

The Navigator

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Introduction to Oblation 101

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

This edition of *The Navigator* will be different from other issues in the past. We are ready to open the door to our Oblate program and this edition will be focused almost entirely on that topic.

We decided to do this because the past few months have shown us that there is a great mystery about what it means to be an Oblate. We've had some dear friends (not a part of Saint Brendan's) confess to us that they have lived as Oblates for years but still have very little understanding of what an Oblate is, what an Oblate does, or what kind of formation an Oblate ought to seek for.



This truly caught us by surprise. So much so that we wanted to safeguard Saint Brendan's from a similar failure by not assuming that there's a common understanding among those called to life as an Oblate of the details and work involved in oblation.

Yes, many of our Friends in the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's have previously worked through various aspects of oblation when they were members of the Society of St. Seraphim of Sarov;

and for them, much of this will be a review although there may be a few new additions. And for other Friends, this will be totally new territory. But that's what the level of Friend was intended to be: a time to become acquainted with lay monastic life and spirituality without the obligation or accountability of becoming an Oblate. And as we've stated in previous editions, the level of Friend is also the prerequisite doorway to membership as an Oblate. It's for those Friends who feel ready to test such a call that this edition of *The Navigator* has been prepared. It will help to explain what comes next.

I will be discussing the course of oblation, much like a road-map, that will steer you from Postulant to Life Covenant Profession. Mother Sue will be writing more specifically to those who will enter the Postulancy and what you can expect during those initial steps of formation—and, of course, one of our donkeys rises to the challenge to help illustrate what she means!

Take this edition to heart. It's a whole new chapter for Saint Brendan's, one that we've been carefully building for a long time—and waiting for God's signal that it was time to go. Ask the Holy Spirit if this is your next step. Seek the mind of Christ as you consider what it means to begin the life of an Oblate. ✕

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OBLATE LIFE BEGINS AT SAINT BRENDAN'S

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

We have reached a place in the development of Saint Brendan's where God is now ready to open the door for Oblate life and formation. To help you understand how this works, please take time to read, study, and pray through the following information.

The **Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's** is designed to have two levels or groups of affiliates: **Friends** and **Oblates**. **Friends** is an introductory level of membership designed for people who, while keenly interested in lay monasticism, want to begin by simply receiving newsletters, gaining access to teaching materials, having opportunities to work through recommended reading lists, and being a part of a kindred family of believers. This level of membership imposes no obligations or requirements except for a small application fee to cover the cost of the newsletter and those things that God calls them to put into practice in their own lives. Friends, however, is a prerequisite stage for those aspiring toward life as a professed Oblate.

What, then, is an Oblate? Oblates (or making 'oblation') is Saint Brendan's contemporary equivalent to the ancient Celtic



Manaig – the people who gathered around the monastery in order to support and participate in its religious life and livelihood.

The *manaig* were farmers, craftsmen, and artisans; married, singles, men, women, and children. They were valuable members of the monastery but did not live under the sacred vows of the way monks or nuns did. *Manaig* were the original lay monastics and, for centuries, their direct descendants (today's Oblates) have been an indispensable part of both the monastery and the church.

Saint Brendan's Oblates are individuals who have associated themselves with **Saint Brendan's Monastic Retreat Community** so as to become a liv-

“Thus an Oblate of Saint Brendan's lives in the world as the salt of holiness so that the world might see Christ...”

ing icon of Christ according to Saint Brendan's **Rule of Life**, manifesting the rich presence of Christ in their homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and churches. Thus an Oblate of Saint Brendan's lives in the world as the salt of holiness so that the world might see Christ through the time-tested and honored practices of monastic spirituality.

Today, there are thousands of Oblates associated with monasteries and convents throughout the world, working and living in spiritual union with their “spiritual households.” It's this spiritual union with a religious house which allows Oblates to draw strength, inspiration, instruction, encouragement, and prayer cover for their lives as lay monastics. It's this same support which allows the Oblates of Saint Brendan's to prayerfully pattern their lives around the original Benedictine promises of **stability**, **fidelity**, and **obedience**, to which we also add the biblical aspiration toward **joy**.

