

# Year Two Formation





## WELCOME

Welcome to the Year Two of the Oblate Formation Program of The Community of St. Mary, Southern Province. You have just finished a wonderful quiet day. You have met with friends. You have participated in the powerful experience of sharing the Divine Office as a corporal body. You have been refreshed and are ready to continue your journey.

Religious life is about “listening” and “becoming” something more than we are today. This process of “listening” and “becoming” is what formation is about. We read and hear the words of Benedict: “Listen carefully, my son, to the Mentor’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from a father who loves you; welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice.”

These words from Benedict welcome us to a different and holy experience. They speak to us over the centuries. The intent and focus of these words remain unchanged. They ask us to listen to the will of God for our life with holy obedience. They ask us to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit as Mary was and to be willing to place some of our desires, expectations, and wants aside for a greater goal, that of ultimate unification with our Creator.

# Getting Started

## **READ-ME-FIRST!**

### **1. Required books (See Book List for details):**

*Sacred Reading, the Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*

*The Benedictine Handbook*

*Preferring Christ*

*Ten Decades of Praise*

*Saint Mary's: The Sewanee Sisters and Their School*

Bible Unit Selection

Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession

The Psalms and the Life of Faith

### **2. Review Your Day Planner**

The “Day Planner” is a vital tool to constructing a day around the many responsibilities and obligations of life. These responsibilities and obligations have far reaching implications and at times can complicate our desire for a structured life. In an effort to minimize these realities, it is of utmost importance to sit down with family members and friends and work together to establish a rhythm and routine that will support an intentional living of our baptismal vows. Our efforts to achieve this goal will be enhanced by sensitivity to the needs of those around us and by compromise.

You have planned your week using the day planner for a year now.

- Are you following it as you and your family wrote it out or have things changed?
- If you have made adjustments, now is the time to sit down with your partner and family and update it.

- Since you are coming into the holiday season, be sure to accommodate family plans into the schedule.

Update your Day Planner and send it to your Formation Mentor by December 15th.

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## Journals

A journal is a daily diary of your thoughts, insights, feelings and impressions developed as you do each of the various activities that make up your Year Two formation. Though not required as part of your prayer and study, journaling can help you focus, develop insights and realize implications of what is discerned as the Holy Spirit works through you daily.

Practically, journaling is a tool. It will be a resource for your monthly report, and reflection papers. If you record your thoughts and insights in the journal after *Lectio Divina* each day, you may find that the insights discerned may be more focused. In your reading and study of the Rule, especially as you work through *Preferring Christ* you will find that journaling will be especially useful in understanding how the Rule impacts your life. Finally, the journal can be used to record your reactions to the books assigned to be read, which will help you as you write your reflection papers.

### Using a Journal

1. Buy a notebook that is large enough for you to write comfortably whether you are at a desk or sitting at your prayer space.
2. Write spontaneously. Don't worry about spelling; it need only be legible enough so you can read it. Your thoughts, the impact you've discerned, and the insights you've discovered are what matters.
3. Make an entry every day and date it. Enter the topic each time you record in the journal. For example: Morning Prayer – Epistle; *Lectio Divina* – *Preferring Christ*, chapter 14, Etc.

4. Make entries as soon as thoughts and ideas occur to you. Don't wait until another time and then try to reconstruct your thoughts. You will lose too much.
5. Use the journal to complete your monthly report/reflection papers on the assigned readings.

Remember, your journal is just that – *Your Journal*. Your Formation Mentor will not collect it nor read it unless you want him/her to do so.

## **Prayer, *Lectio Divina* and Contemplation, Work, Financial Support**

**Background:** Our life is centered on the four prayer services called The Divine Office. Morning Prayer, Noon Day Office, Evening Prayer, and Compline are prayed six days a week. These Offices may require up to 2 hours each day if you use the Book of Common Prayer. Depending on your sources, your experience may vary greatly. Other acceptable sources may include shortened versions of the Office or listening to tapes or CDs of the Offices by monastic communities. *Lectio Divina* (sacred reading) has a listening component. Here again, tapes and CDs may be used to initiate your hearing before delving into your reflection.

***On Sunday, Oblates are only required to pray Evening Prayer.***

The second most important hallmark of Benedictine life is the practice of *Lectio Divina*, meditation and contemplation. This important private reading and prayer discipline is practiced Monday through Saturday. Once again, our experience indicates that a minimum, 30 minutes a day, is devoted to the practice of this important prayer activity.

A third element is work, *labora*. The kind of service you render for the Community and for those in your area will vary greatly, but it is of significant importance. Remember, the Benedictine motto is *Ora et Labora*. Prayer is also work- as I'm sure we have all discovered already- but the work of the hands and mind are Incarnational and creative aspects that help to ground us in reality and remind us to be other-centered. If you have not already, you should begin to think of what service you may contribute to the Community and how you might better minister in your area as a means of living the Oblate life. You may wish to meet with the Sister-in-Charge or your Formation Mentor about possibilities.

