



# **Handbook for Oblates of Our Lady of Glastonbury Abbey**

**Hingham, Massachusetts USA**

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**Edited by Oblate Steering Committee of 2024-2025**

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# Section I

# **Glastonbury Abbey**

## **Oblate Chapter Mission Statement**

The mission of the Oblate Chapter at Glastonbury Abbey, Hingham, Massachusetts is as follows:

- To affiliate, through mutual affirmation, a commitment to the Benedictine way of life in this specific monastic community;
- To incur, although living outside the monastery, opportunities and guidance to grow in Benedictine charisms of prayer, work, and community;
- To pursue continual conversion to Christ by integrating to the best of each one's ability the spirit of St. Benedict as found in the *Rule of St. Benedict* (RB) to manifest Christ's presence in society;
- To act as a complementary spiritual component to the Monks of Glastonbury Abbey through participation in the Abbey's offerings of prayer and spiritual nourishment.

# St. Benedict and Oblates

Oblates promise to lead an enriched Christian life according to the Gospel as reflected in the *Rule of St. Benedict* (RB). In this way they share in the spiritual benefits of the sons and daughters of St. Benedict who are dedicated to the monastic life by vow. After a time of preparation that culminates in an Act of Oblation - a rite approved by the Church - the candidates become Oblates of St. Benedict. This promise affiliates them with a Benedictine community and commits them to apply to their lives the characteristic monastic principles.

Oblates strive after stability and fidelity in their lives by regular worship with other Christians and by the support they may continue to give to the social and educational apostolates of the Church as a whole.

In accord with the teaching of Benedict, Oblates practice moderation. This moderation manifests itself in the use of the goods of this world, an increasing concern for their neighbor, and in the way they temper and direct their desires. Their fidelity to Christian living will provide a much needed example of genuine Christianity and a stabilizing influence for good within their communities.

In the spirit of the Gospel, Oblates commit themselves to a continual conversion to Christ. They see sin and any attachment to it as basically incompatible with a serious following of Christ. Through this deepening of the Baptismal promise, the Oblate is free to put on Christ and to allow him to permeate his/her life. In this way, Oblates will come to recognize that in all the phases and events of their lives, in their joys and successes as well as in their sorrows and disappointments, they are in close union with Christ and participate in his very death and resurrection. This "putting on of Christ" is the goal Oblates pursue in their conversion of life.

In the spirit of obedience, Oblates strive to discover and maintain proper relationship with God, their family, and the civil and religious society in which they live. Before God, Oblates must come to recognize themselves as creatures dependent on their Creator and as sinners before their Redeemer. Aware of their own spiritual poverty and need of God, Oblates come to realize that they have no other reason for being, except to be loved by God as Creator and Redeemer, and to love and seek him in return.

In loving obedience to God's plan, Oblates develop a deep reverence for life. They will respect it as a precious gift from God and defend those groups that, because of age, health or race, are defenseless and most open to attack. Seeking harmony and integrity of life, they perpetuate and enhance the traditional Benedictine motto: *Peace*. Individually and together with other Christians, Oblates work to promote Christian family living. They take care to seek out opportunities to practice charity and warm hospitality to those around them.

St. Benedict lived in the sixth century. He was born in a small town north of Rome and went to Rome for his education. Before long he abandoned his studies and lived as a hermit for several years at a place called Subiaco, where in time he acquired a reputation for holiness and miracles. Attracting many followers, Benedict established monastic communities at Subiaco, Terracina, and Monte Cassino. It was at Monte Cassino that he wrote a Rule that combined moderation with fidelity to the best traditions in Christian monasticism. During the following centuries, his monastic way of life spread throughout Europe. Benedictine monasteries and convents became the principal centers of prayer, culture, and education, and St. Benedict became the patron of Western Monasticism.

From the very beginning Benedictine monasteries accepted boys and convents received girls, "offered" to them by their parents for their religious training and education. These children lived in the community, shared its daily round of religious activities, and became known as Oblates. 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 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 the *Rule of St. Benedict*. They applied the teachings of the *Rule* 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 Benedictine monastics (monks and nuns) of various communities, and receiving spiritual strength and inspiration from their association as Oblates.