Oblates of Saint Brendan's, like Oblates of other religious communities, promise to lead a Gospel-centered, lay monastic life which, after a period of growth and testing, culminates in the sacred act of full Oblation. What are the steps to becoming a full Oblate?

STEP 1. Sense and discern that you are being drawn by God. You will know in your spirit that you are being called to a deeper level of Christian spirituality. The course may not be clear but the call is distinct and persistent.

STEP 2. Test your call to monastic spirituality. There are many Christian lifestyles and practices that can lead to a deeper relationship with God.

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Monastic spirituality is only one of those ways. It's right for some. It's not right for others. And it's definitely wrong if it's not God's will for your life. Pray it through.

STEP 3. Confirm your call with trusted Christian friends and advisors. People around you can often discern the things for which God has already spiritually 'wired' you. Their discernment is an excellent indicator of how God may be calling you. You may already be demonstrating the basic monastic disciplines in your life while not even realizing it. However, others will see it and affirm it.

STEP 4. Begin to 'intentionalize' your current spiritual disciplines on a regular basis. Are they a joy or a burden? Do they restrict or liberate? Do they nourish you or rob you? Let this also be a part of your test.



STEP 5. Make application to Saint Brendan's Oblate program. You will need to fill out an application which also requires from you a brief, personal narrative. There will also be a form for your pastor or priest that must be completed and returned to us indicating that you have the blessing and prayer cover of your church leadership.

STEP 6. Participate in the Oblate Postulant Ceremony. Upon acceptance and approval of your application, we will send your pastor or priest a brief ceremony for your induction as a **Postulant**. This ceremony can be conducted in the church office with the leadership of the church or, more ideally, before the witness of the entire congregation. You will be prayed over and presented with a copy of Saint Brendan's Breviary and Rule of Life. Since these items will be delivered directly to the church, your church leadership will have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with level of accountability that your life is taking and that it does not conflict with the mission of your church.

STEP 7. Continue the process of discernment. This includes growth as a Postulant and further growth as a **Novice** (with its own application, ceremony, and requirements). This helps to draw you into the vision and ministry of Saint Brendan's for your local area and allows for spiritual direction and maturity. Through regular contact, opportunities for retreat, selected readings and study guides, consistent use of the Breviary for daily worship, and formation development through the Rule of Life, you will know if monastic spirituality will be your lifetime gift to God.

STEP 8. Participate in the final Ceremony of Full Oblation. Upon acceptance and approval of your application to a life of full oblation, and with the blessing and consent of your church leadership, you can become a Professed Oblate of Saint Brendan's. There are two options here. One is provisional full oblation for a set period of time – two, three, five years (we'll pray through this with you and seek discernment from the Lord), after which you will be released from your promise, much like a temporary Nazirite vow. This is Saint Brendan's **Provisional Covenant Promise**. The other is a lifetime full oblation where you are offering yourself as a living sacrifice to God, dying to Christ through lay monasticism for the rest of your life. This is Saint Brendan's **Life Covenant Profession**. Full Oblates, whether Provisional or Life, may add the suffix **POSB** (Professed Oblate of Saint Brendan's) after their names (ex., Mr. John Smith, POSB). Those who have made Provisional Covenant Promises may, at the conclusion of their promised commitment, request to make a Life Covenant Profession or another short-term Provisional Covenant Promise.

What, exactly, does an Oblate of Saint Brendan's do? Truthfully, there is nothing an Oblate does that cannot also be done by any Christian. It's not so much a life of gaining esoteric knowledge or engaging in ascetic spiritual practices reserved only for the most advanced; that's not the goal of lay monasticism. You become an Oblate by...oblation.

“An Oblate is one who unreservedly gives himself as a gift to God... through his intentional, devoted life of prayer and discipline....”

An Oblate is one who unreservedly gives himself as a gift to God. Whereas many contemporary Christians seek to be blessed by God and live for God only as their convenience allows, an Oblate hands himself over to God as a sacrifice, seeking to bless God through his intentional, devoted life of prayer and discipline.