At this point, - if you haven't already- you should also consider how you might financially support the life and ministry of the Community in which you desire to be an Oblate. Such consideration is a further means of practicing stewardship of your time, talents, and wealth. The supplementary articles concerning stewardship - "Financial Conversion of Life" and "Thanksgiving, Stewardship, and Offering" - will be helpful readings to process and think about this element.

## Lectio Divina

### Instructions:

1. Continue the practice and discipline of *Lectio Divina*. You are to use the chapter assigned for the week from *Preferring Christ*. The process is as follows:
    - On the first day of the week, read the segment of the Rule from the chapter assigned in *Preferring Christ* and select a word or phrase for *Lectio Divina*. Write the word or phrase in your journal. • Do *Lectio Divina* using this word or phrase.
    - After you have finished, write your thoughts/insights on the phrase in your journal.
    - Each day repeat the process, selecting a different phrase from the segment of the Rule for the week.
  2. Suggested times to set aside for *Lectio Divina* are: before or after Morning Prayer, before or after Evening Prayer, or a quiet time in the middle of the day. Allow a minimum of 30 minutes for this work.
  3. Make a record of your feelings and insights that you discerned immediately after *Lectio Divina* in your journal. This will help you focus your thoughts and become a resource for you to complete your weekly report.
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## Benedictine Study

**Background:** The other part of Benedictine life is study. For Year Two Oblates-in-Training study time is used to:

- Study the Rule of St. Benedict, study and begin to live out Benedictine Vows in the world, study the Customary, Rule of St. Mary, and read the books assigned.
- Writing reflection papers on the books read.

- Completing necessary reports on your prayer life and on your Lectio Divina/meditation/contemplation.

Study and reading habits vary widely between individuals. Some people are able to read, learn and inwardly digest formation material quickly and create reflection papers easily. Others need more time. Determine the amount of time you need to study based on how you learn best. Later in this manual you will find your study syllabus and Weekly report guide. Using these tools, you will determine how much time you need to allocate to study. Your Formation Mentor does not care about how much time is spent, but rather the quality of the time spent. Have you completed the readings within the schedule? Have you written concise and effective reflection papers? Are you faithful in submitting the weekly reports on a timely basis? These points are what interest your Formation Mentor. So, when creating your plan, you have to allocate sufficient time to do quality work. Once again, your Formation Mentor is there to help. If you are struggling or have questions contact her. (S)he is your primary resource for help and support.

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## Study of the Rule of Benedict

**DURING Year One**, your study of the Rule consisted of daily reading with a commentary. Your work with the Rule continues with study and meditation using *Preferring Christ* by Norvene Vest. (See Chapter 2, Benedictine Unit – Intermediate). The author has taken the Rule of St. Benedict and has created a study methodology which involves breaking up many of the chapters of the Rule into smaller segments, providing you with discussion and reflection, and offering you the opportunity to write your own reflection and create a prayer.

You will be reading and studying the Rule in a systematic way and at a slower pace that will deepen the power of this wonderful document and will cause you to love it more.

This work will be accomplished in two ways:

- 1) Through reading and writing short reflections. This is a somewhat intellectual activity where, through your reflection paragraphs, you develop an understanding of the segment of the Rule and you can reflect on the effect of it on both your spiritual and temporal life.
- 2) You will pray over the segment using *Lectio Divina*. (see the *Lectio Divina* section of this chapter). *Lectio Divina* is the ideal discipline to strengthen your response (reflection) and prayer. This may be one of the most difficult parts of your formation; but it is the most rewarding. As you get into this project you will be carried by the ebb and flow of the Rule as it takes you through from the mundane to the ecstatic over and over.

## Instructions

1. Beginning in November, select one chapter of *Preferring Christ* from the table on the next page, beginning with Semester 1, Week 1. Then continue each week in order for the rest of the year.
  2. Read the segment of the Rule, the commentary, and the reflection Monday of each week.
  3. Complete a *Preferring Christ* work sheet right after you complete the reading. Please provide the following information:
    - a) Your name, chapter and verse(s) studied.
    - b) A short Response (reflection) on the chapter and verse(s) studied.
    - c) Finally, write a short prayer.
  4. On Saturday, after *Lectio Divina*, review the chapter reflection you wrote last Monday and the notes in your journal from *Lectio Divina*. **Are there new insights you can add to the reflection?** If so, add these to your worksheet. There is no need to re-write the worksheet, just add the new thoughts to the bottom.
  5. At the end of the month, you will send four or five completed *Preferring Christ* Worksheets to your Formation Mentor.
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