Lamb of God On England's pleasant pastures seen? And did the Countenance Divine Shine forth upon our clouded hills? And was Jerusalem builded here Among these dark satanic mills?



Application for Admission as a Novice/Oblate of St Benedict
in affiliation with
The Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence

Legal Name _____ Baptismal/Chrismation Name _____

Date of Birth _____ Date of Orthodox Baptism/Chrismation _____

Parish and Jurisdiction _____

Married or Single? _____ Cleric (and rank) or Layperson? _____

Address _____ Preferred Phone No. _____
_____ Alternate Phone No. _____
_____ Email _____

Have your spouse and parish priest given their blessing to your application? _____

Are you an Oblate of another Benedictine Community? _____

If so, what was the date of your Oblation? _____

Oblate life requires a commitment of time, discipline, and giving. Please bear this in mind as you sign and submit this application. In things pertaining to the life and discipline of an oblate and the observance of the *Holy Rule* of St Benedict, you will be “under obedience” to the Abbot of the Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence; this obedience does not, however, extend to those matters that are the proper sphere of your parish, your confessor, or your family.

As an initial step towards growing into the Six Duties of an Oblate, I will undertake to pray the following Hours of the Divine Office: _____ ;
to spend the following amount of time daily in spiritual reading: _____ ;
and to contribute \$ _____ monthly to the Monastery or, pending approval of the Abbot, offer the following service in lieu of financial support: _____ .

I, the undersigned, affirm that I understand the obligations and rights of an Oblate of Saint Benedict in affiliation with the Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence and the Benedictine Fellowship of Saint Laurence, and that I freely choose to pursue the oblation of my life to God through the means of this discipline and Monastery.

Signature _____

Date _____

✘ Acceptance by the Director _____ Date _____