

“SEEKING GOD”
AS A BENEDICTINE OBLATE
OF
HOUSE OF BREAD MONASTERY

Never has the longing for “seeking God” been so great in our lives as it is now. There is a deeper “longing” for God. Within that search, the spiritual way handed down by St. Benedict places special emphasis upon *being*, rather than upon *doing*. What we do is the result of who we are, how we perceive ourselves and what we value. The Oblates are, in a unique way, *co-members* together with the professed Sister of House of Bread Monastery, in and through that shared and valued relationship, there comes a strength from knowing that there are other people in the world who value prayer, work and the spiritual life. There is the enjoyment, mutual support of friends within and beyond the monastery, and the challenges, which go together with journeying with the monastic community while sharing prayer and community life. In that sense, one could describe the “Oblate” as a *monastic at a distance* or a *monk in the marketplace*; Oblates may live in the area near the Monastery or at a distance from the location of the Community and the length of time a person may be in Oblate membership varies according to the agreement between the Community and the individual Oblate.

As an Oblate member of the Monastery in formal, but “non-vowed” relationship with the Benedictines of Nanaimo, the community’s hospitality welcomes our participation in liturgy, work and community life with the Sisters. Together, we document a covenantal agreement of relationship between the Oblate and the House of Bread Community. In this way, the Oblates have independence, while still living with people who share the same values that we have. The Oblates have been offered the hospitality of the Sisters, which is a “different” life-style of growth in prayer and spirituality for *non-vowed* persons, both women and men of varied faith heritage backgrounds.

Oblate members make a commitment to the monastery community through which we may share ministry, prayers, Eucharist, leisure and perhaps meals with the Sisters. We continue to pursue our own lives and careers, and we are responsible for our own living expenses and situation. The Sisters have always been so supportive of me and my work and family. Sharing in their prayers, their work and their recreation has been a true spiritual gift to me. These have been an invitational gift to explore our call to live the teachings of Christ, values of the Gospel and the Rule of St. Benedict through an “extended membership” with the House of Bread community.

The “Oblate” membership is, in a sense, a “re-examination” of the whole nature of ministry and relationship within the House of Bread Monastery—it is a new model of monastic community. It is not a re-invention of religious life; rather, it is a “reformulation” of the nature of monastic community life. Jesus was never a parishioner, and even though St. Benedict probably was a parishioner, I have long felt a strong urging towards living a life of faith in concert within a small community of “shared life

believers". As an Oblate, I have been privileged to be a part of the changing model of the monastic church. It has become clear that we as "Church" cannot stay as we are. Rather, we are moving from a "prophetic" tradition in rebuilding the Church and within that, towards the monastic lifestyle.

As a male person, the Sisters and female and male Oblates have enabled me to become better in touch with my "feminine" values; to become better aware of my heart and body. The Oblate Program has helped me towards a more balanced approach to living the spiritual life as a Catholic Christian male.

As an "Oblate", who am I? Through "shared-life" or "co-membership", I have become more aware that I am one of a faith community of women and men empowered by our baptism in the Spirit of Jesus to reach out to others in their need as Jesus did. The House of Bread community is dedicated to the continuation and renewal of ministerial service and worship in the Church. So, I hope that you will see that as an Oblate of House of Bread Monastery, you will sense that the Oblate Program is not an end in itself. Rather we are here to proclaim the compassionate presence of God in the midst of sin and that somehow God is with us, as pilgrims on the way to the reign. I see the Oblate membership program as a means, but not the only means, to promote the reign of God. The Oblate is not a "pious" external person or "Holy Joe" who says all the right prayers and attends all the services. Rather, we are sinners who are trying to change our lives by *being* "prayers" and "performers" of positive action and "doers" of "good" deeds because of God's Love and Forgiveness. Through being an Oblate, I share an awareness of God's presence and turn my words into completion of the plan of God for our intimate closeness with God and each other.

I am here because House of Bread and Bethlehem Retreat Centre are alive, because its people pray, work and serve others and each other. But mostly, I am here as an Oblate because Jesus, the Creator and the Spirit have brought me to this community in search of God.

"RECEIVE ME, LORD, AS YOU HAVE PROMISED, AND I SHALL LIVE, DO NOT DISAPPOINT ME IN MY HOPE"

Terry Totzke, OblSB

(This article is written with the hope that other Oblates will feel welcome to share their Oblate experience from their own personal perspective. Also, it has been written in trust that the professed monastic members will feel the freedom to offer their perceptions of Oblate membership. It is the quality of life that we are living and the ideals of the founders and our Creator that knit us together. The Oblate Program gives rich spiritual food and makes our live both whole and shared. The Oblate Program creates a broader vision because of involvement in community with a greater variety of people and talents. The quality of shared life and ideals of the founders knit us together. The Oblates believe that a quality of lay inclusion will spill over into inclusion in religious life. They sense that religious life will evolve and expand with time and there will be greater involvement

and weaving together of many new means of seeking God together as an “offering” of shared life to God.).