

DOUAI OBLATES - AN INTRODUCTION

Cum permissu

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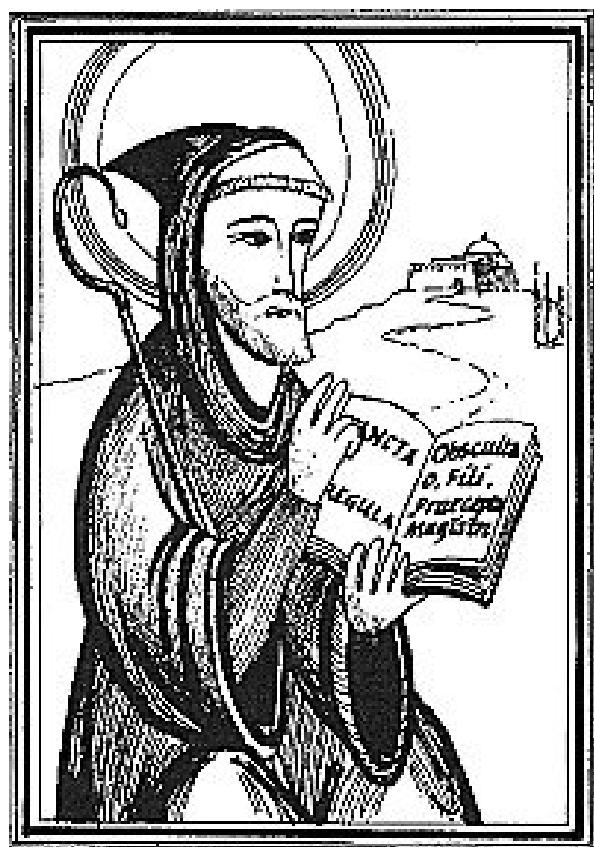
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OBLATES OF DOUAI ABBEY

AN INTRODUCTION



PEACE TO ALL!

Whether you are at Douai for the day, a few days mid-week or for a weekend, we hope you will find this a useful booklet to help answer some of the questions you might have about becoming an oblate of Douai.

WHAT IS AN OBLATE?

Oblate comes from the Latin verb ‘to offer’ and means ‘an offering’ or ‘oblation’. Oblates are people who seek to deepen their response to the

Gospel through association with a particular monastic community, in our case the community of St Edmund, King and Martyr, at Douai Abbey. They seek to implement the *Rule of St. Benedict* in their daily lives, in the light of the insights and experiences of their fellow oblates and of members of the monastic community.



Recognising the need for a framework of values in their lives, oblates seek simplicity of life and spiritual friendship, with a sense of being in union with a community of monks and oblates that is an expression of a living tradition.

Oblation is open to all Christian men and women (you do not have to be a Catholic to be an oblate), lay or clerical, married or not, young or old, however far from Douai. The decision to make an offering of oneself as an oblate comes about as a response to a call from God discovered through an experience of the life of the community at Douai.

WHAT DOES THE MONASTERY ASK OF OBLATES?

Oblates are members of the extended monastic community and therefore need to take their commitment seriously. The monks invite us to live our lives in accordance with the Gospel while recognising that they are trying to do the same.

OBLATES - WHO ARE THEY?

We are a group of lay and clerical secular people trying to follow, with varying degrees of success, the *Rule of St Benedict* in our lives. Simply put, we are Christians of different generations, from a variety of backgrounds, and living in different parts of the country and, in some cases, overseas. We have both male and female oblates from different Christian denominations. In addition to trying to live our lives in accordance with the *Rule*, oblates also attend regular retreats at Douai organised specifically for oblates. These take place from a Friday to a Sunday or mid-week. See next page.



In addition to the regular oblate retreats at the monastery (which are booked through the oblate director and are not generally accessible on the web except at <http://www.douaiabbey.org.uk/douaiobl.htm>), there are five Chapters which organise their own gatherings: the Julian Chapter, based in Norfolk, the Wulstan Chapter based in Warwickshire, the Faringdon Chapter in Berkshire, the Erconwald Chapter based in London and St Margaret's in Dunfermline. A chapter is about to be formed in Lancashire under the patronage of St Alban Roe. Each chapter, perhaps only half a dozen members, meets several times a year.

There is an **Oblate Directory** which contains a list of all the members' addresses and contact details. Many oblates keep in touch with each other outside of the retreats.

HOW MANY RETREATS ARE THERE?

Oblates should try to attend at least one **retreat** per year at Douai, but may go to as many as they wish. There are currently 6 per annum, 3

weekend ones and 3 mid-week.

WHAT HAPPENS AT AN OBLATE RETREAT?

Oblate retreats start with Vespers with the community at 6 pm. You will be given a programme for the retreat when you arrive at Reception and collect your keys. **Community prayer**, the Office, takes place in the **Abbey Church**. Guests and oblates are encouraged to join the monks in the choir stalls in the stalls nearest the altar, and attendance at all services is encouraged but not required. Those who wish to attend are requested to be in choir five minutes before the start of the office so that they can be seated and given the appropriate service sheets in good time. [The internal buzzer will ring 5 minutes before each service is held in the Abbey Church. The Church bell rings at the start of each service.] Guests and oblates are asked **not** to enter choir once an office has begun.