# The Construction of the Rule of St. Benedict

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# The Rule of St. Benedict

## Chapter Summaries

**Chapter 1** defines four kinds of monk:

1. Cenobites, those "in a monastery, where they serve under a rule and an abbot".
2. Anchorites, or hermits, who, after long successful training in a monastery, are now coping single-handedly, with only God for their help.
3. Sarabaites, living by twos and threes together or even alone, with no experience, rule and superior, and thus a law unto themselves.
4. Gyrovagues, wandering from one monastery to another, slaves to their own wills and appetites.

**Chapter 2** describes the necessary qualifications of an abbot, forbids the abbot to make distinctions between persons in the monastery except for particular merit, and warns him he will be answerable for the salvation of the souls in his care.

**Chapter 3** ordains the calling of the brothers to council upon all affairs of importance to the community.

**Chapter 4** lists 73 "tools for good work", "tools of the spiritual craft" for the "workshop" that is "the enclosure of the monastery and the stability in the community". These are essentially the duties of every Christian and are mainly Scriptural either in letter or in spirit.

**Chapter 5** prescribes prompt, ungrudging, and absolute obedience to the superior in all things lawful, "unhesitating obedience" being called the first degree, or step, of humility.

**Chapter 6** recommends moderation in the use of speech, but does not enjoin strict silence, nor prohibit profitable or necessary conversation.

**Chapter 7** divides humility into twelve degrees, or steps in the ladder that leads to heaven: (1) Fear God; (2) Subordinate one's will to the will of God; (3) Be obedient to one's superior; (4) Be patient amid hardships; (5) Confess one's sins; (6) Accept the meanest of tasks, and hold oneself as a "worthless workman"; (7) Consider oneself "inferior to all"; (8) Follow examples set by superiors; (9) Do not speak until spoken to; (10) Do not readily laugh; (11) Speak simply and modestly; and (12) Express one's inward humility through bodily posture.

**Chapters 8-18** regulate the Divine Office, the Godly work to which "nothing is to be preferred", namely the eight canonical hours. Detailed arrangements are made for the number of Psalms, etc., to be recited in winter and summer, on Sundays, weekdays, Holy Days, and at other times.

**Chapter 19** emphasizes the reverence owed to the omnipresent God.

**Chapter 20** directs that prayer be made with heartfelt compunction rather than many words. It should be prolonged only under the inspiration of divine grace, and in community always kept short and terminated at a sign from the superior.

**Chapter 21** regulates the appointment of a Dean over every ten monks.

**Chapter 22** regulates the dormitory. Each monk is to have a separate bed and is to sleep in his habit, so as to be ready to rise without delay [for early Vigils]; a light shall burn in the dormitory throughout the night.

**Chapters 23-29** specify a graduated scale of punishments for contumacy, disobedience, pride, and other grave faults: first, private admonition; next, public reproof; then separation from the brothers at meals and elsewhere; and finally excommunication (or in the case of those lacking understanding of what this means, corporal punishment instead).

**Chapter 30** directs that a wayward brother who has left the monastery must be received again, if he promises to make amends; but if he leaves again, and again, after the third time all return is finally barred.

**Chapters 31 and 32** order the appointment of officials to take charge of the goods of the monastery.

**Chapter 33** forbids the private possession of anything without the leave of the abbot, who is, however, bound to supply all necessities.

**Chapter 34** prescribes a just distribution of such things.

**Chapter 35** arranges for the service in the kitchen by all monks in turn.

**Chapters 36 and 37** address care of the sick, the old, and the young. They are to have certain dispensations from the strict Rule, chiefly in the matter of food.

**Chapter 38** prescribes reading aloud during meals, which duty is to be performed by those who can do so with edification to the rest. Signs are to be used for whatever may be wanted at meals, so that no voice interrupts the reading. The reader eats with the servers after the rest have finished, but he is allowed a little food beforehand in order to lessen the fatigue of reading.

