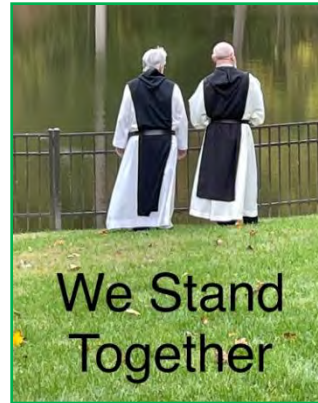


Obsculta

"Listen with the ear of your heart."

December 2021



February 1981 - February 2021

"Gratitude will open our souls to the unity of God, self, and others. Gratitude moves us from limitations and fear to expansion and love. Gentleness will lead others to God's eternal intent of true joy and freedom."

The quarterly newsletter of
The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, Common Observance
Worldwide Membership of Monks Living Outside of a Monastery
Founded 1981
1606 Briar Lake Circle Winston-Salem, NC 27103 336 918-0975

www.CistercianMonks.org

Celebrating Forty Years



Celebrating Forty Years

Greetings Dear Cistercians and Friends:

When I reflect on our fortieth anniversary, I am grateful for our Good Lord's grace and inspiration. My daily prayer for the Order is that we might grow in numbers and holiness, and indeed that is our inheritance.

This year the grief we suffered over losing loved ones, and the covid pandemic did not hold us back.

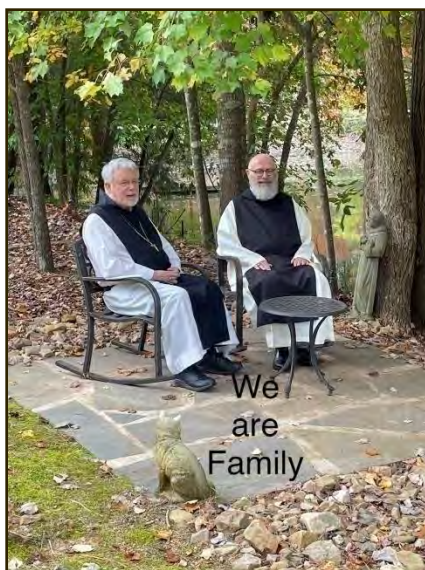
This year our Constitution was evaluated and ratified. We grew in numbers with the addition of life-vowed members and Oblates. The "We Got Your Back" medical emergency fund is now well solidified. The monks of the Most Holy Trinity Monastery and I did a zoom healing retreat and service.

St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary has added new students, faculty, and courses.

Additionally, this month I age seventy-five years and sport good health and cheer. This coming year will be my twenty-fifth year serving the Cistercian Order.

Next year we will continue to use social media to help people meet and join us. Would you please continue praying our Daily prayers for the Order? And thanks to each of you for all of your contributions.

“There is *no other group* that can lay claim to our holy foundation, structure and government, programs, membership, formation opportunities and requirements, not to mention our longevity at 40 years! The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, Common Observance is alone in its legitimacy, tenacity, and excellence.”



The Cistercians Ordain Their Second Priest By Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO++

We have had many bishops and priests from other jurisdictions join our Order during our fruitful forty-year history. However, we have only ordained two men to the priesthood. Rev. Br. Columcille, OCCO, was ordained on April 9, 2006, and Rev. Br. Raphael, OCCO +, was ordained this past October 30, 2021.

Br. Raphael is a highly educated academic from Canada. We have frequently met during his monastic formation and priestly studies. It became clear to my advisory council and me that he indeed had a vocation to a monastic priesthood.

Br. Raphael's trip to our Monastery in Winston Salem, NC was packed with liturgical instruction, meetings, prayer, and being introduced to local Cistercian supporters. Kathleen's gift of hospitality and gourmet cooking added extra joy to the occasion.

Everyone was impressed with Br. Raphael and enjoyed his conversation and humor. As these photos illustrate, he and I celebrated a brotherhood, enthusiasm for the occasion, and hopes for the future.

Br. Raphael returned home to establish *The Hermitage of the Resurrection*. Please keep him in your prayers.