The structure of the day is as follows, although it occasionally varies a little:

06.20-07.05	Morning Prayer (English)
07.10-07.40	Time for private prayer
07.45-08.15	Community Eucharist (not Sundays)
08.15-09.00	Breakfast
11.00-12.15	<i>Eucharist on Sundays</i> [sitting in the nave]
12.50-13.00	Midday Prayer (English)
13.00-14.00	Lunch

18.00-18.30	Vespers (Latin Chant)
18.30-19.00	Time for private prayer
19.00-19.30	Supper
20.00-20.30	Compline (English) <i>[Not Sundays nor most Tuesdays. Please consult the church notice board or the website.]</i>
22.00-09.00	Night Silence until after breakfast

At Mass, those who are unable to receive communion for any reason are very welcome to go up to the altar and ask for a blessing.

During an oblate retreat there are a number of sessions where we usually examine some aspect of the *Rule* and discuss it. These are usually led by our Oblate Director, but other monks and outside speakers are sometimes invited. There is also a session of communal *Lectio Divina*, designed to assist oblates to become more familiar with this Benedictine style of prayer. (See page 9 below)

BECOMING A NOVICE OBLATE

Aspiring oblates, after taking time to reflect on making this commitment, are expected to submit a written or e-mail request to the Oblate Director asking to be admitted as a novice oblate. The Oblate Director will submit this request to the Abbot's Council. It is important to keep in mind that this is entirely voluntary and no one is pressured to do so. The *Rule* [58] states that newcomers should not be granted an easy entry, so you may have to be persistent in your application. "If someone comes and keeps knocking at the door, and if at the end of four or five days he has shown himself patient in bearing his harsh treatment and difficulty of entry, and has persisted in his request, then he should be allowed to enter." *[RB 58:3-4]*

The novitiate normally lasts a minimum of twelve months during which time novice oblates are recommended to attend at least one and, if possible, two retreats in order to gain a greater understanding of what oblation entails. While there is no formal course of study or instruction it is expected that oblates will have acquainted themselves with the contents of the **Douai Oblate Companion**, which they receive from the oblate director on admission. This folder contains various documents such as articles on the *Rule of St Benedict* with question papers for one to answer if one so wishes.



At the rite of reception, the new oblate is given a copy of the *Rule of St Benedict* and a Benedictine Medal. Oblates often wear their Benedictine medals throughout retreats, so they can recognise each other. Particular consideration is given during this time to the three promises made at final oblation; these are modelled

on the monastic vows of stability, obedience and conversion of life. There are various ways of understanding these and you will find discussion with other oblates helpful here.

The Oblate Director is available to guide novice oblates and propose tasks for the period of the novitiate and beyond. He will be able to supply you with a copy of the ceremonies used on receiving a novice oblate and when making a final oblation.

BECOMING A FULL OBLATE

When the novitiate is over, application to make one's final oblation should be submitted in writing or by e-mail to the Oblate Director. Upon receipt of the application, the Oblate Director will propose the names of new oblates to the Abbot's Council and if approved the new oblates are admitted by the Abbot during Conventual Mass, when the oblates read aloud their own hand-written promises, following which these are signed by the oblate and the Abbot and placed on the altar at the Preparation of the Gifts.

OBLATE PRAYER

It is hoped that oblates will pray some part of the Office each day. Many Oblates of Douai Abbey say **Compline** in the privacy of their homes at approximately the same time as the monks – 8.00 p.m. Novice Oblates are given a copy of *Compline* as celebrated at Douai. However, individuals must choose what is suitable for their own lifestyle and do what they can.

Suitable **prayer books** are available for purchase from the bookshop, located at the back of the church, and for guidance on these, and for a bibliography of recommended books to read, see the list at the end of this booklet or seek the advice of other oblates or the Oblate Director.

LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is a form of meditative prayer, which can be done alone or in a group. It focuses on a small piece of text from Scripture which one mulls over and then asks oneself ‘What is this saying to me?’ and ‘What is my response?’ A separate document is available from the Oblate Director that explains this process.

A session of group *lectio divina* is organised for every oblate retreat to allow oblates to experience this form of Benedictine prayer.



WHAT HELP CAN I GET?

Oblates are always keen to help other oblates and we also have our **Oblate Director** (douaioblade@aol.com) with whom we liaise on a regular basis. You must feel free to approach an oblate either in person or by e-mail if you would like some help or support.

Some oblate novices have asked experienced oblates to **mentor** them. Feel free to ask individuals or ask the Oblate Director for assistance in selecting someone for you. **Other monks** are also available if you wish to talk to them about something; simply ask them directly or arrange to meet.

The Abbey Church is open all day and so too is the **bookshop** at the back of the Church. When buying books, please leave your payment (cheques payable to ‘Douai Abbey’ or the correct money) in the slot in the wall

near one of the bookshop doors.