While there is no 'typical' Oblate of Saint Brendan's, there's a uniformity in the things that an Oblate should strive to offer God, especially as they grow more consistent in the Rule of Life. Every lay monastic associated with Saint Brendan's will be found faithful in the following disciplines:

Praying the Divine Office. This is the regular outflow of love from our hearts to God as we fulfill the mandate to "pray without ceasing." The Divine Office, Daily Office, or Liturgy of the Hours is this gift prayed to the Lord two to six times a day. This fixes in our spirits the fact that prayer is not an interruption of our work and leisure, but that our work and leisure are the interruption to our gift of prayer.

A devotion to Divine Reading (Lectio Divina). This is slow, absorbing reading that contemplates and meditates on the Word of God until your spirit is attuned to the heart and mind of Christ.

Structuring the day for silence or solitude. Oblates of Saint Brendan's enjoy silence in their lives and actively seek it out. Silence or solitude, in conjunction with Divine Reading, is the earpiece through which we are privileged to hear the "still small voice" of God.

Pursuit of a monastic lifestyle. Oblates (as Pope John Paul II once said) seek to "unify one's life around the primacy of God." Saint Brendan's version of this is, "The Lord first served." This is done through the imitation of Christ using ancient and tested monastic disciplines such as simplicity, fasting, humility, study, submission, etc. This aspect of monastic life was called *conversatio morum* by the ancient Benedictines; a passing away from the things of this world that weigh us down, thus giving us the freedom through obedience to devote ourselves to the one thing that is necessary.

Reading monastic authors, both contemporary and ancient. Oblates of Saint Brendan's should desire continuous formation by gleaning from those who've successfully walked this spiritual path. There is no plateau when, once achieved, permits

a laziness in our learning and study.

Giving back to the family of God. Oblates of Saint Brendan's will submit to God's leading in areas of service in their local churches; not just in activities that generate positive recognition, but in the small tasks, the hidden tasks, the humble tasks, the tasks that nobody else wants. Oblates will also lift up their church leadership, vision, and mission in regular prayer. They will do the same for their communities and community leadership, blessing the towns and cities where they live in the name and for the sake of Christ.

Engaging in opportunities for spiritual retreat. This is not a getaway to an isolated campground; this is taking the opportunity to be part of a monastic community for a weekend or longer. Many convents and monasteries open their doors for people seeking a retreat. This puts you in the refreshing company of monks and nuns in the daily rhythm of monastic life. Oblates may have the time to do this once every couple of months or maybe just once a year. A religious house may be close by or Oblates may come to Saint Brendan's (Oblates must make at least one retreat at Saint Brendan's prior to full oblation). Without a doubt, the opportunity to be in the company of vowed religious men and women is one of the monastery's greatest gifts given back to the Church.

Oblation is a calling. Oblation is a pursuit. The perfection of oblation can fill a lifetime. Much of oblation is lived out unseen from the eyes of others and, in this sense, requires personal discipline as well as the grace of the Holy Spirit. And yet, like Jacob who wrestled alone with God until God subdued him (Genesis 32:22-32), a life of oblation will change you in ways unmistakable to the notice of others. It's hard to mistake the fragrance of a holy sacrifice. Sue and I are not perfect at this; we're still learning as well. But we have what we believe is God's vision for Saint Brendan's and we invite you to join us in this vision. If you are ready, request an **Application for Admission as a Postulant** and we'll send it to you right away. ✕



The Minimum Requirements Sue Andraeas, Prioress

*“The fear of the Lord
is the beginning of knowledge:
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”
Proverbs 1:7*

I don't know if you're tired of hearing about Doyle the Donkey. I'm not tired of talking about him yet, so guess who this article will be about! Yep. Doyle. Like most of the dogs I had growing up, he was a rejected, unloved critter. But unlike my dogs, that former rejection hasn't quickly turned into unshakable loyalty. Why? Because dogs are instinctively predators, hunters. Show them that you are a worthy 'head of the pack' and they will do whatever you ask, knowing you will be able to provide. But donkeys are not predators; they aren't even really prey. They have been known to attack and maul coyotes and cougars, so they are not afraid to kill. That means, I couldn't convince Doyle to love me for my 'hunting skills' or for my protective skills. Our relationship would have to be based upon something else: intentional submission on his part and intentional leadership on my part. It is new territory for both of us.