A Cistercian Vocation meets Covid Travel Complications

By Rev. Br. Raphael, OCCO

Anticipating the announced date of Nov. 7 for the closure of the USA border to those with mixed vaccinations, the Abbot and I agreed to move up our plans from the end of November to the end of October. With only a month to plan, each of us was pitched abruptly into action mode: the Abbot to arrange liturgies for final vows and ordinations to the diaconate and the priesthood, me to arrange flights, hotel, and the right kind of Covid tests on each end of the trip (Halifax, NS and Winston-Salem, NC)

Everything had to be compressed into a visit of 3 days, sandwiched between two full days of travel coming and going. Abbot Oscar Joseph handed all the travel and Covid test arrangements to me, while he arranged the services for vows and ordination, with the several kinds of planning, preparation and documentation they entailed.

As the weeks counted down rapidly toward my October 27th departure I marveled at the Abbot's organizational skills while I waded through the sometimes piecemeal and difficult to find information required to successfully navigate the border crossings. I needed to arrange for the correct variety of Covid testing within 72 hours of travel into the US and then back to Canada, adding considerably to the cost as well as the complexity of the travel arrangements.

The Abbot warned me that spiritual warfare often intensified in the weeks approaching ordination. Physical accidents, emotional turmoil, and spiritual tensions were well known to increase in frequency and intensity as the date approached.

The day following this conversation found me in the Emergency Room with two dislocated fingers from a fall in the woods on the last day of trout fishing season. It was followed in the weeks approaching my departure by unexpected and vexing circumstances faced by a longtime friend who badly needed emotional support in responding to a complex set of personal crises.

Nonetheless, the day of departure arrived, my three flights (with stopovers in Toronto and Washington) were (mostly) on time and Abbot Oscar Joseph and I met in Greensboro Arrivals gate for the first time in person (without the help of Skype). The life-changing events of Solemn Vows to the monastic life and ordinations to the diaconate and the priesthood could take place as we had hoped and planned.





2" filet mignon, roasted sweet potatoes with maple syrup and pecans with fresh sautéed spinach



Reflections on my stay at Holy Cross Monastery by Rev. Br. Raphael, OCCO

The first of my three days in Winston-Salem in late October was spent with Abbot Oscar Joseph at his monastery home, located on a small lake in a secluded neighborhood of the city. My first day provided time for rehearsal of the liturgies scheduled for days two and three of my stay. Later in the afternoon, the Abbot drove me to a CVS facility for a Covid test, timed to maximize my chances of receiving the results well before my return flights. The day concluded with a superb meal, prepared with unhurried skill by the Abbot and Kathleen. I slept well, rising ready for the all-important events of Solemn Vows and Ordination to the Diaconate.

Monastic vows and priestly ordination were the culmination for me of a gradual evolution that began in my first year of university more than a half century ago, in 1969, as I sat in a back pew for an Evensong Mission Sermon by Fr E. Appleton Packard of the Order of the Holy Cross. Fr Packard was a riveting preacher. I had never experienced anything like the power and deep conviction of his Mission sermon. An already awakening interest in the monastic life and the priesthood were ignited by the experience. I won't try to describe here the circuitous life path that has brought me to Vows and ordination at the age of 71. Suffice to say I had a lot to learn about prayer and the contemplative life, the kind of learning, in my case, that only life experience could bring about. That path bore fruit during my three days in Winston-Salem with the Abbot.

I returned to Nova Scotia on Oct. 31st fully formed to live as a Hermit and Priest-monk of the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross. The Abbot has formally recognized my home as the Hermitage of the Resurrection, and Mass and Offices are now being said in its Chapel of the Venerable Bede. St. Bede, the only English Doctor of the Church, is a key figure in the early life of the Church in England. Mostly known as a church historian and biblical commentator, he was also an important writer on and shaper of monastic life. What is little known is that he exerted through his writings a powerful shaping influence on St Stephen Harding, the third abbot of Citeaux. Stephen Harding is honored by Cistercians as the true founder of the order, being the principal author of the Charter of Charity that enabled the establishing of a vast and stable network of Cistercian abbeys, numbering at its height in the 16th century 750 abbeys across Europe. Our Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross is an important carrier of this little-known heritage of Anglican monastic life.

I am honored now to be numbered among you as a brother monk.



