



The World Community for Christian Meditation

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"What Being an Oblate Means to Me" by Saralee Turner

When asked to contribute this piece about what being an oblate means to me, I sat down and wrote a long account, which would have bored everyone. Now, after several tries, I find I can write in fewer words about my desire to join this Benedictine community. Quite simply, I want to be in a community of shared values where I am accepted and encouraged to grow in truth and love. In addition, I want to contribute to the work of helping others find Christian meditation, as I believe that meditation has the power to change lives and the world. I believe that being part of this Community will help me to do that.

The foundation of the Community's shared values is rooted in the teachings of Christ, as presented in the sacred text of the Bible. For me, the primary teaching, the commandment above all others, is to love God and our neighbours. Another goodly part of those shared values is encapsulated in The Rule of St Benedict. The primacy of knowing where one stands; of having some reasonable perspective of where one fits into the grand scheme of things; of keeping that root of all evil, pride, at bay; and, of course, the silence, are all fundamental to my understanding of the Benedictine way of life.

The necessity of living in community is one I have long appreciated and my search for such a community has occupied much of the last twenty years. Until Christian meditation was made known to me, I thought that "Benedictine" was simply a liqueur prepared by some monks somewhere in Europe. I had enjoyed drinking that when I was much younger and much preferred it to brandy. Then John Main's writings came into my life, followed swiftly by Laurence Freeman's visits to Singapore to speak to our meditating community.

It became quite clear to me then that the monastic tradition offered much more than liqueur. But it wasn't until I met Liz King in Penang at a School for Meditators in early 2003 that I realized that this door was open to people such as myself who could not participate in the full life of the monastic community but who could, nonetheless, live in the Community's "monastery without walls."

I started reading The Rule in March of 2003 and was immediately put off by the strong language and the inclusion of corporal punishment. I'm afraid that, despite all evidence to the contrary, this reinforced my idea of a monastery as a forbidding place. But help was on the way! Jean Chittister's interpretation of The Rule helped me translate those timeless values into lessons for everyday life in the present age.

Then came the difficulty of convincing others (and myself) that I really wanted to embark on

this path. I traveled to Cockfosters monastery in London (from Wales where I was attending a conference) and stayed three days in the Benedictine Spirituality Centre. This was a way, I thought, of trying to discover what a Benedictine community is since there were none that I could locate in Singapore or Malaysia. I ate meals with the monks each day and was particularly inspired by a young monk from Switzerland who informed me gravely that being an oblate was very difficult indeed.

In fact, he thought it more difficult than living inside the monastery. But he did allow that it was possible. That gave me courage. Of course, I also met oblates who seemed to take it all in stride. But most of all, singing the Divine Office with the monks and meditating with them made me more eager to be part of this community.

I'm rather used to living on the outside. I've been in a very mixed marriage (race, religion, nationality, gender) for the past 31 years and have lived in cultures much different from the one in which I was raised, so being an outsider is not new. I realize that some might think there is a contradiction there: Why would someone who wants to be in a community of shared values go to such lengths to place herself outside?

But I have been convinced, since my youth, that under our skins our blood is basically the same red colour; under our perceptions of God (who is unknowable) our need for stability and lasting love is universal; and that community exists wherever people share respect and love for each other. This Benedictine community is one with values that I long to share!

Honouring the Christ in ALL seemed to me to be the perfect way to be part of such a community. In my interaction with another oblate, Rita McKenna, I've come to understand the quiet, silent way of growth. I hope to go on in this direction for the rest of my life.

In short, I am an ardent fan of St. Benedict and I am convinced that with the love and support of the Benedictine tradition of The World Community for Christian Meditation, I will be able to seek God and truth, and to participate fully in the work of helping others find love, peace, joy and liberty through the practice of Christian meditation.

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