“And we start, most of all, with relationship, and the understanding that these initial basic steps are to become the ‘instinctive’ foundation for all that is to follow.”

When Doyle arrived here, he already knew he liked Chula, the other donkey. She had become the head of the herd. I wasn't necessary. He would let me put his halter on him, but only because it meant he'd be led outside where Chula (and the grass) was. But as soon as I tried to take him for a walk, I became an enemy because I was taking him away from Chula – and that grass. I'll spare you the description of the first few weeks, except to say that I have come to understand Ps. 147:10 in a whole new light! (“His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man.” Doyle's strong legs and hard hooves did NOT bring pleasure, and my legs were not 'delighted' by the countless bruises and welts!) Eventually, Doyle decided I was a worthy of being tolerated and that, perhaps, I'd make a good playmate. That was almost worse because he began to treat me like a buddy. Donkeys

play rough. More bruises. And I couldn't use force because then *he'd* use force and, well, I'm no match for him! After many discussions about the leader being the one with the rope and the follower being the one wearing the halter on his face, we came to a mutual understanding. I would learn all I could about these strange, strong, intelligent creatures and he would try to be more gentle. After three long months, we were ready to begin training. BEGIN, notice. And this is where it all applies to YOU, believe it or not. Stay tuned. It'll make sense soon. All this 'Doyle talk' is more than just talk...

The basic, minimum requirements for donkey obedience are 6 key elements:

- **'Walk on'** means exactly that, staying on the right side of me.
- **'Whoa'** means stop. Now. Here. Facing forward.
- **'Back up'** means to go in reverse until I say 'whoa.'
- **No biting humans.** Ever.
- **No kicking humans.** Ever.
- **The human is always the boss.** The donkey is not the boss. Ever.

Simple, right? WRONG! For example, it was hard for Doyle to grasp that he had to walk where I wanted him to walk, at the pace I was walking, and not stop until I wanted to stop. Learning to “Whoa” was almost as bad. He soon learned that my secret hiding place for training treats was in my left front pants pocket. So “Whoa!” soon came to mean “stop walking, step on Sue's foot and stick nose in the treat pocket.” I could not get

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MONASTIC MUSE

muse \ˈmyüz\ 1: *vb* to turn something over in the mind meditatively 2: to think reflectively 3: *n* a state of deep thought...

“Abstinence from sin is not sufficient for perfection, unless a person also assumes the work of righteousness—the activities of doing good.”

— Clement of Alexandria (c. 195 AD)

him to stop beside me for anything! He's a pro at backing up. (I have no clue why that is. Any insight from you equine readers??) And as for the biting and kicking and my being the boss... we're still negotiating those terms. But it's important that Doyle learn ALL of these things, and that he execute them perfectly. Until then, I can't put a bit in his mouth, or a saddle on his back (let alone a rider!). I can't hook him to a plow or a cart or even a log to pull from the woods. If I can't trust him with the basics, and if he doesn't trust me enough

pulling it. He needs to learn about it and see it demonstrated before he is ready to try it out for himself. Is a Postulant expected to do vast amounts of Bible study and meditation, for a regular keeping of the more rigorous spiritual disciplines? NO! Neither is Doyle ready for the back-and-forth hard labor of pulling a plow, something that must seem pointless to an animal that can't know he is preparing the ground to provide food for himself and others. But he'll see Chula pulling a plow. Then he'll see oats growing there. Doyle also



Doyle is curious about everything, even one of our new peeps that will soon grow up into a laying hen. In this picture, little "Foster" (yeah, a guy's name given to a girl; there's a story behind that, too) is being introduced to Doyle—she's not sure what to make of that big nose and those lips! Chula looks on.

to want to execute those basics, he's not ready for responsibility. And he has to be able to do these minimum requirements without even thinking about them, or expecting to be rewarded for them. In other words, HE must want them to become as instinctive as his own instincts.