Reflections on the event of Priesthood and Solemn Vows: By Rev. Br. Raphael, OCCO

As much as I admire, and for a time in my twenties aspired to, the role of a parish priest, for me the monastic life has come first. It is monastic life that in the end has provided the context that has opened a path to the priesthood.

My vocation is to a life of prayer; the absence of a specific congregation, parish, or diocese is purposeful. It makes me better available to service to the whole Church, to prayer without geographical or jurisdictional boundaries. Such service to the Universal Church is part of all vocations in the Church, lay, religious and ordained, but it is the express focus of the hermit.

The Abbot knows what he is about in confirming each of us in the monastic vocation that seems most natural to us. That has certainly been my experience of him.



The service of the hermit to the Church as a whole, to “everything in general” is not service to “nothing in particular.” It is particular in being located in a specific place, a community, a habitation. I live within a few miles of a National Historic Site called Port-Royal, where there is a reconstruction of what was called The Habitation. Originally built in 1605 by Samuel de Champlain, it is one of the earliest permanent settlements of Europeans in North America. My little Hermitage, built in wood in 1843 is likewise part of the history and fabric of this locale. Its creaky charms, its comforts and discomforts, captured my affections and drew me to the area. I live here, shop here, and walk the hiking trails for exercise. I’ll do my Cistercian thing here.

That’s it. And for it, thanks be to God.

We were honored to have these faithful Kingdom servants to join us



Dr. Kathleen, Council member Lance, Bishop. Scott

The Abbot receives Br. Raphael's first blessing



The Oblation in OCCO

Father Joachim Seeger, Ph.D., D.D. OCCO / Oblate

Many people like me are looking for a way to live their relationship with God more intensely and are interested in becoming an oblate.

For me it was primarily about my personal relationship with God. Community is ultimately formed through and in Christ.

I asked myself the question: who are we listening to? It became clear to me that once we have chosen God as our guide, then our life will gradually become a single listening to His instructions. Listening to the Word of God will then grow our relationship with God more and more. It is listening with the heart to which God has inclined.

For me it became very important that on the way through everyday life, which is characterized by ups and downs, the oblation is a great help to continue. I have come to believe that the source of our life is to be created, willed and called by God. Those who have heard God's call are urged to give an answer.

The Oblates are to carry their mission where they live, so that God may be glorified in everything. I am very glad to be an Oblate in the Cistercian Order.

Suspicious Signs of a Call to Contemplative Religious Life

**Desire to grow in union with God through prayer. Love of God that manifests itself in a desire to give one's life to Him.
Desire to live simply. The wish to live life with less stress and more order. Generosity. Ability to listen to others and accept direction when needed. Desire to worship God in all the moments of life.**

**Contact us immediately if these symptoms appear.
Abbot@bellsouth.net**



KATHLEEN P. RIVEST, PH.D., D.D.

