

# Oblate Candidacy Program Outline

**1. THE IDEAL.** The Benedictine ideal for the laity differs in its outward expression from that which one would expect to find in the monastery. It is built on the same fundamental values, however, that one would find in the monastery: a response to the call of Christ to live in the reign of God, specifically to witness to the kingdom of heaven and to the passing character of the present world.

The Oblate of Saint Benedict is introduced to this idea by being shown the importance of a desire for God, a desire for union with God through intense and loving prayer, The transitory values of this world and its values becomes a base for removing attachments to material goods and placing a stress upon using what one has to increase one's love of God and neighbor, especially when these material goods make life "comfortable." In this way the Oblate of St. Benedict can witness to the kingdom of God to those near: family, neighbors, and friends.

**2. PRAYER.** The Oblate of St. Benedict must learn to seek God and to respond to God through a life of prayer. This is not a matter of "saying certain prayer" but rather dedicating one's whole life to a sensitivity of God's presence in all aspects of life. Using the Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office), the Oblate of St. Benedict becomes part of the "praying Church" that praises God through this public expression. The Oblate is in this way "fed" for other works throughout the day, always filled with a spirit of compunction and dependence upon God. Through the Eucharist celebrated with the parish community or in joining the Conventual Mass at the abbey, the Oblate of St. Benedict learns to build up the Body of Christ by entering deeply into this mystery. Private prayer, along with *lectio divina* help the individual enter into this spirit deeply.

**3. READING.** Benedict expected his monks to spend some quality time meditatively reading and praying with the Word of God. This process, referred to as *lectio divina*, give the Oblate an awareness of God's activity as manifested in the sacred history of the past as well as the sacred history of the present in which the Oblate lives.

Holy Scripture serves as the normative guide against which the Oblate of St. Benedict may evaluate the experiences that come during this encounter with God's word. The Oblate is encouraged to make use of programs in those parishes having adult education programs in Scripture or by purchasing materials designed to lead into the serious understanding of God's word.

**4. SILENCE.** Silence is not so much a matter of the Oblate being alone or away from family or insisting on "everybody being quiet in the house," as it is a matter of developing an attitude in which one is aware of God's presence as well as God's call to which the Oblate may respond. Stress here is upon the development of a home life where there will be a minimal amount of dissipation and where there will be much charity as well as an environment that will stand clearly against the world and its frenetic noise.

The charity here stressed should be also taught to the children (if the Oblate has children in the house) so that they develop a sense of God's presence. It would be hoped that this would show itself in respect for one another as well as honoring the private time (especially prayer time) of others in the house.

The value of silence seems to grow with children and some parents mention the difference in home life when the children begin to understand silence as a respect for one another. We do not stress silence as simply "quiet for its own sake," but rather as a means to the Benedictine ideal of a response to God and the creation of an environment where union with God may take place.

**5. COMMUNITY LIFE.** The Oblate home life is the life of a "little church" in which the Oblate (and children) gather as a group united in God. The primacy of charity is stressed here, especially God as He come wherever two or three are gathered. Sharing of time and work is given primacy: the charity that is expressed in the family and through the family to others outside the home.

**6. COMMUNITY OF GOODS.** In the monastic life, the evangelical counsel of “poverty” finds its deepest meaning not as a simple matter of deprivation as rather the promise “to share all that one is and all that one has with all people.”

The Oblate, following the Benedictine ideal, is shown that sharing of material goods within the family and especially with the poor outside the family give a solid base for the sharing of other treasures—and these build up other people in the pilgrimage toward God. The seeking of God’s kingdom must be first in the Oblate’s life. Many of the points we make in this session will rest on examples given by the Oblates themselves of ways in which they develop a spirit of sharing in the family unit and beyond.

**7. CONVERSION.** While the old terminology of “conversion of morals” does not seem to express an openness to the influence of the kingdom of God in the Oblate’s life, conversion as an ideal implies a willingness to grow, influenced by the monastery and its witness to “reaching out to what lies ahead and pressing towards the goal to win the prize which is God’s call to the life above in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

**8. STABILITY.** The vow of stability for the Benedictine helps the monk avoid looking for the “perfect community” and rather face the challenge to “bloom where one is planted.” The Oblate is encouraged to see this Benedictine ideal as rooting a person—whether parent, child, or single person—in a situation where discouragements and difficulties are faced head-on, without constantly running away to distractions or activities that would lead one to avoid confrontation with self. Developed here is the point that the Oblate must depend upon God, upon the salvation work of Christ, and should not see challenges as something to be done alone. Stability also requires for the Oblate a certain willingness to be faithful to the daily life that serves to bring the Oblate closer to God and the fact that these reminders come through serious prayer and reading (*lectio divina*).

**9. PROPHETIC WITNESS.** No less than the professed monk, the Oblate is in a position to present to the world a witness to the kingdom of God as prophet, as one who can stand to speak for God to the world. This takes place primarily by the Oblate’s willing examples shown by a rooting in values other than those presented as important by the world. This aspect is, in a sense, tied in with No. 11 discussed below (“Renunciation”), but grows from the attitude that one is willing to enter into the uncharted, the insecure areas, where one is led by God.

**10. OBEDIENCE.** In this traditional Benedictine value, the Oblate sees how the root of this word—ob+audire: giving heed, listening— gives the Oblate the foundation for his/her own entering into the mystery of Christ who was obedient to the Father. The point needs to be made here that the married Oblates need to “give heed” to their spouse, that children need to “listen” to parents, and that all need to be open to one another in this common goal of the search for God.

**11. RENUNCIATION.** Renunciation is understandable only in the light of faith. Anytime the Oblate represents the mystery of God to the world as something that is “primary,” there may well be a misunderstanding, especially on the part of those in the world who see the world and what it offers as being something permanent and not as a part of the preparation for the future, for the life with God above. Renunciation leads the Oblate to accept self with its limitations, with faults and failures and sins, and to allow God’s purifying fire of love to change him/her. The love of God and the love of the Christian community give the Oblate’s life a wholeness that one cannot have by nature.

**12. WORK.** Whatever the Oblate does, whether at home or in a job away from home, work is part of the plan of building God’s kingdom. The work one does is sanctified by the time given to prayer and various times during the day, reminding the Oblate that what is done is always done

“that God may be glorified in all things.” No work is to be looked upon as unimportant and the Oblate needs to be reassured that whatever is done—if sanctified and offered to God—build up the Body of Christ, the Church.