**Chapters 39 and 40** regulate the quantity and quality of the food. Two meals a day are allowed, with two cooked dishes at each. Each monk is allowed a pound of bread and a hemina (about a quarter litre) of wine. The flesh of four-footed animals is prohibited except for the sick and the weak.

**Chapter 41** prescribes the hours of the meals, which vary with the time of year.

**Chapter 42** enjoins the reading an edifying book in the evening, and orders strict silence after Compline.

**Chapters 43-46** define penalties for minor faults, such as coming late to prayer or meals.

**Chapter 47** requires the abbot to call the brothers to the "work of God" (Opus Dei) in choir, and to appoint chanters and readers.

**Chapter 48** emphasizes the importance of daily manual labour appropriate to the ability of the monk. The duration of labour varies with the season but is never less than five hours a day.

**Chapter 49** recommends some voluntary self-denial for Lent, with the abbot's sanction.

**Chapters 50 and 51** contain rules for monks working in the fields or travelling. They are directed to join in spirit, as far as possible, with their brothers in the monastery at the regular hours of prayers.

**Chapter 52** commands that the oratory be used for purposes of devotion only.

**Chapter 53** deals with hospitality. Guests are to be met with due courtesy by the abbot or his deputy; during their stay they are to be under the special protection of an appointed monk; they are not to associate with the rest of the community except by special permission.

**Chapter 54** forbids the monks to receive letters or gifts without the abbot's leave.

**Chapter 55** says clothing is to be adequate and suited to the climate and locality, at the discretion of the abbot. It must be as plain and cheap as is consistent with due economy. Each monk is to have a change of clothes to allow for washing, and when travelling is to have clothes of better quality. Old clothes are to be given to the poor.

**Chapter 56** directs the abbot to eat with the guests.

**Chapter 57** enjoins humility on the craftsmen of the monastery, and if their work is for sale, it shall be rather below than above the current trade price.

**Chapter 58** lays down rules for the admission of new members, which is not to be made too easy. The postulant first spends a short time as a guest; then he is admitted to the novitiate where his vocation is severely tested; during this time he is always free to leave. If after twelve months' probation he perseveres, he may promise before the whole community *stabilitate sua et conversatione morum suorum et oboedientia* -- "stability, conversion of manners, and obedience". With this vow he binds himself for life to the monastery of his profession.

**Chapter 59** allows the admission of boys to the monastery under certain conditions.

**Chapter 60** regulates the position of priests who join the community. They are to set an example of humility, and can only exercise their priestly functions by permission of the abbot.

**Chapter 61** provides for the reception of strange monks as guests, and for their admission to the community.

**Chapter 62** deals with the ordination of priests from within the monastic community.

**Chapter 63** lays down that precedence in the community shall be determined by the date of admission, merit of life, or the appointment of the abbot.

**Chapter 64** orders that the abbot be elected by his monks, and that he be chosen for his charity, zeal, and discretion.

**Chapter 65** allows the appointment of a provost, or prior, but warns that he is to be entirely subject to the abbot and may be admonished, deposed, or expelled for misconduct.

**Chapter 66** appoints a porter, and recommends that each monastery be self-contained and avoid intercourse with the outer world.

**Chapter 67** instructs monks how to behave on a journey.

**Chapter 68** orders that all cheerfully try to do whatever is commanded, however hard it may seem.

**Chapter 69** forbids the monks from defending one another.

**Chapter 70** prohibits them from striking one another.

**Chapter 71** encourages the brothers to be obedient not only to the abbot and his officials, but also to one another.

**Chapter 72** briefly exhorts the monks to zeal and fraternal charity.

**Chapter 73**, an epilogue, declares that the Rule is not offered as an ideal of perfection, but merely as a means towards godliness, intended chiefly for beginners in the spiritual life.

(From: Internet Archive [[Saint Benedict : The Holy Rule Of St. Benedict \(516\) : Saint Benedict \(Benedict of Nursia c. AD 480–550\) : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)])