MARIAN SCHOLAR
PUBLISHED AUTHOR



New Years' Resolutions

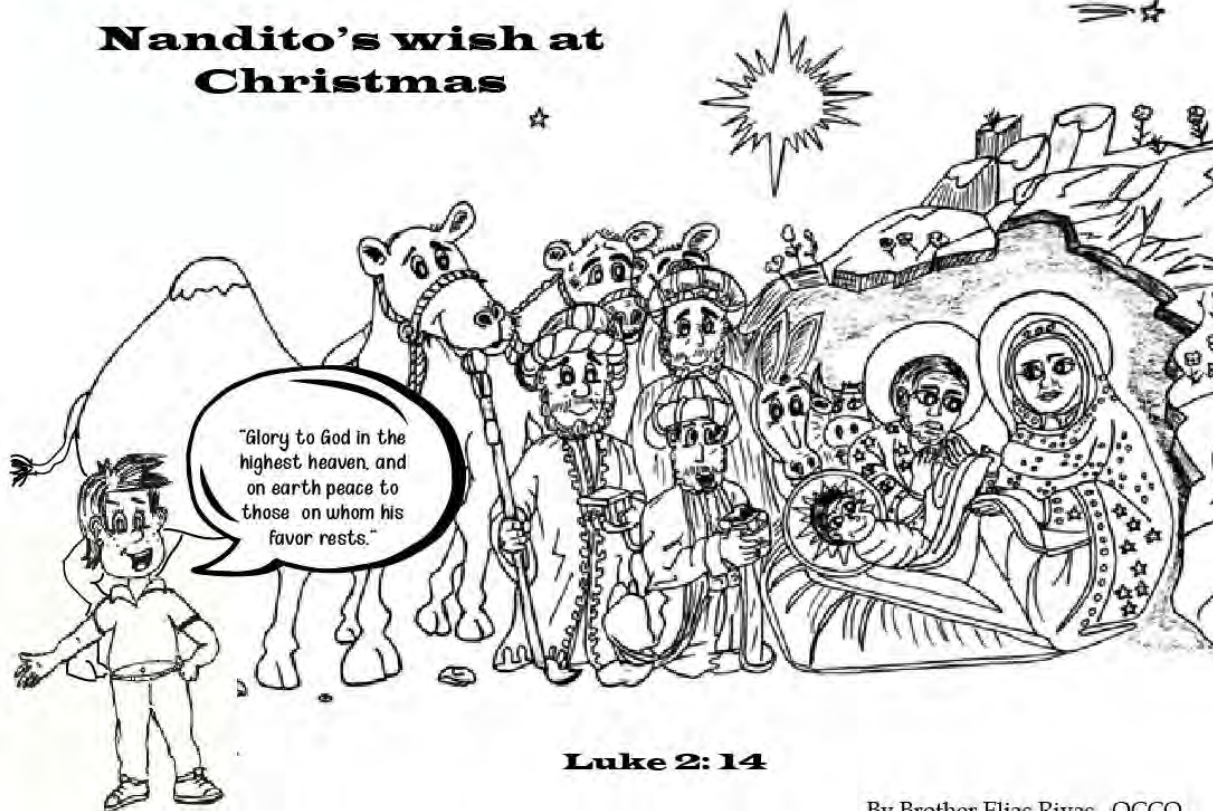
The history of making New Year resolutions reaches back to early Babylonians, possibly as far as 4000 years ago. Early Babylonians' resolutions would usually involve returning borrowed farm equipment in order to start the year with a clean slate. Roman tradition involved asking forgiveness from their enemies and giving gifts. The Chinese practiced rituals they believed would chase away ghosts from the past. Modern day Americans make resolutions designed to improve personal habits, such as diet and exercise, or to make better financial decisions. These resolutions are generally founded on short-term enthusiasm and are broken shortly after they are made.

The dictionary defines "resolution" as making a firm decision, or commitment, to do something. To "resolve" is to make up one's mind. However, when considering these varying histories, it would seem that no one truly makes a commitment, a resolve, to stabilize any aspect of life.

I believe that were I to ask the Blessed Mother about her New Year's resolutions, she would look at me quizzically. The entire concept of making one resolution this year and another one next year would be a foreign concept. Her parents, Anna and Joachim, demonstrated a lifetime of stability and commitment to God. Mary demonstrated this same commitment from the Annunciation to the Crucifixion. She did not waiver and had no need for rituals designed to create a clean slate or correct a bad personal habit. Stability leads to conversion. Though Mary did not require conversion of heart to make her more submissive to God, her lifetime of stability converted her understanding of Him to be converted as the New Covenant was revealed in her Son.

Cistercians who honestly practice stability can participate in the same benefits as Our Lady. Stable Cistercians can and will grow in understanding of, and relationship with, God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And isn't that all that matters? Everything else, whether joyful or painful, is simply temporary. Remain stable and faithful to God, the Order, your marriage, your calling, and you will grow in wisdom, joy and holiness. May the guidance and protection of the Holy Trinity remain with you always. Amen.

Nandito's wish at Christmas



Luke 2: 14

By Brother Elias Rivas, OCCO





Br. Columcille, OCCO+

Br. Columcille, OCCO+ was ordained to the Holy Priesthood of Christ in April of 2006 thus making him the very first monk in the Order to be ordained by a bishop of the Order.

In the photo on the right Rev. Br. Columcille, OCCO is giving ++ Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO his priestly blessing.