Are you getting the picture? Those six 'minimum requirements' for Doyle are like the requirements for Postulancy. They must become almost instinctive before the 'real work' of monastic life is even really discussed. Let me show you what I mean. Are postulants required to keep all the Offices? NO! That would be like hooking Doyle up to a cart, and the results would be equally disastrous. It's enough, for now, that Doyle *knows* what the cart is, and that he sees Chula, his herd-mate,

watches Chula stand perfectly still while we put on all her tack – her bit in her mouth, bridle, blinders to prevent her from seeing what she shouldn't see, harnesses and all the 'gizmos' that go on her back so that she's ready to work. He learns by watching, then by trying it out a little at a time, and THEN, only then, does he start doing. To try to put a bit and bridle on him and immediately hop on his back would be as dangerous for him as it would be for me. Who knows what mental damage would be done to him – or what physical damage to me when he rebels against all the strange 'disciplines?' The same is true for us. To jump into huge demands for spiritual disciplines could derail any serious attempts at long-term works of faith. So we start slowly. And we start, most of all, with relationship, and the understanding that these initial basic steps are to become the 'instinctive' foundation for all that is to

follow. Here's the full list – this time for Postulancy for People, not for Doyle:

- **Develop a relationship with Fr. Alan and I as Prior/Prioress.** Christianity is, more than anything else, built upon relationships – first with Christ and then with each other.
- **Begin using the Breviary**—baby steps, maybe one Office per day.
- **Begin to read the Rule and to apply basic disciplines like daily Scripture reading and prayer** so that you know where you are headed – like Doyle watching Chula before attempting it himself.

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- **Read some books about monasticism and do the study guides available.** Again, know where you are headed by watching someone who has already been there.
- **Pay \$20.00 toward the books and study guides you receive.** Even a small sacrifice can create greater commitment.
- **Be teachable.** You will be given a spiritual director, a person who is as committed to your spiritual growth as you are. Or you can suggest your own preference for a spiritual director, someone who already knows you well and whom you trust, and who knows about monastic life as it appears in the Rule of Saint Brendan's. But in any case, it must be someone who understands the role of Christian leader, the cost of discipleship, and who possesses the necessary maturity, discipline, and humility to guide someone else.

The only way I can teach Doyle is if he wants to learn, if I know what I want what's good for him, and if I can explain all of that to him. The first step is relationship. The second is commitment – from both of us. Christian discipleship is no different. Alan and I, like all spiritual directors, must spend as much time in the presence of God - seeking His will for ourselves and the Friends/Oblates He has placed in our care – as we spend working with, and for, all of you. We don't want to become legalists or dictators. We're not teaching you to be predators – or prey. We want to be guides to Christians who are seeking Jesus as actively and intentionally as we are. You have to trust that we do indeed seek God's will for you before we offer any guidance. That requires time, and relationship. Is monastic life the only way to know God? Of course not! But it is a way that nurtures relationship, provides stability and an intentional plan to grow and mature in Christ-like faith. And very often, that first step of submission and a teachable heart is the toughest one. Don't believe me? Ask Doyle.

(Oh! Just as a side note... Go back to the verse at the beginning. "fools despise wisdom and instruction." I call Doyle 'Funny Boy' because while he doesn't despise instruction, he sure likes to interrupt it with practical jokes. Donkeys have a great sense of humor, but it's an acquired taste, I suppose. I thought I'd look to see what the Hebrew word for 'fool' might be. It's "eviyi," pronounced ev-

eel. Odd. A word that meant 'foolish' and 'silly' is the one we now use for something that is in total opposition to God. Could it be that the foolish despising of wisdom and instruction is the root of evil? Perhaps we'll leave that one for Alan to ponder.) ☺



SAINT BRENDAN'S UPDATES

- The Saint Brendan's not-for-profit corporation has a new board member, Jeffrey Felter of St. Augustine, FL. Thank you, Jeffrey, for your help and wisdom.
- A new study guide has been completed for Richard Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline*. This will be a required study guide for those in the Oblate program. However, if you would like one as a Friend, let us know and we'll send it to you.
- Additional copies of the **Rule of Life** and **The Breviary** are available for purchase. The **Rule of Life** costs \$8.00 and the **The Breviary** costs \$10.00. These costs include shipping. Those making application to the Oblate program should remember that the application fee includes the costs of both these books.
- Saint Brendan's has been received and placed under the cover of the United Anglican Church. Be in prayer for this new relationship.

The Navigator

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