There is a **guest library** next to Room 7 on the first floor in the old Guest House near the main entrance, open all hours. You may borrow books and return them at your leisure. Please ensure you write your name and book title in the register, which is kept on the right hand windowsill shelf. When returning books, please put them back in the right place, from where you took them. Consult the abbey librarian if you wish to use the **monastic library**.

Those familiar with the internet will find an almost bottomless resource in our own website and its links: <http://www.douaiabbey.org.uk/douaiobl.htm>

HOW CAN I BECOME MORE INVOLVED?

In a monastery there is always something to be done. Oblates are like a family and are therefore not *guests* to be waited on. Occasionally, we can help with little chores like washing up the coffee and tea cups; photocopying; moving chairs when necessary; occasional typing; assisting during concerts or special events; sending out mail shots, working in the library, garden or book shop and so on.

Once they have made their oblation, oblates aim regularly to attend oblate retreats with the oblate community, as a member of the wider Douai monastic community, and to study the *Rule of Benedict* with one's fellow oblates.

STAYING IN THE MONASTERY

The monks at Douai Abbey are semi-enclosed. The **Monastery Enclosure** is private to monks only, including the monastic refectory unless one is specifically invited in, and oblates and guests should be careful not to intrude. Please remember that this is their home.

SILENCE IN THE MONASTERY

The times between Morning Prayer and Mass, and between Vespers and supper, are considered quiet times for prayer or *lectio divina*.

In addition we are asked as oblates to try to keep needless talk to the minimum, particularly in the morning. Some people will require personal **quiet time** and so we try to maintain a consciousness of speaking softly, being mindful of where and when to speak or to be silent. From 10.00 pm until after breakfast there is a general rule of maintaining silence.

However, contact can be made with one another or the monks in an emergency.

Sometimes monks, oblates and guests will avoid eye contact. They're not being rude; they just want to maintain their inner peace and space with God. At other times, people will simply smile at you or nod, to avoid speaking.



HOUSE RULES

Smoking and the use of a **mobile phone** are only allowed outside please, in the grounds. Because of the location, you may not experience a very good signal on your mobile phone.

A separate, more detailed, booklet entitled *Helpful Hints and Customs for Oblates of Douai Abbey* is available from the oblate director.

There may be times when you are invited to the Monastery Refectory but normally oblates eat in the guest refectory because of our numbers. In the Guest Refectory, the meals are self-service and usually taken in silence but with background music. The atmosphere is relaxed and friendly.

Collect your napkin from a side table and sit where places are laid, taking care not to use places that may be laid for another group which may be present. Talking is allowed the first supper and at lunch on the last day.

Please be kind enough to strip your bed at the end of your stay.

HOW MUCH SHOULD I CONTRIBUTE?

According to Chapter 53 of the Rule, guests are to be received ‘as Christ himself’ and therefore, without charge. This applies to the hospitality offered by the monks for oblate retreats for which there is no charge. However, just as a good guest does not impose on a generous host but finds an appropriate way of showing gratitude, oblates contribute to the work of the community by making donations.

Many oblates share in the apostolic mission of the monastic community by making a standing order payment each month of between £20 and £50 per month; such donations should in total at least be equivalent to the cost of staying in the monastery for oblate retreats. [The commercial rate for a weekend in the monastery is some £90-120.] Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the monastery expects no money and would not want difficult financial circumstances to prevent anyone from becoming an oblate.

UK tax-payers should consider making their donations under the Gift Aid scheme as this benefits the monastery by a further 25% (at current tax rates) and at no cost to themselves. [Standing Order forms and Gift Aid Declaration forms can be obtained from the Assistant Bursar.] This tax concession is only allowed where the tax-payer receives no benefit for the contribution, and for this reason any suggestion of *payment for hospitality* would prevent the monastery from re-claiming the tax paid as well as putting the oblate's visit on a surely inappropriate commercial basis.

Oblates therefore who do not contribute to the work of the monastery by standing order should consider making a contribution by donation, recognising that the commercial rate for such a weekend would be in the region of £90-120. Such donations cannot however benefit from the tax concession as they are *payments*, not *gifts*.

ARRIVING BY TRAIN

The nearest railway station to Douai Abbey is Midgham. Trains leave from Reading or Newbury station. A lift can be organised for your collection from Midgham station if you arrange this in advance via the Oblate Director. Be careful when buying your rail tickets that you clearly ask for ‘Midgham’ near Reading to avoid being given a ticket to ‘Mitcham’ in Surrey. There is no ‘Woolhampton’ station, only

'Wolverhampton', which is a very long way away. The photograph shows the days when the monastery had its school and boys would arrive at and depart from Midgham station.



USEFUL BOOKS

Gervase Holdaway OSB (ed), *The Oblate Life*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008)

The Benedictine Handbook, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003).

Timothy Fry OSB (ed), *RB 1980, The Rule of St Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981)

Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict – Insights for the Ages*, (NY: Crossroad, 2002)

Full of resources is the website:

<http://www.douaiabbey.org.uk/douaiobl.htm>



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