Summary report of findings from research project commissioned by Lord Abbot General researched by Br. Columcille, OCCO+

As the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross approaches our 40th anniversary, Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO++ asked for research regarding any other religious orders/communities based in the United States that are like ours. The following information sketches my methods and results.

There are approximately 140 internet search engines and web directories available today. I decided to limit myself to the five most commonly used in the United States: Google, Yahoo, Bing, Ask, and Duck Duck Go.

Then, I made a list of descriptors for our Order, our mission and the opportunities/services provided to members. These included (but were not limited to): *dispersed, non-residential, religious order/community, apostolic succession, Independent Anglican, Independent Catholic, conservative, monastic, monks, vowed religious, priests, ordination/incardination, brothers, sisters, novice, life-professed, formation, postulant, oblate, seminary/theological college, extern, rule, constitution, abbot.*

With these descriptors identified, I began the process of searching for them singularly, or in conjunction with one another, using my five search engines one at a time. I started with directories and continued on to individual sites. With the vast results, I limited my time for each group, concentrating on any “about us” information that could provide structure, membership and mission statements. I used this data in comparison with the aforementioned descriptor criteria related to the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross.



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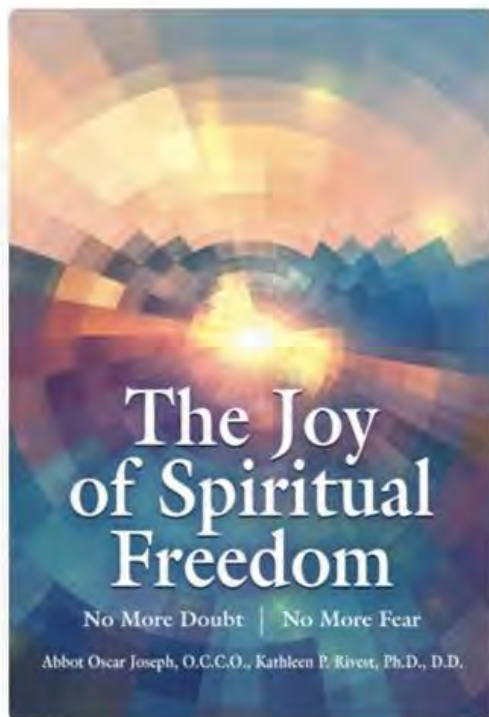
Over the course of about seventy hours, I collected, categorized, and edited a pool of religious groups. The vast majority of these groups were easily culled by failing to meet the key descriptors of our Order. Many were exclusively Roman Catholic or Anglican, etc. so failed in comparison to our more ecumenical membership. Others were extremely liberal, ordaining women to the priesthood, having no claim to apostolic succession, etc. These were removed when compared to our more conservative charism both socially and liturgically. Others failed by a lack of clear structure and/or mission statement. These were more like loose confraternities made up of mostly laypeople. More of a Third Order aspiration, but without any guiding Rule or discernable leadership. And of course, there were dozens of dead links and references to groups I could not find, or that had a severely outdated “cover page” and nothing else. One has to assume that these groups are now defunct, if they ever existed in the first place.

Lastly and sadly, there were the pretenders. And there were *a lot of them!* These groups usually had very few members and seemed more to be *role playing* at being monks, hermits, even priests and bishops. I shudder to think of the people they have misled into grievous spiritual harm.

To conclude, I can proudly say this to you: Father Abbot, Brothers, Sisters, Oblates and friends; we are *unique*. There is *no other group* that can lay claim to our holy foundation, structure and government, programs, membership, formation opportunities and requirements, not to mention our longevity at 40 years! The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, Common Observance is alone in its legitimacy, tenacity, and excellence.

My God bless and protect this Order and all of the earnest, holy people who that make it our true spiritual home.
Amen

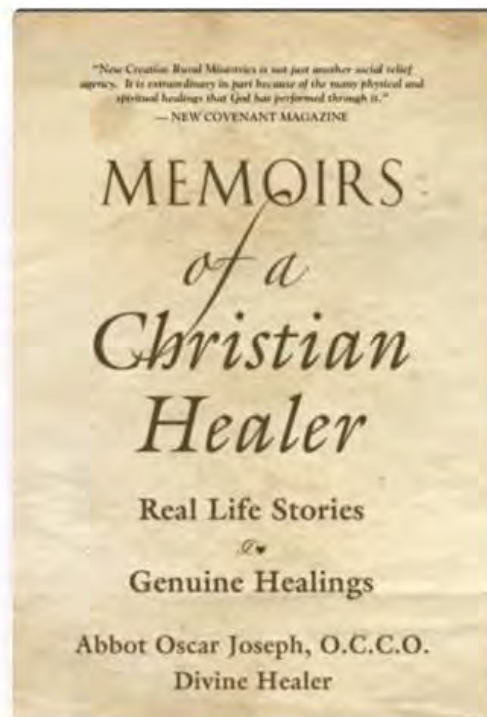
Dearest Brother Columcille, OCCO+ the Cistercians will always be grateful for your labor of love and faithfulness.



The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

No More Doubts | No More Fear

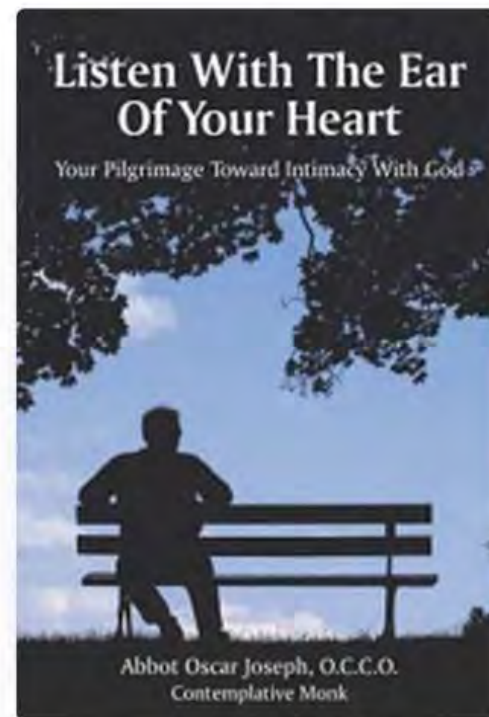
The Joy of Spiritual Freedom is the first of a trilogy that leads and inspires the reader to enter into a joy-filled relationship with a loving God. It is grounded in Biblical wisdom revealing how to remove debilitating doubt and fear. It draws from inspirational letters and case studies that illustrate the Gospel path toward freedom.



Memoirs of a Christian Healer

Real Life Stories | Genuine Healings

Memoirs of a Christian Healer chronicles the miraculous works of God. You will experience the joy of victory and the sorrow of human weakness. Incorporated within the many stories the Abbot includes reflective lessons on the Healing Ministry. The many stories are of real people and genuine healings.



Listen with the Ear of Your Heart

Your Pilgrimage Toward Intimacy with God

God created you to yearn for intimacy with Him. Listen with the Ear of Your Heart presents a dynamic pilgrimage utilizing Scripture, the teachings of the Church Fathers, The Rule of St. Benedict, prayer, meditation and contemplation.

**For more information on 20% discount and Newsletter go to
AbbotOscarJoseph.com**



The “We Got Your Back Program” was inspired by Br. Benedict, OCCO.

Br. Benedict often said, "Miracles are always happening because God loves you. He's got your back."

Br. Benedict was a life professed Cistercian monk who went on to heaven on September 13, 2018.

He was an exceptionally holy monk. Br. Benedict was humorous, captivating and a dear lover of our Lord.

His wife, Alexis, describes Br. Benedict as “a deeply devoted man, not only to God, but to his family, friends and any stranger who needed a prayer or a friendly conversation.

He had a gift for making anyone feel like family. He could see people's hearts and never held a grudge.”



In loving memory of Br. Benedict and our love for the Cistercian Order we have founded

The “We Got Your Back Program”

Four areas of support

Spiritual Support

Enrichment Support

Making Life Easier Support

Financial Support

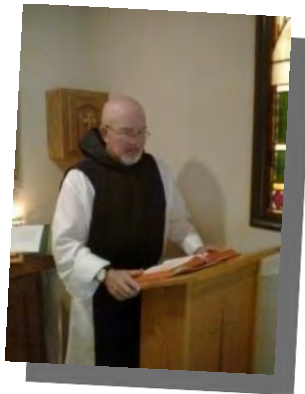
For detailed information go to; www.CistercianMonks.org



These are Your Volunteers



Monks can also be deacons and priests



Deacon Monks can

- Develop local faith communities
- Do religious services
- Preach
- Baptize
- Marry
- Bury



Priest Monks can also

- Celebrate the Holy Eucharist
- Hear confessions
- Give The Sacrament of the Sick



□ The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross is happy to receive male applicants for Holy Orders, e.g., Priest, Deacon. We would also consider incardination for other rightfully ordained clerics.

□ While there are traditional qualifications for ordination/incardination, the principal interest is discerning a true vocation and developing Priests or Deacons who are fruitful ministers. Therefore, educational requirements may be individually tailored.

□ We celebrate valid apostolic lines of succession, the seven sacraments and liturgical worship consistent with the historical churches. We adhere to true apostolic teaching.

□ If you are interested in ordination or incardination, complete the application found on our website and forward it to the Abbot General. His office will then contact you.

The Memorial Day for our dear Br. Paul, OCCO is June 24th. He was a true blessing to our Order.



Great videos for all occasions and needs. Good for personal study and group discussions. Can be used to introduce others to the Cistercian charism. Check them out.

There are several new videos available. Check them out.

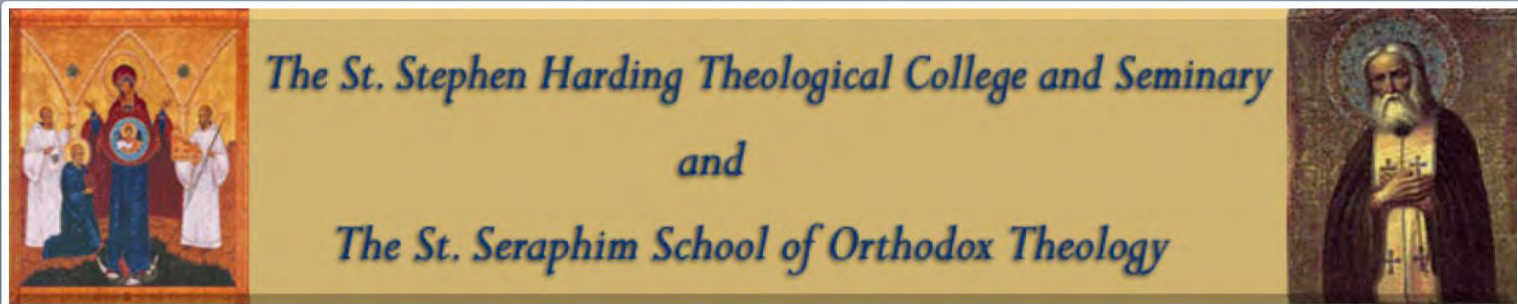
The Abbot is really funny in some of these videos.

Can you believe it?

www.vimeo.com/Cistercian

Two NEW teachings on Sexuality

Technology gives our worldwide community one more way of coming closer together. I have produced a number of videos to provide personal messages and teaching opportunities for our members. I hope that they will be both enjoyable and inspiring.



St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary welcomes students to a wide variety of degrees, programs, licensing, and continuing educational opportunities. For more information go to:
www.StephenHarding.College

CISTERCIAN ORDER OF THE HOLY CROSS, COMMON OBSERVANCE



We serve men and women, clerical or lay, married or single by:

- *Helping them grow in perfection through the use of the Rule of St. Benedict, our Constitution, Manual and community life.*
- *Consecrating to a first or second order religious life those who want to live either in community or outside community.*
- *Third order oblate program.*
- *Validating and assisting those already living the religious life but not living in a formal community.*
- *Supporting men with a call to the diaconate and priesthood through ordination, incardination.*

"The Cistercian charism is a refuge for ardent lovers of God. The adherence to the Holy Rule of St. Benedict and focus on contemplating God in prayer is a precious balm on hearts aching for closer union with the Lord. The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross is an opportunity for men or women to become a true monk or nun in this revered tradition."

*For more information contact
Abbot@bellsouth.net*